



From Curriculum to Accreditation: Assessing Educational Quality

Sara Faithfull
Chair, Education Group and Accreditation Council

EONS accreditation is not only a means to endorse a product but it is also a process used by cancer nurses to evaluate quality and educational relevance of courses thereby providing professional credibility. Over the past 5 years, over 22 long and short courses have been accredited by the EONS Accreditation Council. Recently, the Educational Group undertook a review of EONS accredited courses. The purposes of this review were to gain an estimate of how many nurses were receiving professional development using EONS accredited programmes and to explore how competencies and educational credits were being utilised within Europe.

There have been many changes in the treatment of cancer that are now reflected in multi modality therapy and new ways of managing cancer in different care settings. These changes in treatment and treatment delivery have made it necessary to take a new look at the EONS Post-Basic Curriculum. As a result, changes have been made to the revised framework to reflect not only new thinking in oncology but also to reflect changes in educational methods. The developments within education have been quite dramatic in the last 5 years with the advent of the Bologna Declaration of 1999 and the subsequent changes in academic and vocational educational structures within Europe. As stated in the Bologna Declaration (1), educational institutions across Europe are expected to comply with the specified revisions by the year 2010.

The Bologna Declaration includes nine action lines for education:

- Adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees
- Adoption of a two cycle education system (Degree, Masters)
- Establishment of a credit system
- Promotion of mobility
- Promotion of European cooperation in quality assurance
- Promotion of the European dimension of higher education
- Lifelong learning
- Higher education institutions and students
- Promoting the attractiveness of the European higher education system

The impact of these changes on vocational courses is that learning outcomes and competencies for practice need to be more clearly defined and that credits will be awarded based on length of study and learning outcome. These credits are transferable across countries providing increased mobility and transferability of qualifications. Although there is still much work to be done in developing educational structures, these changes need to be reflected in future nursing curriculum and professional development.

Methods

A questionnaire was sent to course leaders of accredited programmes offered in 2004 and 2005. Of the 15 questionnaires that were sent, 11 were returned (73%). The questionnaire asked about course cohorts and numbers, rates of successful completion, deferrals, and credits awarded. Further, answers to questions on whether external review and student evaluation was undertaken and if any changes had been made to the current programme were solicited by the questionnaire.

Results

Although information provided on many of the returned questionnaires was incomplete, the course leaders gave an interesting picture of the cancer courses and developments ongoing within nursing (Table 1). Over 500 nurses undertook EONS accredited professional development in 2004/5. Of these, 305 participated in courses based on the EONS post-basic cancer nursing curriculum and 234 on specialised subject education.

Course characteristics	Responses (N=11)
Local educational credits used	2 (18%)
ECT credits used	1 (9%)
External examiners	11 (100%)
Evaluation and feedback provided by participants	11 (100%)
Clinical performance or competence assessed	1 (9%)

Table 1: Characteristics of Educational Courses, Number (%)

Few of the courses had attached academic credits (18%) which meant that the education was not necessarily transferable within institutions or countries and was not able to be used to build upon existing professional qualifications as proposed in life-long learning. Commendable was that all courses used appropriate quality assurance techniques and had positive feedback from external examiners and reviewers. Few of the courses utilised competencies in practice and only one programme evaluated clinical performance as part of their educational provision. Although practice was central to cancer nursing education, this was assessed through case studies and knowledge of topics rather than the actions of the nurse in practice. Changes within courses included: an increase in focus on care of older people, more specialist education topics, and more content on palliative care within cancer nursing courses.

Future cancer nursing courses will need to adapt to meet the changing educational structures within Europe. The impact of these changes will not only facilitate greater transferability of education across Europe but will also require academic recognition for practice elements and the assessment of competence. These changes will provide benefits for cancer nursing but will require an increasing vision of education as practice.

References

1. From Berlin to Bergen: General report of the Bologna follow-up group (<http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no> accessed 27/7/2005)