

Bridging the gap between theory & practice Enhancing clinical teaching through model wards in Malawi G Chipungu, G Chidalengwa, and T Bvumbwe

Background

In 2010, the US government, together with ICAP launched the Nurse Education Partnership Initiative (NEPI) in Malawi. ICAP is working with three nursing education institutions to improve the quality and relevance of nursing care since nurses provide between 60-80% of direct patient care in the country. To achieve this, ICAP is working with Mzuzu University to enhance clinical teaching.

Clinical placements provide nursing students with the opportunity to link theory to practice, become familiar with the practice environment and experience “real world” opportunities to develop the requisite knowledge, skills and attitudes. In Malawi, ICAP’s NEPI programme is enhancing clinical teaching through the reestablishment and support of Model Wards.

The concept of a “Model Ward” is not new in the history of nursing education in Malawi. In the early 1960s, Malawi’s National School of Nursing operated a “Student Ward” at Queen Elizabeth Central Hospital. Nursing students passed through this ward to develop clinical competencies. The Ward had all the essential human and material resources for an ideal clinical teaching/learning environment. With passage of time and increasingly less human and material resources the student ward concept faded. Nevertheless, veteran nurses still recall that the ward played a critical role in the development of clinical skills and competencies among student nurses.

Challenges Experienced in the Clinical Area

The quality of nurse education depends largely on the quality of the clinical experience as Elliot (2002) contends. As shown by ICAP’s assessment in 2011, however, the clinical environment in Malawi experiences the following clinical teaching/learning challenges:

- There is a critical shortage of clinical teachers—1 RN supervising 15–20 students contrary to the ideal ratio of 6–8 students per preceptor
- Clinical teaching in Malawi is performed by nurse and midwife technicians who are not trained to teach student nurses
- Wards in Malawi lack basic resources hindering students from learning basic nursing competences
- Wards do not have best practice guidelines to guide quality nursing care provision

Model Ward Objectives

Reintroducing Model Wards in Malawi aims to bridge the theory-practice gap by:

- Enhancing clinical teaching/learning through provision of an ideal clinical learning environment.
- Strengthening “evidence based practice” in clinical teaching and learning
- Promoting provision of quality nursing care

Expected outcomes of the Model Ward are shown in Figure 1. Some of the nursing skills to be learned in the Model Ward are shown in Figure 2.

ICAP Intervention

ICAP and Mzuzu University are implementing Model Wards at two central hospitals and two district hospitals. The four hospitals were selected based on accessibility and utilization by the nursing colleges in Malawi. ICAP and Mzuzu have created an enabling clinical teaching/learning environment by providing:

- Advocacy for providing adequate healthcare personnel on the ward
- Preceptorship training for nurses working on the Model Wards
- Essential material resources that were not adequate for clinical teaching such as blood pressure machines, health monitors, bathing basins, bathing towels, kidney dishes, glucometers, and traction pulleys
- Best practice guidelines

Next Steps

- Design and conduct an assessment to evaluate the effectiveness of the Model Ward. Sample evaluation questions are shown in Figure 3.

Figure 1: Expected Outcomes

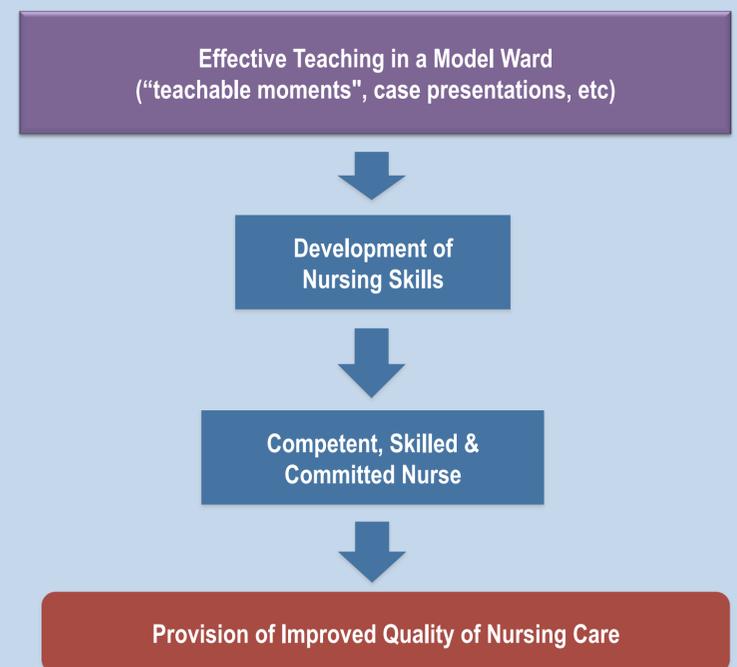
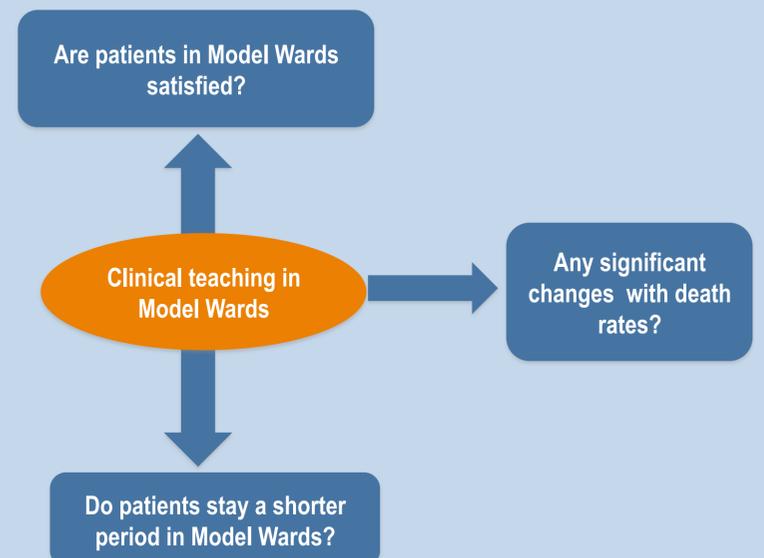


Figure 2: Improved Skills Learned in Model Ward



Figure 3: Possible Evaluation Questions



References:

1. WHO, (2011)
2. Elliot, 2002
3. ICAP Model Ward Assessment, 2011
4. Ministry of Health – Nurse/Midwifery Training Operating Plan, 2010