

*Original Article***Accreditation of Nursing Education in Iran: Documenting the Process***Nayereh Naseri*, Shayesteh Salehi*****Abstract**

Background: In recent year, the accreditation process as the most important assurance and improvement of the quality of higher education, especially in medical sciences, has been set forthed. The need for accreditation of nursing faculties as the same of medical sciences has been acutely felt. Yet there are not compiled standards at the same time, to describe present and desirable quality via accreditation process. So naturally accreditation without standards will not be possible. Therefore, the employment of international standards does not seem to be realistic. Accordingly, the researchers decided to compile applicable accreditation standards to nursing education in Iran, using available international standards as well as suggestions made by nursing education experts in Iran.

Methods: This research is a Triangulation study carried out in three main steps. In the first step, sufficient documents on international standards for validation of nursing education were gathered from the Internet and the standards were divided in ten different categories. Using these ten categories of global standards, in the second step of study, a questionnaire with open answers based on Delphi techniques was prepared. In the third step, 50 nursing educational experts of the country were selected and their suggestions regarding desirability and applicability of these standards to the educational, executive and sociocultural situations in Iran were investigated through a descriptive survey method. To analyze the quantitative data gathered in the third step, descriptive statistical methodology of frequency distribution was used.

Results: 260 standards in 10 domains were drafted for accreditation of B.S nursing education in Iran (in input, output and process areas).

Conclusion: The most of the standards had either appropriate or fairly appropriate level except in some cases without 100% votes of agreement mostly on issues lack of appropriateness of these standards can be central educational system and the prevailing atmosphere in national nursing education system in Iran. So, necessary changes in final standards have been made based on subjects' viewpoints.

Key words: Accreditation process, nursing education, accreditation standards

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Accreditation is almost a new term which has recently been noticed by the higher Iranian education institutions, especially in the field of medical sciences (1,2). Nursing colleges and schools as part of the medical sciences institutions should move toward it as well to ensure their quality and continuous evaluation and improvements (3,4). The Accreditation of nursing education is im-

portant because it is closely related to people's health and well-being (5). Accreditation is a faithful method to guarantee the improvement of nursing education in different levels which leads to the improvement of public health services.

Accreditation of nursing education refers to clarification of necessary standards for each curriculum components, evaluation of existing curri-

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culum based on the standards, fixing the problems and improvement of the quality to the level of global standards (6). In this process, it is important to use the pre-designed standards (7).

So far, there are no documented standards and criteria in Iran to evaluate the current curriculum and its quality; and this task have been practiced based on the personal ideas of experts in this field. It is obvious that without documented criteria, evaluation is not consistent and valid (8). This is the situation in Iran while in most countries of the world nursing schools are following documented standards approved by public associations or governmental institutions to standardize the quality of their education and their whole system (4).

It is necessary to prepare the standards of nursing education programs suitable for the Iranian society to improve public health in accordance with the general policies of the country.

The researchers of this study tried to develop special standards for the nursing education in Iran considering the global standards, and to define how these standards can be adapted to the Iranian society characteristics considering educational and bureaucratic systems, as well as social and cultural features.

Methods

In 2004, this research was carried out pursuing the above mentioned goal. This study was a triangulation study carried out in three main steps. In the first step, sufficient documents on international standards for validation of nursing education were gathered from the all online sources and the standards were divided in ten different categories. Using these ten categories of global standards, in the second step of study, a questionnaire with open answers based on Delphi technique was designed. This questionnaire were send to several experts in the field of nursing education working in Isfahan University of Medical Sciences, Shahid Beheshti University, Shiraz University and the Isfahan Center for Research and Development of Medical Sciences Education, asked them to provide their ideas and suggestions regarding how to adjust the global standards to the characteristics

of nursing education system in Iran. In the third step, a questionnaire comprised of suggested standards in the second step using three point Likert type scale (favorable, relatively favorable and unfavorable) was prepared. This questionnaire was given to the experts of nursing education in Iran consisting of faculty members and managing board of the nursing and midwifery schools who had the study criteria (you should say it) to give their opinion. Reviewing the expert's ideas, the items rated 90% to 100% were used exactly as they were, those rated 70% to 90% were edited based on the received suggestions as well as research advisors' comments, and the standards rated fewer than 70% were omitted from the list. Also, considering comments and suggestions the final standards were edited. To analyze the quantitative data gathered in the third step, descriptive statistical method of frequency distribution was used in SPSS software.

Results

260 standards in 10 domains were drafted for accreditation of B.S nursing education in Iran (in input, output and process areas): program staff (45 standards), students (26 standards), curriculum (28 standards), resources and facilities (42 standards), organization (44 standards), teaching and learning processes (11 standards), annual records (8 standards), research (24 standards), evaluation (18 standards), and graduates (14 standards).

Discussion

The comments and suggestions received in the third step of the study showed that most of the standards were favorable or relatively favorable. However, the standards related to inclusion of nursing students, clinical nurses, graduates and managers in the program, putting nursing schools in charge of documenting curriculum, or involving clinical nurses in teaching in nursing schools were rated as unfavorable.

We doubt that the main reason for rating these items unfavorable relates to the centralized system of education as well as the general situation of nursing education in Iran.

In final step, considering the suggestions and comments gathered in the third step of the study, the final standards were edited. The items rated 90% to 100% were used exactly as they were, those rated 70% to 90% were edited based on the received suggestions as well as research advisors' comments, and the standards rated fewer than 70% were omitted from the list. The results agreed upon were a list of 260 standards in ten categories as the standards to evaluate and validate the nursing education programs in the undergraduate level in Iran.

The researchers hope that the policy makers of the nursing education system use the results of this study to standardize the system and improve the quality of nursing education in the country.

Note: All the standards are available in the final report of the study number 83186 from the Isfahan Medical University research archive.

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