



DOES ON LINE LEARNING CLICK WITH NURSES? A QUALITATIVE STUDY



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Australia's ageing population will cause an increased demand for public hospital beds over the next 20 – 30 years. In order to cope with this change in patient demographic there is a need for clinicians to acquire knowledge and skills related to the care of older hospitalised people to reduce the risk of functional decline that can result from a period of hospitalisation. Like all rural nurses, those who work in Hunter New England Area Local Health District (HNE LHD), find it difficult to access continuing professional development. In order to overcome these barriers, HNE LHD has embraced on-line learning.

Initially, this research set out to determine (using randomised control methodology) if the completion of a series of online learning modules about the prevention of functional decline resulted in an increase in clinician knowledge and a resultant change in practice. This question was unable to be answered due to low participation rates.

A qualitative study was then carried out to gain a better understanding of how nurses perceive online learning for continuing professional development in regard to things that enable engagement, issues that lead to dissatisfaction and disengagement and a description of what the ideal learning platform could look like. Semi-structured interviews were undertaken with 14 nurses of various professional designations at three rural facilities. The facilities were part of the Primary and Community Network in Hunter New England which provide acute, sub-acute and residential aged care services to their local community.

The research found that the mylink platform and online learning was supported by nurses. For the majority of nurses, online learning was primarily associated with completion of online modules required to meet annual mandatory requirements. Nurses valued being able to access the modules at any time of the day and night. They also valued being able to revisit modules as many times as they liked to refresh their knowledge or clarify things. However, nurses reported that the system was not user friendly, hard to access and navigate and that module content and design did not meet many of their learning needs.

Analysis of the interviews indicated that online learning works well when: there is accountability for education being undertaken – such as annual mandatory requirements; staff are supported by their managers and provided with time to undertake online learning during and completion of online learning modules are linked to organisational goals and targets.

The findings and recommendations of this research will assist policy makers and designers of online learning platforms and modules to have a better understanding of the needs of rural nurses in order to deliver an online learning environment that nurses will want to participate in.

For the full report on this project visit our website, follow the link to the Rural Research Capacity Building Program and click on 'view completed projects'

Kim Riley is a Clinical Nurse Consultant with the Aged Care and Rehabilitation Services Clinical Network in Hunter New England Area Health Service. Kim has extensive experience in rural health and she has qualifications in general nursing, midwifery, child and family health (Karitane), Critical Care, Public Health, Health Service Management and Gerontology.

