

**The Attitude of Perioperative Nurses  
Towards  
Continuing Education and  
Professional Development**

**Rona K. Naicker**

**Australian Centre for Educational Studies  
Macquarie University**

**This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment of the  
Requirements for the degree of  
Master of Adult Education and Work**

**2006**

## **Dedication**

*This thesis is dedicated in loving memory of my late parents,  
Willie and Dhanum Pillay and late brother, Segrans,  
who were denied the chance to celebrate this chapter  
of my career*

This is to certify that this thesis has not been submitted for a  
higher degree at another university.

Date: May 2006

Signature: *RK Naicker*

Name: Rona K Naicker

## **Abstract**

### **The attitude of perioperative nurses towards continuing education and professional development**

Continuing education and professional development has become a popular term among many professional groups in recent years. However in recent years the professional organisations are exploring continuing education and professional development to monitor accountability and clinical competence. In a broad sense continuing education and professional development involves updating and maintaining knowledge and skills to perform tasks in the normal realm of careers. This type of development is seen as a means to provide quality services to clients, customers or patients as the case may be, relevant to a specific vocation. Employers and registration agencies in Australia and elsewhere globally are considering making participation in continuing education and professional development activities mandatory for relicensure to practise.

This study examined the attitude of perioperative nurses towards continuing education and professional development. The primary purpose of this study was to explore what perioperative nurses perceived as continuing education and professional development and whether they were keen to participate in such activities. Factors that enhance or deter perioperative nurses' participation in continuing education and professional development were explored. Their attitudes towards mandatory continuing education and professional development were also investigated in view of the possibility that continuing education and professional development could in the future be required for continuing registration to maintain authority to practise.

The research employed two complementary methods of data collection. The first was a survey questionnaire, which was mailed to a cohort of 400 perioperative nurses. The second involved a follow up telephone interview performed to further explore themes that emerged from the analysis of the questionnaire data. The interviewees were selected from the cohort that received the questionnaire.

The analysis of the survey data indicated that the perioperative nurses in this study displayed a positive attitude towards continuing education and professional development as well as mandatory continuing education and professional development. Factors that were perceived as motivators for participation in continuing education and professional development included funded courses, study leave and courses related to current speciality. Barriers to participation in continuing education and professional development activities included financial costs and lack of time.

Telephone interviews where issues raised in the questionnaires were explored in greater depth was carried out on a sub-group selected from the original cohort. These interviews reinforced the earlier finding that the nurses in the survey were in strong favour of mandatory continuing education and professional development in New South Wales because their knowledge and skills were kept up to date, which would lead to improved patient care. Interviewees did, however, emphasise that resources would have to be provided to allow them to attend continuing education and professional development, preferably within working hours, and that any continuing education and professional development must be relevant to their practice.

## Acknowledgements

Although sometimes I felt in solitary confinement while writing this thesis, the help of several people did not go un-noticed. I would like to thank those people who have supported and encouraged me in many different ways during the last few years. In particular I would like to acknowledge and thank the following.

Professor George Cooney, my supervisor who guided me with his expertise in many ways, including analysis of the data, his time, constant encouragement and belief that I would complete this project.

Mrs. Suzanne Hyde, a colleague who patiently in the initial stages spent hours on the telephone and then in the later stages spent Sunday afternoons under the trees in her backyard working through the literature review and final proof read.

Professor Sue Nagy who patiently read extracts of my paper and guided me many times via email and telephone conversations, I thank her for her critical reading and constant encouragement.

Mrs Donna Waters who always made herself available to talk to me most often at short notice and in my crisis moment, in her quiet manner, she was great to ‘bounce off ideas’ and clarify terminology unknown to me.

The Library staff at the College of Nursing, who were such a great team for the literature searches and arranging the inter-library loans, sometimes at short notice.

AND

Last but not least, to my two adorable children, Theo and Kori, who had to tolerate the loss of a dining room table in the last few months and for their patience while I dominated the computer, thank you.

# Table of Contents

<b>Title Page</b> .....	<b>i</b>
<b>Dedication</b> .....	<b>ii</b>
<b>Certification</b> .....	<b>iii</b>
<b>Abstract</b> .....	<b>iv</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	<b>vi</b>
<b>Table of Contents</b> .....	<b>vii</b>
<b>List of Tables</b> .....	<b>ix</b>
<b>Chapter 1 Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter 2 Literature Review</b> .....	<b>4</b>
2.1 Introduction .....	4
2.2 Nursing as a profession .....	4
2.3 Characteristics of a profession.....	9
2.4 Continuing professional development.....	12
2.5 Nomenclature.....	14
2.6 Participation in CPD.....	15
2.7 CPD and other professions.....	20
2.8 CPD in relation to nursing.....	24
2.9 Summary.....	32
<b>Chapter 3 Methodology</b> .....	<b>35</b>
3.1 Introduction .....	35
3.2 Research design .....	35
3.3 Ethics .....	35
3.4 Target sample .....	36
3.5 Questionnaire.....	37
3.6 Telephone interviews .....	38
3.7 Distribution of survey questionnaires .....	39
3.8 Statistical analysis.....	40
3.9 Summary.....	41

<b>Chapter 4 Analysis of Questionnaire Data .....</b>	<b>42</b>
4.1 Introduction .....	42
4.2 The sample and participation in CE .....	42
4.3 Development of scales.....	44
4.4 Attitude towards participation in CE .....	51
4.5 Perceived effects of CE .....	51
4.6 Application of knowledge and skills gained.....	52
4.7 Attitudes of other staff.....	52
4.8 Perceived motivators that enhance participation in CE .....	53
4.9 Perceived barriers that inhibit participation in CE .....	53
4.10 Administrative structure .....	54
4.11 Preferred programs.....	54
4.12 Sharing knowledge .....	54
4.13 Summary.....	55
<b>Chapter 5 Analysis of Interviews.....</b>	<b>56</b>
5.1 Introduction .....	56
5.2 Perception of professional development.....	56
5.3 Types of activities that motivate perioperative nurses to participate in professional development programs.....	58
5.4 Current participation in Professional Development.....	59
5.5 Motivational factors that enhance participation in PD programs.....	60
5.6 Barriers that inhibit participation in Professional Development programs..	61
5.7 Mandatory CPD in NSW .....	61
5.8 Sharing knowledge gained.....	63
5.9 Summary.....	65
<b>Chapter 6 Discussion of Results in the Context of the Literature Review .....</b>	<b>67</b>
6.1 Introduction .....	67
6.2 Findings .....	67
6.3 Conclusion .....	75
6.4 Implications for CPD in nursing.....	76
6.5 Recommendations .....	77
6.6 Limitations of the research.....	81
6.7 Directions for future research.....	82
<b>References .....</b>	<b>83</b>
<b>Appendix 1 The Questionnaire .....</b>	<b>95</b>
<b>Appendix 2 Interview questions.....</b>	<b>101</b>

## List of Tables

Table 3.1 Target sample and response rate .....	40
Table 4.1 Study sample .....	42
Table 4.2 Highest nursing qualification .....	43
Table 4.3 Participation in CE by centre .....	43
Table 4.4 Participation in CE by highest nursing qualification .....	44
Table 4.5 Responses to questionnaire items.....	45
Table 4.7 Descriptive statistics for grouped item scales .....	49
Table 4.8 Descriptive statistics for individual items .....	50
Table 5.1 Participation in formal PD activities .....	59
Table 5.2 Participation in informal PD activities.....	60
Table 5.3 Reasons for <i>sharing</i> knowledge.....	64
Table 5.4 Reasons for <i>not sharing</i> knowledge.....	65