

Review

## A review of studies on the experience and practical nursing ability of clinical nurses

Terumi YONEDA *Aino Gakuin College*

**Key words :** experience, practical nursing ability, career development, nurse's growth

### Introduction

Although the physical ability of human beings declines with age, mental ability is considered to develop throughout life (Erikson, 1963, 1982; Havighurst, 1953; Levinson, 1978; Okadou, 1987; Okamoto, 1985, 1986, 1994, 1999; Hamachek, 1990; Franz & White, 1958). Professional activities are considered to be based upon practical abilities which are thought to develop with experience (Baltes, 1987). Thus, the ability of clinical nurses is thought to develop with experience.

A pioneering study on the development of clinical nursing ability of nurses was done by Benner (1984). She claimed that practical nursing ability develops with experience in a stepwise manner: (1) "novice," (2) "advanced beginner," (3) "competent," (4) "proficient," and (5) "expert." She stated that the development from "competent" to "proficient" was achieved not by the length of the experience but by its quality. A number of studies support prove her conclusion. There are also some reports indicating that life experiences other than nursing practice influence development as nurses.

This review will introduce and discuss papers on the development of practical clinical nursing ability published over 10 years. Some papers published before this period are also included when relevant. The present review consists of three parts: 1) studies on the development of human experiences and mental ability; 2) studies on practical clinical nursing ability; 3) studies on experiences and the development of clinical nursing ability. The present review will show that not

only clinical experiences but also life experiences influence practical development of the clinical nursing ability.

### 1. Studies on the development of human experiences and mental ability

Knowledge can be obtained by experiences (Miki, 1940) and one grows with various experiences (Mori, 1970). A human being thus continues to develop by experiences throughout his or her life. This is generally understood not only in developmental psychology but also in nursing science (Peplau, 1952; Havighurst, 1953; Franz & White, 1958; Erikson, 1963; Okadou, 1987; Mizushima, et al. 1978; Levinson, 1978; Nojima, 1984; Hamachek, 1990; Tatara, 1990; Tomey, 1994; Okamoto, 1999).

For life events related to development during the adult stage, the following have been reported. Erikson (1963) suggested "epigenetic development" in the adult stage, "close human relationship" and "reproductivity (generative)" or, in other words, "love" and "care." Life events which strongly influence the development of the adult stage are "occupation (life)," "formation of human relations," "marriage," "childbirth," "formation of family life," "care of aged parents," and "fostering of the young generation." These life events could be crises in human development. The mental ability of a human develops when he or she overcomes a crisis. Okadou (1985) classified crises in life events into two types. The first are crises which everyone encounters: "entrance into school," "employment,"

“marriage,” “childbirth,” and “retirement.” The second types are crises that one can not predict, including “unemployment,” “bankruptcy,” “divorce,” “traffic accidents,” “sudden illness,” and “death of close persons.”

Next, let us consider life events. Holmes and Rahe (1967) described high stress life events of healthy adults. They included “spouse’s death,” “divorce,” “separation of a married couple,” “imprisonment,” “death of close relatives.” Masuda and Holmes (1967) investigated stressful life events using re-adaptation measures targeting 112 adult Japanese (72 men, 40 women). Their results agreed with the results obtained by Holmes and Rahe (1967). However, the studies by Holmes and Rahe (1967) did not deal with differences among individuals in the evaluation of stress. Mikawa and Nakanishi (1989) investigated high-stress life events based on evaluation of personal recognition with 572 adult men in the 20–50’s. The results were classified into four types: “trouble in personal relations,” “parting with relatives,” “problems with work” and “problems with home life.” The results showed that “problems with work” caused the greatest stress in people in the 20–40’s.

These studies have shown that life events of the human beings in the adult stage affect human development and that life events under strong stress affect social and mental abilities.

## 2. Studies on practical clinical nursing ability

Practical nursing ability should include knowledge, technology, skill and judgment. However, the meaning and concept of practical nursing ability differ among nursing theorists. Wiedenbach (1964) defined clinical practice ability as integrating four elements: “knowledge,” “judgment,” “communication skills” and “procedural skills.” He stated that nursing practices are comprised of direct and indirect care extended to the patient. The components of practice in direct care are “identification,” “administration,” and “validation,” and those of practice of indirect care are “reporting,” “consulting,” and “conferring.”

In the 1980’s, sociological methods began to be used for the study of nursing. They have been used to

fairly judge the ability of nurses in clinical nursing practice. Benner (1984, 1992) claimed that there were seven types of practical nursing ability: 1) the role of helping, 2) the teaching and guiding, coaching function, 3) the diagnostic and monitoring function, 4) effective management of rapidly changing situations, 5) administering and monitoring therapeutic interventions and regimens, 6) monitoring and ensuring the quality of health care practices, and 7) organizational and work-role competencies. Expert nurses in clinical nursing practice judged the reported situation by intuition as well as theoretical or rational analysis. Tenner (1987) described six aspects of ability of the experienced nurses. According to him, this ability of judgment developed by repeated experiences under similar conditions. These studies demonstrated that experiences influence the development of practical nursing ability, practical knowledge and clinical judgment ability.

Nojima (2001) classified the ability of Japanese expert nurses into six types: 1) can make accurate clinical judgment based on suitable judgment expertise; 2) can provide independent nursing care suitable for individuals; 3) can possess advanced knowledge and technology; 4) can provide patient with suitable information; 5) can make a patient feel relieved and comfortable; 6) can take a leadership role in a medical team.

Sato (1989) explained the components of the clinical judgment ability of clinical nurses as being: 1) knowledge, 2) understanding of the situation, 3) behavior of nurses, 4) effect and 5) feeling of satisfaction. There are also studies on good practical nursing ability (Shibata et. al. 1995; Matsushita, 1991, 1995) and on the structure of practical nursing ability (Yamada, 2000). Such works show that practical nursing ability is not only ability directly concerned with knowledge, judgment and skill, but also with abilities indirectly related with nursing care. The latter include administration ability related with leadership and the ability to foster staff members and ethical considerations.

### **3. Studies on experiences and the development of clinical nursing ability**

#### **1) Studies on practical clinical nursing ability and the clinical experience**

Benner (1984) studied the potential of skillfulness in : nursing practice and classified the developmental steps into 1) novice, 2) advanced beginner, 3) competent, 4) proficient, and 5) expert. She also suggested that the development of the nurses' skill progressed through these five steps. Another report of stepwise development of clinical judgment ability came from Sato (1989). Since then there have been a number of studies on the clinical experience of nurses and the development of their clinical ability (Toyota et al. 1992, 1997; Kajiyama et al. 1993; Yanagisawa et al. 1994; Nakano et al. 1997).

What is common from these studies is that rather than the length and amount of experiences, the quality of the experience influences the development of practical nursing ability (Benner, 1984; Sato, 1989; Toyota et al. 1992; Kajiyama et al. 1993; Yanagisawa et al. 1994; Nakano et al. 1997; Nojima, 2001).

Benner (1984) stated that there was a qualitative jump when a nurse developed from competent to proficient. Sato (1989) reported that not only time but also the quality of the experience is important for the development of clinical judgment ability. Thus, not all clinical nurses who had clinical experience of more than five years could be classified as experts. Yanagisawa et al. (1994) reported that there were clinical abilities which were not acquired only by working for a long time. There are reports that, after working for 4-5 years, nurses tended to perform work habitually, thus inhibiting further development (Mizuno et al. 1987; Takada et al. 1995). These studies seem to prove that practical nursing ability develops not necessarily in proportion to the length of experience.

These findings have been used to develop a method by which practical ability in nursing administration and effective training can be evaluated (Hirata & Minami, 1997). A personnel system including a clinical ladder has been developed based on the theory of Benner (1984) and applied to the development of clinical nursing ability and career. In Japan, the

question has arisen of whether or not nurses with long experience should become administrators and educators. The evaluation system of practical nursing ability, like a clinical ladder, has been introduced in some hospitals in Japan (Inada, 1993; Kamizumi & Shibata, 1995).

#### **2) Studies on practical clinical nursing ability and life experiences**

Some work is available on the life experiences and the growth and development of the nurse. Itami (1999) who used the technique of the life course studied 170 nurses with questionnaires on experiences which gave them the opportunity to grow as nurses. Her results showed that nurses grew with experiences independent of age. There were life events which gave them opportunities to promote their growth when they were novices as well as later. Important factors were "experience in nursing practice," "relations with excellent superiors in the hospital" and "changes in personal and home lives." Itami (1999) clearly showed and growth and development of nurses are strongly affected not only by clinical experiences but also by life experiences. Kusakari (1985) conducted a questionnaire survey related to the lives and careers of 162 nursing administrators by using a life course study technique. The results indicated that their careers developed through personal work experience and family life. However, individual and family's lives were interpreted as experiences which delayed the career development in nursing. Mizuno and Mikami (2000) used a semi-structured interview to study the development of 57 clinical nurses. Six important factors influencing career development were: "learning opportunity," "relations with patient and patient's family," "relations with superiors and colleague," "role grant," "job transfer," and "life events." These studies showed the importance of experience as factors influencing nurse growth and development, but they did not describe the contents of the experience.

Elster (1987) conducted a qualitative study on clinical excellence in nursing. He interviewed 14 professional nurses using an open-ended guide. The mean age of the nurses was 32 years. The results of the analysis showed the following. The nurses were

highly socialized by being involved in professional organizations and peer recognition. They had many and diverse life experiences which they incorporated and internalized through reflection. Nurses develop clinical excellence with concepts including patient advocacy, patient-centeredness, holism and involvement. The philosophy of life strongly influences nurses' humanism and sense of security, and the philosophy of nursing reflects advocacy and patient-centeredness related with self-preservation. Williams (1996) studied the concept of "expert and non-expert nurse perspectives of life experiences related with becoming and being a nurse." Twenty Caucasian nurses (10 experts and 10 non-experts) were interviewed using a semi-structured interview guide on their experiences in four areas : deciding to become a nurse, living in the family, learning to be nurses, and being a nurse. The results of the analysis showed that expert nurses had a constructive perspective, by considering their occupations with multiple points of view.

Suzuki (2001) similarly studied 15 clinical nurses, via interview using a semi-structured system. As a result, six explanatory concepts emerged : (1) acquiring clinical competence and deepening nursing role by overcoming problems ; (2) facing changes in daily life and reconstructing lifestyle ; (3) establishing relationship with members of an organization and maintaining it ; (4) feeling confrontation between developmental task and job demand ; (5) being unable to decide to continue a job or not and finally making decision to continue : (6) progressing in understanding of nursing and establishing nursing standard and value.

What emerged from these occupation experiences were that : (1) not only the practical nursing ability but also the ability to carry out one's duties could be acquired while working and that a nurse could develop as a human being as well as a person with an occupation. The study by Suzuki (2001) is one of the few which focused on nurse life experiences. The studies introduced above clarified the content of life experiences influencing the growth and development of nurses. Clearly, the development of nurses as human beings influenced their practical nursing ability.

#### 4. Issues raised by studies on the clinical ability of nurses

This review has shown that the development of the practical nursing ability of clinical nurses is strongly influenced by the quality of their clinical experiences. Another important factor pointed out by Peplau (1952) and Nojima (1984) is the personality and life experiences of the individual nurse. In the future, more studies are needed on the life experiences and personalities of clinical nurses.

#### Acknowledgements

The author wishes to express her deep gratitude to Professor Toshiaki Sakai, the Rector of Aino Gakuin College and to Professor Yoshio Masuda for their invaluable support in writing this review. Thanks are also due to Professor Judy Noguchi of Mukogawa Women's University for her kindest editing of the English.

#### References

- Benner, P. : From Novice to Expert-Excellence and Power in Clinical Nursing Practice. Menlo Park, Calif. Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1984
- Benner, P., Tanner, C., Chesla, C. : From beginner to expert : Gaining a differentiated clinical world in critical care nursing. *Adv. Nurs. Sci.* 14 : 13-28, 1992
- Erikson, E. H. : *Childhood and society.* W. W. Norton, New York, 1963
- Erikson, E. H. : *The life cycle completed.* W. W. Norton, New York, 1982
- Elster, S. E. : An analysis of nurses who demonstrate clinical excellence in nursing. University of Utah, A Doctoral Dissertation 1987, Health Sciences Nursing, Dissertation Abstracts International. 48 : 1640-1641, 1987
- Franz, C. E., White, K. M. : Individuation and attachment in personality development : Extending Erikson's theory. *J. Personality.* 53 : 224-256, 1958
- Hamachek, D. : Evaluating self-concept and ego status in Erikson's last the psychosocial stages. *J. Counse. & Developm.* 68 : 677-683, 1990
- Havighurst, R. J. : *Human development and education.* Longmans Green & Co., Inc., New York, 1953
- Holmes, T. H., Rahe, R. H. : The social readjustment rating scale. *J. Psychosomatic Research.* 11 : 213-218, 1967
- Hirata, A., Minami, Y. : The job description document of specialist at the American medical facilities. *International Nursing Review Japanese eds.* 18 : 30-39, 1995
- Inada, M. : Japanese personnel management and specialization in nursing. *Annual Bulletin of The Institute of Business Research Chuo University.* 14 : 183-198, 1993

- Ishikawa, K., Yamamoto, K., Sakamoto, H. : Seikatusutoresu towa nanika (What is stress in life). Tokyo. Kakiuchi-Shuppan, 1985
- Itami, K. : Study of the process of nurses' progress according to life-course approach. Shiga College of Nursing, University of Shiga Prefecture. 3 : 15-21, 1999
- Kamiizumi, K., Shibata, H. : About the nurse's career development and the quality of the nursing care. International Nursing Review Japanese eds. 18 : 72-77, 1995
- Kajiyama, N., Kugo, F., Kawauchi, Y., Miyakenaka, A., Tuzuki, A., Omachi, N. : Investigation about the nurse's nature—The learning grade of the clinical ability and development process. Kango Kanri (Administration of Nursing). 3 : 480-486, 1993
- Kusakari, J. : Studies on life course and career development of university hospital's nursing executives in Japan. Jpn. Nurs. Res. 29 : 31-46, 1986
- Levinson, D. : The seasons of a man's life. The Sterling Lord Agency, Inc., New York, 1978
- Matsuoka, M., Hirasawa, M., Kumazawa, M., Sasaki, K., Kimura, S. : Investigation about the business of proficient nurse at the establishment : The actual condition of the chief nurse's business evaluation and the self-evaluation of the clinical ability of proficient midwife. Jpn. J. Midwives. 50 : 21-27, 1996
- Matsushita, H. : Nursing strategy which tides over a nursing crisis. Tokyo, Nikkei BP. Co. 1991
- Matsushita, H. : Nursing business administration. Tokyo, Official Journal of the Japanese Nursing Association, 1995
- Masuda, M., Holmes, T. H. : Life events, perception and frequencies. Psychosomatic Medicine. 40 : 236-261, 1978
- Mikawa, T., Nakanishi, N. : Ningenkeisei no Shinrigaku. Tokyo, Nakanishi shuppan, 1989
- Miki, K. : Tetsugaku nyumon. Tokyo, Iwanami-Shinsho, Publishers, 1940
- Mizushima, K., Okadou, T., Tahata O. editing : Client — Counseling wo motomeruhito Counseling wo manabuhito. The first edition. Yuhikaku Publishing Co. Ltd., 1978
- Mizuno, S., Ebata, M., Yamamoto, M., Yoshida, N. : Pattern of job attitudes owing to their length of service. J. Jpn. Soc. Hospital Administration. 24 : 13-22, 1987
- Mizuno, Y., Mikami, R. : Research on the clinical nurse's career development process. J. Jpn. Acad. Nurs. Admin. Policies (JANA). 4 : 13-22, 2000
- Mori, Y. : Ikirukoto kangaerukoto. Kodansha-gendaishinsho, 1970
- Nagatomo, S., Kusakari, J. : A study on the life course and career development of directors of nursing in university. J. Jpn. Hospital Administration. 7 : 217-225, 1995
- Nakano, S., Okabe, K., Mise, N., Okumura, J. : Changes in nurses' ability to make clinical judgement according to experience — from using simulated situations. Bulletin Ehime College of Health Science. 16 : 81-90, 1997
- Nojima, Y. : Kangoron. Tokyo, Herusu-Shuppan, 1984
- Nojima, Y. : The nursing diagnosis ability of expert nurse : The characteristics and development process. J. Jpn. Soci. Nursing Diagnosis (JSND). 6 : 62-68, 2001
- Okadou, T. : The clinical mentality of the patient care. Tokyo, Igakushoin, 1985
- Okamoto, Y. : Research on the self identity of the middle age term. Annual Report of Educational Psychology. 33 : 295-306, 1985
- Okamoto, Y. : The analysis of the development course of the self identity status in the adult term. Annual Report of Educational Psychology. 34 : 352-356, 1986
- Okamoto, Y. : A review and some consideration to studies on life-span developmental psychology. Annual Report of Educational Psychology. 33 : 132-143, 1994
- Okamoto, Y. editing : Josei no shogaihattatu to aidentiti (Woman's life development and identity). Tokyo, Kitaoji-Shobo, 1999
- Peplau, H. E. : Interpersonal Relations in Nursing—A Conceptual Frame of Reference for Psychodynamic Nursing. New York, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1952
- Sato, N. : Component grade of nurse's clinical judgment and suggestion to the continuation education. Kango (Nursing). 41 : 127-143, 1989
- Shibata, H., Kamiizumi, j., Yoshimura, C., Yokomichi, M., Higaki, M., Suzuyama, H., Katsuhara, Y. : Structure of the quality of nursing care ; Quantitative analysis. J. Jpn. Nurs. Res. 28 : 41-54, 1995
- Suzuki, M. : Hospital nurses' occupational experiences. Kango Kyoikugaku Kenkyu (Nursing Education Research). 10 : 43-56, 2002
- Tanner, C. : Teaching clinical judgment. In J. Fitzpatrick, J. & q. Taunton (Eds.), Annual Review of Nursing Research, 5 : 153-173. New York : Springer Publishing, 1987
- Takada, K., Kusakari, J., Kawaguchi, T. : A study of job satisfaction of nurses in S university hospital. J. Jpn. Soc. of Nursing Research. 18 : 53-62, 1995
- Tatara, M. : Psychology of the self identity. Kodansha-Shinsho, 1999
- Tamura, Y., Oomori, M., Manabe, Y., Takagi, E. : Clinical thinking for the clinical nurse— the relationships between personal backgrounds and self-evaluation of abilities, Nursing Journal of Kagawa Medical University. 1 : 46-60, 1997
- Tomey, A. M., Ed. : Nursing theorists and their work. Third. ed. Mosby—Year Book, Inc., St. Louis, 1994
- Toyota, Y., Nakano, S., Kitahara, E., Mise, N., Okumura, J. : Research in making process of clinical judgment by nurses No. 1. Bulletin Ehime College of Health Science. 5 : 191-200, 1992
- Toyota, Y., Nakano, S., Kitahara, E., Mise, N., Okumura, J. : A change by the experience of the nurse's clinical judgment ability. Bulletin Ehime College of Health

- Science. 16 : 81-90, 1997
- Yanagisawa, S., Yamazaki, A., Komatsu, M., Mikami, R. :  
Research on the acquisition of the nursing practical  
ability. J. Jpn. Acad. Nurs. Sci. (Proceedings). 14 :  
360-361, 1994
- Yamada, S. : A study of evaluation of nursing competence  
development of weighting method on appraisal items.  
Kouchi joushidaigaku kiyou kangogakubu (eds.). 48 :  
37-47, 2000
- Wiedenbach, E. : Clinical nursing : A Helping Art. Springer  
Publishing Company, Inc., New York, 1964
- Williams, C. S. : Expert and non-expert nurses' perspectives of  
life experiences related to becoming and being a nurse.  
University of South Carolina. A Doctoral Dissertation,  
1996