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## Correspondence

# Letter to the Editor: Critical need for effective communication skills education in nursing



Dear Editor,

Wei, Ming, Cheng, Bian, Ming, & Wei (2018) [1], state that specific communication problems were linked to 17.5% of all complaints, but in reality other categories, totalling 83.7% of all complaints, have a clear (verbal and non-verbal) communication component; uncaring attitudes (26.7%), unsatisfactory quality of treatment and competence (26.5%) and processes of care (13.0%). Highlighting this point are the examples given by patients in relation to complaints categorised as uncaring attitudes, included “displayed indifferent expressions, used unfriendly language tones, were impatient with patients' questions, or did not give thorough explanations when answering questions”. The authors suggest theory-guided strategies to assist with nursing care. We advocate the need for this to be instilled in nursing education.

Education providers for health professionals aim to improve communication skills through formal education [2–4]. Wei et al. (2018) [1] state the Chinese curriculum for medicine focuses on science more than humane or caring qualities. Few education providers are able to effectively educate health professionals of the critical nature of communication for their future practice and work place requirements [5].

In the United States, poor communication contributed to 1744 deaths over a five-year period [6]. The United Kingdom National Health Service (NHS) are acutely aware of the issues with poor communication, commissioning a document, Improving Communication with Patients in the NHS. The document states that good communication, not only improves health outcomes, but could save the UK one billion pounds annually, challenging the position that communication is a “soft skill” [7]. Good clear communication in nursing, specifically demonstrated as the successful ability to “receive, decode information effectively, exhibiting different types of communication in different nursing contexts through visual, auditory and kinaesthetic modes” [8], p. 51 2014, is the foundation of a vibrant, safe and effective healthcare system. Thus, student nurses require an evidence based, consistent communication educational approach.

How communication is taught affects health professional's work place, patient lives and has financial implications [2,9,10]. Previous studies have demonstrated the inconsistency in communication education [11–13]. Common educational methods currently used, include simulation, role-play, videos, debriefing and reflection [4,10–12,14,15]. One method that has proven to be effective is

simulation, as this enhances performance in clinical practice [5]. As well, there are a variety of validated communication assessment tools for health care. One example is The Calgary Cambridge Guide used by Ammentorp (2014) [16] for a programme to educate health employees, who had contact with patients. The tool measured communication ability, style and comprehension and could be applied to undergraduate nursing communication.

Communication education is too important not to develop a consistent, evidenced based curriculum, employing rigorous assessments tools to ensure our future nursing practitioners are fully equipped with the communication skills required to support patients, families, and communities.

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