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Florence Network promotes professional co-operation in nursing and midwifery education

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Professional networks are considered indicators of professional maturation when having to respond and contribute to global (economic, political, multicultural etc) challenges for the profession. The networks are to develop the advancement of practice, education, research and publication. The European Union's policy on the free movement of services and labor has increased the mobility of nurses in Europe. The aging of the nurses, the lack of workforce and the attractiveness of work are increasing staff mobility between countries, especially the transfer of nursing staff to higher-income countries. This increases educational differences and multiculturalism in the field and poses challenges to education and its integration. This population mobility, societal multiculturalism and the diversification of the nurse workforce prompted the creation of The Florence Network (FN) in 1995 in Groningen, Holland. There was a need to have professional cooperation among the countries. Currently, the FN has grown to have 63 Higher Educational Institution members from 19 different European countries. The initial focus of The FN was to facilitate student and lecturer mobility. Further its' scope has developed into work collaboratively in developing joint strategies for educational activities based on best practices and synergies on matters of common professional interests. (Mantzoukas et al 2020.)

The importance of the Florence Network

Mantzoukas S. et al (2020) studied the impact of the Florence Network (FN) in advancing nursing and midwifery in Europe. They interviewed six former presidents and one present president of the FN. The results emerged three main themes. The first theme considered FN impact on exploring cultural sensitivity and leadership on global health issues. The main activity of the FN is to offer the possibility for students and staff to participate in international exchange programs. These exchanges enable the implementation and development of multicultural nursing work as well as the global review of issues related to health care. (Mantzoukas S. et al 2020.)

The second theme included curriculum standardization and research collaborations. The FN is seen to have a significant impact on the refinement of nursing curricula and the development of research. The network offers its members a variety of opportunities and partnerships, and combines resources for development and the collection of research data. (Mantzoukas S. et al 2020.)

The third theme focused on the role of professional networks. Although the importance of the professional network has been identified, it has no direct bearing on professional visibility or political impact on health care. In the future one of the main objectives of The FN is to increase the visibility of the nursing and midwifery professions. (Mantzoukas S. et al 2020.)

Lapland University of Applied Sciences as a member of Florence Network

Lapland University of Applied Sciences has been a member of the FN since 1990's. Our experiences correspond to the results of the Mantzoukas et al research group. Lapland University of Applied Sciences' goals for the network are set on strengthening these results in the future. It is important for nursing teachers to meet other European colleagues about curricula, the content of the studies and pedagogical solutions. Also the comparison and harmonization of assessment methods and curricula are important issues.

The FN enables a possibility to influence within the network. In annual meetings it is possible to share good practices and create deeper co-operation. The FN improves coherence and makes it possible to find project partners with common interests and get connected with specialists on various areas. These connections can give us new development ideas for pedagogical solutions,

including simulation and virtual learning solutions. Not forgotten the possibility to share informal professional knowledge.

In Lapland University, the network consists of two teacher and two student members. Teachers are responsible for maintaining close contact with the network, participating in meetings that include research and development collaborations and sharing results. Student members are elected for a two years period and they participate in meetings and ongoing communication within the student network. The network also enables the sharing of thesis results and the development of multicultural competence. The next annual meeting will be held in Turkey in May 2022.

References:

Mantzoukas, S., Scharli-Lim, S., Kelly, H., Falk, K. Frey, S. & Van Der Aa C. 2020. The impact of The Florence Network in advancing nursing and midwifery in Europe. Nurse Education in Practice.