

Background

Challenges in patient safety need to be addressed in clinical practice. However, the foundation for capacity-building in patient safety competencies for upcoming health professionals must be provided in health professional education. The World Health Organisation (WHO) published an extensive guide on incorporating relevant clinical and socio-cultural patient safety topics in today's curricula [1]. In 2014 Canadian researchers found health professional educators to articulate the need for more formalised teaching about patient safety [2]. Neither nursing educators nor medical faculty knew of specific patient safety courses within their curricula. In assessing students' self-perceived competence in patient safety in the Euregion Meuse-Rhine (EMR), students express the need to address patient safety more extensively in the curriculum [3]. This is relevant, as the European Union directive clearly states that all nurses (regardless of their training level) must develop the necessary competencies to collaborate interprofessionally, assure quality of care, communicate effectively and improve professional practice [4].

Aim(s)

This study explored the definition, meaning, and operationalisation of patient safety in health professional education in medicine and nursing education in the EMR.

Methods

A multi-site constructivist grounded theory study was conducted in various health professional education facilities in the Euregion Meuse-Rhine. Initially, purposive sampling was applied to recruit medical faculty and nursing educators, followed by theoretical sampling. Both individual and focus group interviews were conducted, involving a total of 38 participants.

Results

A formal or operational definition of patient safety is lacking in both medical and nursing education in the EMR. In their definition, respondents focus mainly on the health organisation's ability to perform risk detection and avoid preventable harm. Although respondents are unanimous about the importance of patient safety, a shared vision on its meaning in the curriculum is non-existent. Patient safety tends to be implicitly present, hidden in the curriculum. There are no specific patient safety courses, yet clinical (i.e., infection prevention) and socio-cultural dimensions (i.e., effective communication) of patient safety were scattered throughout the curriculum. According to educators, this causes students to develop a "blind spot" for patient safety.

Discussion

The findings in this study correspond with previous literature on health professional educators' views on the definition and translation of patient safety in the curricula of health professional education. One of the study's limitations is the underrepresentation of nursing education in the Netherlands.

Implications and future perspectives

When health professional education fails to educate students about the importance and width of patient safety and its dimensions, this could significantly impact health professionals' patient safety competencies when entering clinical practice. Medical faculty and nursing educators endorse its importance by stating that patient safety needs to be mentioned more explicitly in the curriculum.

References

1. WHO. Multi-professional patient safety curriculum guide, 2011.
2. Tregunno et al, *BMJ Qual Saf* 23(3):257-64, 2014.
3. Ulenaers et al, unpublished, 2023.
4. Directive 2013/55/EU.