

# ***Workplace Learning and Information Practices of Newly Qualified Nurses in a Hospital***

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## **Introduction**

Hospitals are complex information environments, and new health care personnel have to learn how to handle many different information sources (Bonner & Lloyd, 2011; Isah & Byström, 2016; Lloyd, 2009). Every year hospitals are recruiting numerous new employees, predominantly nurses. Newly qualified nurses are expected to fully operate in a multi-professional environment, and to deal with different types of information to save patients' lives. Thus, the transition from being a nursing student to a newly qualified nurse can be challenging and daunting (Edwards, Hawker, Carrier, & Rees, 2015). To address these challenges, this study focuses on nurses' information needs and their conventional practices in relation to searching, evaluating, using, sharing and producing information. It takes place in a training program for newly qualified nurses in a hospital in Norway, and its main research question is: What characterizes information practices in a hospital, in the context of a program for newly qualified nurses?

## **Theoretical Perspectives**

The main theoretical perspective for this study is practice-based theories (Nicolini, 2012; Schatzki, 2001; Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015). Practice theorists are occupied with understanding body, mind, things, knowledge, discourse/language, routines/habits and change/re negotiation, all in a social site or context. Specific forms of knowledge are important in practice theories; including know-that facts, but also tacit, collective and shared knowledge in the form of know-how and ways of understanding (Gherardi, 2006). Relevant contributions within information studies and workplace learning will also be explored (Billett, Harteis, & Gruber, 2014; Eraut, 2007; Isah & Byström, 2016; Lloyd, 2010).

## Methods

A series of focus groups were used to collect data from 18 newly qualified nurses during their two-year training program. The training program was established to enhance the nurses' generalist competence by providing each nurse an opportunity to work on surgical, medical and psychiatric wards for periods of eight months. The training nurses were observed when they participated in monthly practical exercises at a simulation center, lectures and reflection groups. Additionally, observation was conducted on a patient ward, during individual follow-up dialogues between training nurses and the project leader, as well as during evaluation meetings that included the project leader, the ward managers and the trainers at the simulation center. Focus groups were also carried out with seven newly qualified nurses not participating in the training program, to reveal possible differences between the two groups. Thematic analysis was conducted using NVivo11 (Bazeley, 2013).

## Findings

Consistent with previous research, a main focus of the newly qualified nurses was to learn the hospital's practical procedures, to watch and listen to their experienced colleagues and to use their bodies and the patients' body to acquire practical tacit knowledge. They were also actively searching for digital and physical textual information to cope with the patients, diagnoses and procedures they are responsible for from day to day. Newly qualified nurses seemed to use textual information more than experienced nurses; they related that they do not always trust information from the experienced nurses. Instead, the newly qualified nurses used their epistemic knowledge and challenged the existing practices.

Observation on a ward indicated that newly qualified nurses seem to spend more time in front of the computer than their more experienced colleagues. These observations also demonstrated that nursing in hospitals is incredibly information intensive. Nurses and their use of the computer as a tool may be characterized as the hub or a center in the hospitals' information landscape. Nurses seem to be searching, using, producing and sharing digital information every minute throughout the day. These information activities involve patients, caregivers, colleague nurses, other professionals within the ward and other units in hospital and community health services.

## Conclusion

Digital information appears to be significant for nurses' workplace learning in hospitals. In this case study, newly qualified nurses seem to be comfortable navigating in the digital information

landscape; they know where to find reliable information and how to use it. However, this case study may not be representative for nursing practice in general, because the context is a specific training program and the newly qualified nurses who participate in this program are regarded as highly skilled.

Further research concerning nurses' information practices related to workplace learning may help improve the training of new and more experienced employees in workplace, illuminating new ways to better support employees' information needs and learning processes.

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