

Original Research Article

Rethinking Nurses' Continuous Professional Development in the Era of COVID 19 Pandemic: Empirical Evidence from Kenya

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Abstract: *Background:* The Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has triggered a global emergency in all social realms, including but not restricted to the economy, health, and education. The health sector requires all healthcare professionals to be well-equipped with the latest advances in knowledge and research through Continuing Professional Development (CPD). These educational endeavors have been severely affected and potentially compromised since they heavily rely on learning through face-to-face interactive activities. Although it is mandatory for nurses in Kenya to participate in continuing professional development programmes the evidence on the effect of their continuing professional development programmes remains unclear. Besides the CPD requirement in Kenya, there is no clear evidence that the nurses and midwives have an enabling environment to accomplish these requirements. *Purpose:* The aim of this study was to determine utilization of Continuous Professional Development on nurses' performance of in Narok County amid the Covid-19 pandemic in Kenya. *Methodology:* A cross sectional descriptive study was conducted in Narok County Health facilities. A mixed method approach, which provided for triangulation that sought convergence and corroboration of the results from questionnaire, was adopted. Purposive sampling was used to recruit 40 respondents for the study. Data was checked for completeness and consistency and then entered into SPSS version 26.0 for analysis. Descriptive statistics used included frequencies, percentage, mean and standard deviation. *Findings:* Results of the study established that majority (58.6%) of the nurses often participated in formal CPD activities like conferences workshops and seminars (M = 4.27, SD = 0.933). It was also established by the study that that continuing professional development had improved their skills and competencies (M = 4.03, SD = 1.097); had improved their techniques in nursing care (M = 4.02, SD = 0.891) and had given them latest knowledge on how to treat clients (M = 4.25, SD = 1.256). Further revealed that continuous professional development activities had a positive and significant effect on nurses' performance ($\beta = 0.380$, p-value = $0.015 < \alpha = 0.05$). *Conclusion:* The study concludes that CPD programs have a very positive effect on the performance of employees, as they considered it a crucial aspect in developing their knowledge, skills and attitudes. Thus, CPD should be a priority for health professionals as a means of quality assurance and workforce advancement.

Keywords: Continuous Professional Development, Covid-19 pandemic, Nurses, long life learning.

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INTRODUCTION

Due to advanced technology, shifting patient care needs, and rapid obsolescence of acquired knowledge, the nursing profession has undergone a variety of alterations in the health care setting. The increasing rate of change makes it difficult for health care delivery systems to provide high-quality care that meets the needs of patients, families, and society [1]. Therefore, nurses must maintain knowledge and skills that will allow them to meet the challenges. This emphasizes the need for nurses to engage in continuing

professional development (CPD) activities to effectively meet patient and care needs.

Continuing professional development (CPD) is fundamental to nurses' lifelong learning and is essential for maintaining their knowledge and skills. All nurses and midwives must engage in continuing professional development in order to keep up with the constantly evolving health care environment. CPD is a lifelong learning process that nurses and midwives must engage in. It is critical that nurses and midwives retain their competence in practice as the largest group of healthcare professionals since they play an important

role in the overall quality of patient care [2]. Through the implementation of evidence-based practices, well-educated nursing and midwifery staff may be able to improve their clients' health outcomes. Participation in continuing professional development by nurses has been associated with the following benefits: improved patient care, greater job satisfaction, enhanced performance, and reduced stress [3]. According to the World Health Organization [4], continuing one's education in one's field of practice, also known as "continued professional development" (CPD), is an essential component in the process of achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which were set forth by the United Nations in order to improve the overall health of underdeveloped countries. In most developed nations, nurses and midwives (NMs) have easy access to chances for continuous professional development (CPD); however, this is not necessarily the case in developing nations like Kenya, where resources are scarce. CPD opportunities may be more difficult to come by [5, 6].

The first reported outbreaks of Covid-19 occurred in China in December 2019. The World Health Organization declared COVID-19 as a pandemic on March 11, 2020 [7]. The COVID-19 pandemic has created the need for rapid development and implementation of nursing continuing professional development (NCPD) to scale up nurses and other health care providers to meet a surge in critically ill patients. Through retooling and upskilling nurses and other health care providers, professional development is more important now than ever before [8]. A heightened need for flexible professional development activity planning that is fully integrated into the professional environment is integral to prepare nurses to meet the challenges posed by this pandemic. Globally, reported cases of covid-19 infections as at July 22 stands at 552 million with fatality cases at 6.34 million. The first case of COVID-19 in Kenya was confirmed on 12 March 2020. As of July 2022, Kenya had reported 335 thousand cases, 5,659 deaths.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The term Continuing Professional Development (CPD) has been subject to much debate. It is used interchangeably with such terms as continuous professional education, in-service education, continuing education, lifelong learning, professional development [9], workforce advancement [10], on the job training and staff development. How professionals maintain and develop their knowledge for their professional life defines continuous professional education [10], while CPD includes the informal manner of gaining knowledge and experience (Gallagher, 2007), Education provided "on the job" to build staff capacity, and efficiency has traditionally and previously been defined as in-service education [11].

Existing research has pointed out how important it is for nurses to participate in ongoing professional development, but little is known about how nurses actually experience and understand CPD. This is especially true in the rapidly shifting healthcare landscape brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic [12]. The Nursing Council of Kenya (NCK) defines Continuing Professional Development to include; Educational activities which serve to maintain, develop, update and increase knowledge, skills, attitudes and competencies that a licensed health professional uses to provide services in the best interest of the patient/client, public or the profession; A continuous process that professionals engage in to keep a breast with new developments in health care; A process of imparting a professional with knowledge and skills to help them develop attitudes to deliver quality care that meets clients' expectations (Nursing Council of Kenya, 2012).

According to the NCK guidelines on continuing professional development, both the employer and the nurse have important roles in ensuring the achievement of professional development through continuing professional development which leads to quality health care. The employer's responsibility is to provide an enabling environment that enhances learning; support nurses, and provide forums for continuing professional development. It is the responsibility of nurses to search for appropriate and available continuing professional development opportunities and ensure participation in continued learning (NCK guidelines on continuing professional development.2008:3). Although it is mandatory for nurses in Kenya to participate in continuing professional development programmes the evidence on the effect of their continuing professional development programmes remains unclear. Besides the CPD requirement in Kenya, there is no clear evidence that the nurses and midwives have an enabling environment to accomplish these requirements.

The disruptions brought by the pandemic on worldwide educational activities have been profound. Specifically, the area of continuing professional development (CPD), where education restrictions and pandemic-related travel embargoes have intersected, that the impact of COVID-19 has been most pronounced. The COVID-19 pandemic has required a substantial change to the approach used for traditional, in-person continuing professional development (CPD) conferences. Running a virtual CPD conference will necessitate consideration of digital platforms and conversion of large group and small group sessions, abstract presentations, and networking events to a digital medium. Since the onset of the pandemic, local, national, and international CPD meetings have either been cancelled or have rapidly pivoted to remote learning formats using digital platforms such as Zoom. To date, there has been insufficient time to rigorously evaluate this seismic change in CPD

practice. This is a matter of considerable interest when, arguably, CPD is the most important arena of health care education particularly in the Kenyan context.

Nurses’ CPD draws a lot from the Adult Learning Theory. The theory has the following assumptions: adults are self-directed learners, bring a wealth of experience to the educational setting, should be ready to learn, learning is problem-centred and adult learners are self-motivated by internal factors [13]. In pursuit of lifelong learning, nurses have to participate and be committed to CPD [14]. Arising from the foregoing, we postulates that:

Ho₁: *Continuous professional development has no significant effect on nurses’ performance.*

METHODS

A cross sectional descriptive study was conducted in Narok County Referral Hospital. A mixed method approach, which provided for triangulation that sought convergence and corroboration of the results from questionnaire, was adopted. Purposive sampling was used to recruit participants for the study. Purposive sampling involves the selection of information rich

subjects that enhance credibility of the study [15]. Purposive sampling was chosen because it is best for gaining in-depth understanding of complex concepts and was used to select participants that would most benefit the study.

Data was checked for completeness and consistency and then entered into SPSS version 26.0 for analysis. Descriptive statistics used included frequencies, percentage, mean and standard deviation. Ethical approval was obtained from Institutional Research and Ethics Committee (IREC) based in Moi University and Moi Teaching and Referral Hospital. Further, permission to conduct the study in the hospital facility was sought and granted by the medical superintendent. Informed consent was sought and received from all the respondents.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive Analysis

Demographic Characteristics

The demographic characteristics of respondents are summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Respondents

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Age	20-29 Years	11	27.5	27.5	27.5
	30-39 Years	18	45.0	45.0	72.5
	40-49 Years	7	17.5	17.5	90.0
	Over 50 Years	4	10.0	10.0	100.0
Gender	Male	8	20.0	20.0	20.0
	Female	32	80.0	80.0	100.0
Marital Status	Single	4	10.0	10.0	10.0
	Married	24	60.0	60.0	70.0
	Separated	6	15.0	15.0	85.0
	Divorced	4	10.0	10.0	95.0
	Widowed	2	5.0	5.0	100.0
Qualification	Certificate	3	7.5	7.5	7.5
	Diploma	25	62.5	62.5	70.0
	Degree	10	25.0	25.0	95.0
	Masters	2	5.0	5.0	100.0
Length of Service	0-3 Years	4	10.0	10.0	10.0
	4-7 Years	4	10.0	10.0	20.0
	8-11 Years	19	47.5	47.5	67.5
	12-15 Years	9	22.5	22.5	90.0
	Over 15 Years	4	10.0	10.0	100.0

Source: Field Data, 2021

Findings in Table 1 above reveals that a majority of the respondents were aged between 30-39 years (45%) and were of female gender 32(80%) who were married 24(60%). Moreover, most of the respondents had diploma qualification 25(62.5%). In Addition, a majority of them 19(47.5%) had served as nurses for between 8-11 years. The study further sought to establish from the respondent whether they participated in continuous professional development on a regular basis.

The findings in Table 2 revealed that most of the respondents participated in continuous professional development. Basically, continuing professional development improves professional expertise and scholastic capability for clinical and teaching responsibilities of healthcare professionals throughout their working life. Therefore, CPD is widely accepted as a standard method of training and retraining healthcare professionals to maximize their potentials for best practice. It is therefore important that nurses take

advantage of CPD training opportunities to improve on their knowledge and skills and maintain quality

improvement in patient care.

Table 2: Participation in Continuous Professional Development

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	32	80.0	80.0	80.0
	No	8	20.0	20.0	100.0
	Total	40	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Data, 2021

Continuous Professional Development Activities

Table 3 shows responses regarding continuous professional development activities that respondents

had participated in in the past 12 months. The findings are presented and interpreted by the generated results of the means and standard deviations output as shown.

Table 3: Continuous Professional Development Activities

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Conferences/ Workshops/ Seminars	4.27	.933
Professional Associations Events	4.15	.949
E – Learning modules	2.90	1.172
Local Hospital Events	3.05	1.197
Morbidity and Mortality meetings	2.53	1.132
Clinical meetings	3.12	1.362
Hands on	2.87	1.453
Journal Clubs	1.88	1.114
Short courses or Refresher courses	3.22	1.310
Author or Co – Author of Peer reviewed publications	1.70	1.018
Valid N (listwise)		

Source: Field Data, 2021

Findings in Table 3 revealed that a majority of the respondents were of the view that they often had participated in conferences/ Workshops/ Seminars as depicted by the high mean and low standard deviation (M = 4.27, SD = 0.933) and events organized by professional associations to which they belonged as members (M = 4.15, SD = 0.949). This can be attributed to the fact that in Kenya, it is mandatory for every health professional to undertake continuing professional development to improve knowledge and skills in order to provide quality health services [16].

For nurses and midwives to have the capacity to practice safely and competently while meeting the level of competence required by both the profession and the healthcare users, they need to engage in mandatory CPD [17]. These findings are consistent with previous studies [18, 19] which established that nurses participated in formal CPD activities like conferences, workshops and seminars to keep abreast of new developments in their profession. The respondents further stated that they sometimes attended short courses or refresher courses (M = 3.22, SD = 1.310), clinical meetings (M = 3.12, SD = 1.362) and local hospital events (M = 3.05, SD = 1.197). The study established that most of the respondents had never participated in journal clubs (M = 1.88, SD = 1.114) and had never engage in formal CPD such publications in peer reviewed journals and do not belong to any journal clubs. (M = 1.70, SD = 1.018). This finding is in

congruence with [19] whose study also concluded that majority of nurses rarely published in peer reviewed journals. This could be attributed to the fact that majority of the respondents were diploma holders and a low number of nurses with degree or masters level qualifications (25%, 5%) which may affect their interest and preparedness in research, as they may not have the skills to undertake research and learn independently.

Given the prevailing condition caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, it is evident that regulatory bodies have to alter the mode of delivery of continuous professional education programmes for an integrated conceptualization of online and face-to-face experiences through e-learning and virtual platforms. The COVID-19 crisis has evidenced the relevance and the need of forward-looking evaluation of traditional CPD tools and practices, with regards to the attitudes, environments, platforms and focus of professional development through virtual and online platforms.

Effect of Continuous Professional Development on Nurses’ Performance

The study further sought to establish the effect of continuous professional development on nurses’ performance. Responses gathered from the respondents were analyzed and the findings presented were interpreted by the generated results of the means and standard deviations output as shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Effect of Continuous Professional Development on Nurses' Performance

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Continuing professional development has improved my skills and competencies	4.03	1.097
Continuing professional development has improved my techniques in nursing care	4.02	.891
Continuing professional development has led me to be more valued by the community members I serve	3.28	1.219
Continuing professional development has helped me address my performance challenges	3.60	1.317
Continuing professional development has given me latest knowledge on how to treat clients	4.25	1.256
Continuing professional development activities like workshops and seminars have led to more workload	3.53	1.432
Continuing professional development has helped me address my performance challenges	2.83	1.466
Continuing professional development is important for performance improvement	4.02	1.291
Valid N (listwise)		

Source: Field Data, 2021

Findings in Table 4 reveal that a majority of the respondents agreed that continuing professional development had improved their skills and competencies (M =4.03, SD =1.097); had improved their techniques in nursing care (M = 4.02, SD = 0.891) and had given them latest knowledge on how to treat clients (M = 4.25, SD =1.256). Further the respondents agreed that continuous professional development is important for performance improvement (M = 4.02, SD =1.291). This findings lend support to previous studies which concluded that Continuing professional development is essential for healthcare professionals to maintain and acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to provide person centred, safe and effective care [20]. Findings further revealed that nurses were of the opinion that continuous professional development had led them to be more valued by the community members they serve to a moderate extent (M = 3.28, SD =1.219), helped them address their performance challenges to a moderate extent (M =3.60, SD =1.317).

With the rapid advancements in the nursing profession and the healthcare industry that is reshaping nurses' role particularly in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, professional nurses are expected to participate in CPD activities to update their knowledge and skills, increase their competencies and ensure that they remain current and relevant with contemporary practice [21]. Investing in continuous professional development of nurses which enables them to acquire knowledge and skill development is critical in retaining a competent workforce, ensuring the provision of quality patient care

Regression Analysis

The study conducted regression analysis to determine utilization of continuous professional development on nurses' performance. The finding of analyses of models, ANOVA and coefficient regression are presented in Table 5 and Table 6 respectively and discussed.

Table 5: Analysis of Variance on CPD Activities and Nurses' Performance

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	2.504	1	2.504	6.512	.015 ^b
	Residual	14.611	38	.385		
	Total	17.115	39			
a. Dependent Variable: Job Performance						
b. Predictors: (Constant), CPC Activities						

Source: Field Data, 2021

Table 6: Coefficients of CPD Activities and Nurses' Performance

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	4.753	.453		10.494	.000
	CPC Activities	.380	.149	.382	2.552	.015
Model Summary						
	R	0.382				
	R Square Change	0.146				
	Adjusted R Square	0.124				
	Std. Error of the Estimate	0.62008				
Model Fit						
	F change	6.512				
	Sig.	.015				
. Dependent Variable: Job Performance						

Source: Field Data, 2021

A simple linear regression analysis was performed to calculate the coefficients of independent variable (continuous professional development) with the dependent variable (nurses' performance). The combined prediction of all the variables accounted for approximately 14.6% of the total variation in nurses' performance (R^2 Change= 0.146). The ANOVA model showed that the prediction of the independent variable as depicted in 6 was statistically significant ($F = 6.512$, $p = 0.015$). Thus, the model was fit to predict nurses' productivity using continuous professional development.

The purpose of this study was to determine utilization of Continuous Professional Development on nurses' performance of in Narok County amid the Covid-19 pandemic in Kenya. This was achieved by testing the following hypothesis:

H_{01} : *Continuous professional development has no significant effect on nurses' performance.*

Findings showed that continuous professional development activities had coefficients of the estimate which was significant basing on ($\beta_1 = 0.380$, p -value = 0.015 which is less than $\alpha = 0.05$). The null hypothesis was thus rejected and it was concluded that continuous professional development has a significant effect on nurses' performance. This suggested that nurses' performance increased by 1 unit due to an increase in continuous professional development activities by 0.380 units. The results of this study demonstrate that the relationship between continuous professional development and nurses' performance is significantly positive.

This finding echoes the results of a study by Osei, Boahemaa, Peparah, Marfo-Kusi and Pinamang [22] which established a positive and significant relationship between continuing professional development and job performance of nurses in Ghana. Similarly, the study lends support to a study by Harunavamwe and Mnqayi [23] which concluded that CPD programs have a very positive effect on the performance of employees, as they considered it a crucial aspect in developing their knowledge, skills and attitudes. It also concurs with the findings of Owaka [24] in Kenya which established that continuing professional development does positively affect their job performance.. However, the results of the study contradict the finding of Friedman [25] which posited that there is a negative and significant effect of continuous professional development and performance.

CONCLUSION

In the current, rapidly changing, healthcare context particularly in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, the public's demand for competent and safe health care obligates the profession to meet the challenges of high-quality care with current knowledge and skills. The maintenance of competence and the

participation in continuous professional development (CPD) is therefore critical for all health professionals if they are to offer quality patients care and stay abreast with the dynamic nature of the nursing profession.

The research further concludes that CPD programmes are very beneficial to practicing nurses since they keep the nurses' knowledge and skills up to date considering the changing nursing practice. The overall view of nurses regarding CPD is that the programmes should be retained and continued for a better nursing workforce.

LIMITATIONS

A simply literature-based designed questionnaire which was used for data collection, along with the small research sample constitute limitations that should be considered

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