

CHAPTER 1

Overview of the study

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Nursing education programmes in the Republic of South Africa (RSA) are expected to produce diplomates who are competent, critical thinkers and who possess knowledge and the ability to solve problems independently and exercise independent judgements (Lekhuleni 2002:1).

During 1986 the RSA Government recognised the need for comprehensive health care services. Thus the Health Act (63 of 1977, as amended) as well as the National Health Plan for South Africa (ANC 1994) formulated policies for the pattern of health care to shift from a curative orientation to a comprehensive health care service.

In response to a shift from a curative orientation to a comprehensive health service the South African Nursing Council (SANC) introduced a four year comprehensive course leading to registration as a nurse (general, psychiatric and community) and midwife (Regulation R425 of 22 February 1985, as amended). This was related to the four year period of training where the R425 programme enable professional nurses to be qualified general, psychiatric, community nurses as well as midwives upon completion of the R425 course. Prior to 1986 students required three years to become registered general nurses and one year for midwifery, psychiatry and community nursing respectively, implying that a minimum of six years was required to obtain the four qualifications (Khoza 1996:51).

According to Searle and Pera (1995:92), competency is defined as a demonstrated cognitive, affective and psychomotor abilities required for the performance of specific activities. The SANC's Regulation

(R2598 of November 1984, as amended) (SANC 1984) prescribes the scope of practice of persons registered or enrolled under the Nursing Act (50 of 1978, as amended).

According to R425 programme objectives professional nurses are expected to have developed analytic, critical, evaluative and creative thinking skills. They are also expected to have developed the capacity to interpret scientific data, draw conclusions and exercise independent judgement upon the completion of their training, requiring higher level behaviours in the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains of learning (SANC 1992:3).

Stuart and Sundeen (1995:13) state that "orientation and guidance of the newly qualified nurse determine whether he/she will be competent to perform his/her duties, the administrative policies where the nurse practises can either foster or limit full use of the nurse's potential".

Since the R425 programme's inception there has been concerns about the problem of inadequate preparation of diplomates and this has been expressed by several researchers. Gwele and Uys (1995:5) conducted a study on the views of nurse educators regarding the R425 programme in the KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) Province in the RSA. Findings revealed that nurse educators perceived diplomates to lack experience causing feelings of inadequacy to be remedied by post basic experience before they could feel confident in psychiatric hospitals/clinics. Gwele and Uys (1995:5) identified a number of aspects that could hinder the attainment of objectives with regard to the R425 programme in the RSA namely:

- Fragmented clinical placements.
- Emphasis on a number of lectures and clinical hours instead of competencies.
- A packed and rigid curriculum with too many "nice to knows" rather than "must knows".
- The mandatory qualifications in General, Midwifery, Community Nursing Science and Psychiatric Nursing Science placed unprecedented burdens on clinical facilities, student nurses and lecturers.

In support of the preceding discussion Chetty and Gwele (2001:77) revealed that students felt that time allocated for clinical practica was too short and it needed to be extended so as to enable students to become confident and competent in the clinical situations.

Khoza and Ehlers (2000:50) conducted a study on the competencies of newly qualified psychiatric nurses in the Limpopo Province (LP) of the RSA, as viewed by senior professional nurses. These findings revealed that the newly qualified nurses were found to be competent in performing some clinical activities but not all. Newly qualified nurses were found to be competent in performing affective competencies, administration and management skills but to be incompetent in carrying out admissions and discharges according to the Mental Health Act (18 of 1973, as amended).

The preceding discussion serves as a basis for the present study. It is important to identify the psychiatric competencies of professional nurses who completed the R425 programme so as to evaluate whether the R425 programme is able to produce professional nurses who are able to use their education in providing high quality care in psychiatric clinical units. If specific shortcomings should be identified during the course of this study, then recommendations can be made to enhance the psychiatric nursing competencies of R425 diplomates in the KZN Province and possibly throughout the RSA.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The research problem can be stated as: Do R425 diplomates perceive their psychiatric nursing education to be adequate in preparing them for practice as competent professional psychiatric nurses?

1.3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework which was adopted for the study was the specifications of the R425 programme. Acquiring complex behaviour patterns implies that the R425 student nurses need to learn new behaviours through the observed desirable conduct of professional nurses in psychiatric clinical units in addition to mastering theoretical knowledge about psychiatric nursing. Retention of observed conduct can only occur if the R425 programme diplomates are given the opportunity to practise and are given feedback by supervisors about those aspects which are only partly mastered.

1.4 METHODOLOGY

An exploratory descriptive survey was employed to investigate the perceptions of the diplomates' specific psychiatric competencies or strengths and weaknesses of the R425 programme diplomates in psychiatric clinical units in the KZN Province of the RSA. The population and sample of this study comprised diplomates of the R425 programme who were working in the psychiatric units around Durban and Pietermaritzburg in the Province of KZN in the RSA. Purposive sampling was used because only R425 diplomates who were working in the Durban-Pietermaritzburg areas of the KZN Province were used for the study (Polit & Hungler 1991:260). A questionnaire was used to collect data. For validity and reliability of the questionnaire nurse educators who were specialists in psychiatric nursing were requested to review, verify and validate the interpretations of the items in the questionnaire. Construct validity was ensured by using the SANC's regulations (R2598 and R425) as a basis for evaluating the R425 diplomates perceptions of their competencies.

1.5 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose of the study was to identify specific psychiatric competencies of professional nurses of the R425 programme upon completion of their training. Based on these results recommendations would

be made for improving R425 diplomates' psychiatric nursing competencies. In doing so the study sought to attain specific strengths and weakness in the areas based on R2598 (the regulation defining the scope and practice of the registered nurse in South Africa).

To achieve this, specific questions were formulated:

- Which cognitive, psychomotor, affective psychiatric competencies do R425 programme diplomates have upon entering the psychiatric work setting as perceived by themselves?
- Which factors according to R425 diplomates' perceptions contribute towards their incompetence in psychiatric clinical units?
- Which factors could contribute to R425 programme diplomates' enhanced competence in psychiatric clinical units?

In order to answer the preceding research questions, the objectives of the research were to

- identify specific psychomotor, affective and cognitive psychiatric competencies of the R425 programme diplomates in the psychiatric clinical units as perceived by themselves
- recommend ways of improving psychiatric competencies of R425 programme diplomates based on the findings

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Findings of this study would indicate which psychomotor, affective and cognitive psychiatric nursing competencies of the R425 diplomates need to be addressed. This information would indicate to nurse educators and curriculum developers which aspects need to be emphasised and/or included in the R425 programme. Such information could assist in the delineation and refinement of the cognitive,

affective and psychomotor psychiatric nursing competencies expected from the R425 programme diplomates.

1.7 ASSUMPTIONS

Assumptions refer to basic principles that are believed to be true without proof or verification (Polit & Hungler 1997:10). The basic assumption seems to be that diplomates of the R425 programme are inadequately prepared to practise as competent professional psychiatric nurses. This situation can be addressed if this research reveals which competencies of R425 diplomates need to be refined in order to provide more effective nursing care to psychiatric patients.

1.7.1 Assumptions regarding theoretical commitments

With regard to theoretical conceptual commitments it is assumed that the R425 programme objectives specify the psychiatric nursing competencies expected of R425 diplomates. The perceptions of R425 diplomates actually working in psychiatric nursing units could thus be used to evaluate whether or not the competencies acquired during the R425 programme enabled them to function effectively in these units or not. Should specific shortcomings be identified, based on these R425 diplomates' perceptions, then recommendations can be made to enhance the psychiatric nursing competencies of future diplomates.

1.7.2 Assumptions regarding methodological technical commitments

In this regard it is assumed that

- a questionnaire can be designed in such a way that its items will address the phenomenon under investigation

- individual respondents can indicate the degree to which each given statement applies to his/her psychiatric nursing competencies, as perceived by him/herself

1.8 SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

The study attempted to determine the perceptions/views of R425 diplomates about their psychiatric nursing training during the comprehensive nursing diploma programme in the KZN Province of RSA. The study involved only professional nurses who were R425 diplomates and who were working in psychiatric clinical units, excluding community, midwifery and general nursing units.

It might not be possible to generalise the findings of the study to the entire RSA as they might only be applicable to the institutions where the research was conducted.

1.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Attention was given to the following aspects:

- Permission to conduct this study was obtained from the Secretary of the Health Department, Pietermaritzburg in the KZN Province of the RSA.
- Informed written consent was obtained from each respondent.
- A letter to guarantee confidentiality and anonymity was submitted to each subject together with the questionnaire and neither the name of the respondent nor the institution was requested on the questionnaire.
- No physical or psychological risks were involved as the study was non-experimental. More discussions on ethical considerations will be presented in chapter 3.

1.10 DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS

For the purpose of this study it is necessary to define the concepts that will be used throughout the dissertation to ensure that the readers and the researcher share the same meaning attached to specific concepts.

1.10.1 Diploma/diplomate

Diploma is a certificate of qualification awarded by a college (Concise Oxford Dictionary 1996:344). For the purpose of this study a diplomate is a professional nurse who has trained under R425 of 22 February 1985, as amended, of the SANC and qualified as a nurse (general, psychiatric and community) and midwife.

1.10.2 Competence

Competency is a demonstrated cognitive, affective and or psychomotor ability required for the performance of specific activities (Searle & Pera 1995:92). Competence means being able to do a particular thing (Concise Oxford Dictionary 1996:247). According to Khoza (1996:15), the definition of competency share common concepts such as ability, quality, performance, efficiency and capability. For the purpose of this study competency refers to R425 programme diplomates' cognitive, affective and psychomotor abilities to perform specific psychiatric nursing tasks satisfactorily as perceived and reported by themselves.

1.10.3 Comprehensive (R425) course/programme

The comprehensive course is a four-year comprehensive programme leading to registration as a nurse (general, psychiatric and community) and midwife (R425 of 22 February 1985, as amended).

1.10.4 Perception

Perception is an act or faculty of perceiving. Perception is an intuitive recognition of a truth or aesthetic quality (Concise Oxford Dictionary 1996:902). Perception in this study refers to the rating/evaluation by newly qualified professional nurses of the R425 programme's items concerning their psychomotor, cognitive and affective psychiatric nursing competencies.

1.10.5 Psychiatric nursing science

Psychiatric nursing science is a human clinical health science based on a variety of theoretical frameworks with emphasis on the psychosocial and biophysical sciences. It constitutes knowledge regarding the promotion of mental health and primary, secondary and tertiary prevention of mental illness (Stuart & Sundeen 1995:8).

1.11 ORGANISATION OF THE RESEARCH REPORT

The rest of dissertation comprises the following chapters:

- Chapter 2 presents a review of literature pertaining to the diplomates' perceptions of their psychiatric nursing science training during the four year comprehensive nursing diploma programme (R425 programme), and to their perceived psychiatric nursing competencies upon completion of this programme.
- Chapter 3 outlines the research methodology used in the study.
- Chapter 4 presents the data analysis and discusses the research results.
- Chapter 5 provides the summary, limitations, conclusions, and recommendations pertaining to the findings.

The bibliography presents a list of references used throughout the dissertation as well as works consulted during the course of this study.

Annexures contain copies of the letters requesting and granting permission to conduct this study and the covering letter attached to each questionnaire as well as a questionnaire.

1.12 SUMMARY

Chapter 1 introduced the background of the study on the R425 diplomates' perceptions of their psychiatric nursing competencies. It includes the problem statement, purpose of study and objectives, significance of study, assumptions and research questions. It introduced the methodology for the study, identified the scope and limitations, specified the ethical considerations, and provided definitions for the key concepts used throughout the study. The review of literature will be presented in chapter 2.