

## Nurses Intern Self Evaluation of Their Practice Competency Level

By

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### Abstract:

**Background:** Nurses intern need to possess professional behavior, critical thinking, illness and injury prevention, relationship and caring, and clinical skills competencies. Self-evaluation of their actual competency needs at the beginning of their professional practice is very important. **Aim:** to assess nurses intern self-evaluation of their practice competency level. **Setting:** The study was conducted at Tanta main University Hospital. **Subjects:** Sample was included 286 nursing interns during their internship year training in (7) intensive Care Units. **Tool:** The collection of data was achieved by using practice competency self-evaluation tool which is based on nursing practice standard. **Results:** The majority of nurses intern were evaluated themselves with a high competency level in dimensions of clinical skills, relationship and caring, and professional behavior competency. **Conclusion:** A highly significant correlation exist between each competency and others. **Recommendations:** It is important to promote self-evaluation for nurses intern during their internship year, periodical evaluation of the interns' competency, making feedback and enforcement of knowledge and skills is necessary.

**Keywords :** practice competency , self-evaluation.

### Introduction:

Nurses are increasingly inclined to question the quality and efficacy of the care they provide. Nurse competency plays an important role in guaranteeing the quality of nursing interventions and outcomes<sup>(1)</sup>. It is a controversial issue in the health care settings affecting many aspects of the nursing profession, including education, practice and management<sup>(2)</sup>. Competency assessment of practicing nurses is a core function in quality assurance systems, work force planning and human resource management<sup>(3)</sup>.

The American Nurse Association (2010) defined nursing competency as the nurse's capability to perform the defined expectations. This definition implies the ability to apply knowledge to new situations, skills, and abilities to tasks for which prescribed standards exist<sup>(4)</sup>. Nurses intern gain competency through the internship program<sup>(5)</sup>. The development of this educational and support program has a two-fold purpose, the first expected outcome is that existing staff will improve their skills in teaching, coaching, mentoring, leadership, communication, and

evaluation. Thus they can effectively work with nurses intern to help them gain competencies expected within the internship year. The second expected outcome is a change in the culture of the work environment. The program supports a transition from isolating work place to a more supportive environment designed to assist the transition of a novice nurse into successful practice. This program is designed to build capacity both in individuals and in the environment<sup>(6)</sup>.

Nurses intern's needs clearly identified roles and responsibilities through developing clinical coaching plan that outlines specific goals, activities, and measurable outcomes. This plan must follow principles of teaching/learning, to foster the progression of the novice through all core competency requirements<sup>(6)</sup>. The competencies expected from nursing interns to ensure safe nursing practice include five areas: professional nursing practice, critical thinking, illness and injury prevention, relationship and caring and clinical skills competencies<sup>(5)</sup>. Nurses demonstrate professional behavior competencies in their professional role

through understanding responsibilities and accountabilities and practicing legally, ethically and effectively<sup>(6&7)</sup>.

Another aspect of competence is the ability to think critically in increasingly hypothesized situations<sup>(8)</sup>. Critical thinking is a composite of attitude, knowledge, and skills<sup>(9)</sup>, includes the judging and deciding that nurses do when they engage in aspects of their roles<sup>(10 &11)</sup>. Activities such as delegating, collaborating with others, and improving performance require critical thinking skills<sup>(12)</sup>. The third competency dimension is the health promotion and illness and injury prevention. Nurses demonstrate competence in this domain by providing health promotion and disease prevention services to patients who are healthy or have acute or chronic conditions, and providing anticipatory guidance and counseling to promote health and reduce risk factors to prevent disease and disability<sup>(13 &14)</sup>. Nurses should also use a follow up system within the practice to ensure that patients receive appropriate services<sup>(15)</sup>.

Relationship and caring competency are considered the foundation and the prerequisite for all the other competencies in professional nursing<sup>(16)</sup>. Relationship competency is the capacity to develop and maintain a constructive working alliance with clients and other health care providers<sup>(17)</sup>. The relationship competency includes psychological knowledge relevant to relationships, the necessary skills, and the rational attitudes appropriate to professional nursing practice<sup>(18)</sup>. Nurses demonstrates relationship and caring competency by creating a climate of mutual trust, assisting patients to address their needs, and communicating a sense of "being present" with the patient to provide comfort and emotional support<sup>(19)</sup>. A competent nurse should possess technical competence. Technical competence is important to the success of technical professionals because it fosters understanding and respect between

technical subordinates and supervisors. Technical competence is the knowledge and set of behaviors a person can use in completing tasks. Technical skills also include the ability to use tools, techniques, and procedures to provide safe professional nursing practice<sup>(20)</sup>. The performance of nurses intern is typically measured and evaluated using competency assessments and annual performance evaluations. Competency assessments measure how well nursing interns can perform specific, day to day job skills. They receive feedback and ratings on their performance. But they can easily play an active role in their performance evaluation by completing a self-evaluation as part of the process. Doing a self-evaluation helps make sure that their annual performance evaluation is a fair and objective record of their contributions to patient care, and addresses all their development needs. Self-evaluation is a process in which the nurse rates the quality of her work<sup>(21-25)</sup>.

#### **Significance of the study :**

Many hospitals use self -evaluation to identify the competencies that staff feels they need to strengthen. When obtaining self -assessment findings, it is critical to ensure that staff members are reporting directly and specifically about their own appraisal of their job performance and what training can improve their performance .The competency self-evaluation can be a powerful tool in facilitating feedback about gaps in skills necessary for optimizing performance. So this study will be conducted to study nurses interns' self-evaluation of their practice competency.

#### **Operational definition :**

**Nurses intern** are baccalaureate nursing graduates who are working at regular staff hours in day, evening, and night shifts. They rotate to various units in the hospital including specialty areas.

#### **Aim of the study:**

The aim of the present research is to assess nurses intern self-evaluation of their practice competency level .

**Study questions :**

- What are nurses intern s' self-evaluation levels of performing different nursing competencies ?
- What is the relationship between level of performing each competency and others ?

**Subjects and methods:**

**Research Design :** A descriptive study design was used in the present research.

**Setting :** The study was conducted at Tanta University Main Teaching Hospital. The hospital has 902 beds; the units understudy included all (7) :

intensive Care Units (ICUs) namely the neonatal ICU, the cardiology ICU, the pediatric ICU, the neurology ICU, the Anaesthesia ICU, gynecology ICU, and the medical ICU. The total number (286) of nursing interns were rotate to be trained at the Main University Hospital at the time of study.

**Subjects of the study :** All (286) nurses intern rotate to practice in above mentioned units during their internship year 2009 / 2010 were included in the study. The nurse interns train for three months in neonatal, pediatric, cardiology, and anaesthesia area. And practice for one month at the gynecology, neurology and medical area. Their training work follows weekly schedule rotation which changed every two days among morning, evening, night and get two days off.

**Tool :** Practice competency self-evaluation tool was used to achieve the above mentioned aim. It was developed by the researcher guided by Steele, Pendock, and Thomson, (2007) <sup>(7)</sup> and recommended literature review.

**Tool development :**

1. Questionnaire sheet of Practice competency self-evaluation tool was submitted to jury of five experts in nursing service administration to get their suggestions about content validity and applicability of the tool. **The experts** were five, two professors were from Faculty of Nursing, ElMansoura University, and three professors were

from Faculty of Nursing, Alexandria University . The experts were asked for testing content validity and it was 90.73%.

2. A pilot study was carried out two times on twenty nine interns' nurses out of proposed sample and the questionnaires were given to them again two weeks later to compute test- retest reliability. The internal consistency reliability found to be 0.976.
3. Modifications were done based on the results of pilot study and opinions' panel of five experts. The pilot study was collected from 9th January 2010 to 23th January 2010. The administration time for filling questionnaires' sheets was approximately 20 minutes. Questionnaire consists of two parts Part 1: Demographic data about the subject. This part was included intern's name, age, name of work unit, marital status, residency, previous graduation school, and graduation level. Part 2: was included 75 items categorized under five dimensions (professional behavior 15 items, critical thinking 15 items , injury and illness prevention 15 items , relationship and caring 15 items, and clinical skills 15 items ).

**Scoring :**

Each nurse intern was asked to respond to items to assess her capability of performing related actions. Interns' responds were on three point likert scale ranging from (0 – 2) Score (0) refers to not capable to do, score (1) refers to partially capable to do, and score (2) refers to capable to do.

The total number of questions under each dimension will be collected separately. Scores classified into three levels; poor (<60%), moderate (60% - 80%), and high (>80%)

**Ethical consideration:**

- 1) An official permission to conduct the study for data collection obtained from responsible authorities.
- 2) The purpose of the study was explained and clarified to both hospital

director and nurse manager of each unit understudy.

- 3) Nurses intern were told that anonymity would be maintained. They were informed of the purpose of the study and assured that their answers would be kept confidential and would not be used to evaluate them.

#### Statistical analysis :

#### Results :

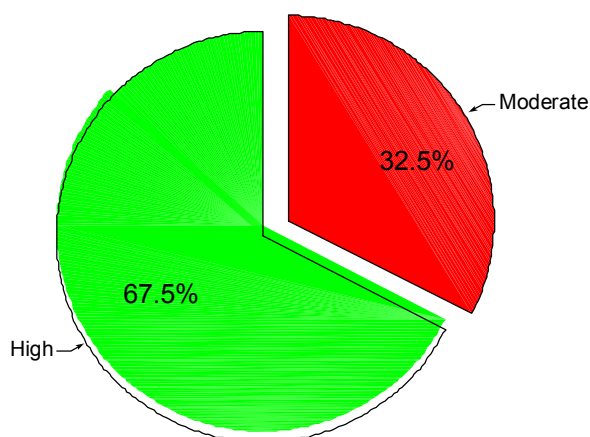
**Table (1)** Demographic Characteristics of Nurses Intern

Demographic characteristics	Nursing interns sample (N= 286)	
	N	%
<b>Age :</b>		
- 21-<22 years.	150	52.0
- 22 years.	136	48.0
- Range	21-22	
- Mean	21.4755	
- Median	21.0000	
- Std. deviation	5003	
<b>Marital status:</b>	173	60.5
- single	113	39.5
- Married		
<b>Residence:</b>		
- Urban	156	54.5
- Rural	130	45.5
<b>Graduation level:</b>		
- excellent	36	12.6
- very good	188	62.9
- good	70	24.5
<b>Previous graduation school</b>		
- General secondary school	237	82.9
- Health Technical Institute	49	17.1

results of table 1 revealed that more than half (52%) of the nurses intern were in age group 21-<22 years old, and (48%) were in age group 22 years old. As for marital status, the less than two third (60.5%) of the nurses intern were single and (39.5%) were married. Concerning residency, more than half (54.5%) of the nurses intern were

Data entry and statistical analysis were performed using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS version 11). Quantitative data were presented as the range, mean, and standard deviation. While qualitative data were presented as the number and percentage. Correlation between variables was evaluated using Pearson's Correlation Coefficient.

from urban area and (45.5%) were from rural area. As regard graduation level, the excellent graduation level was (12.6%), the very good graduation level was (62.9%), and the good graduation level was (24.5 %). Regarding previous graduation school, the majority (82, 9%) of the nurses intern were graduated from the general secondary school, and about (17.1%) were graduated from the high technical institute .



**Figure (1)** Nursing Interns, self evaluation of levels of performing total nursing competencies. Demonstrates that high percent (67.5%) of nurses intern have a high level of nursing competencies. While the rest (32.5%) of nurses intern have moderate levels of performing total nursing competencies.

**Table (2)** Nurses Intern s' Self-Evaluation Total Level of Performing Different Nursing Competencies.

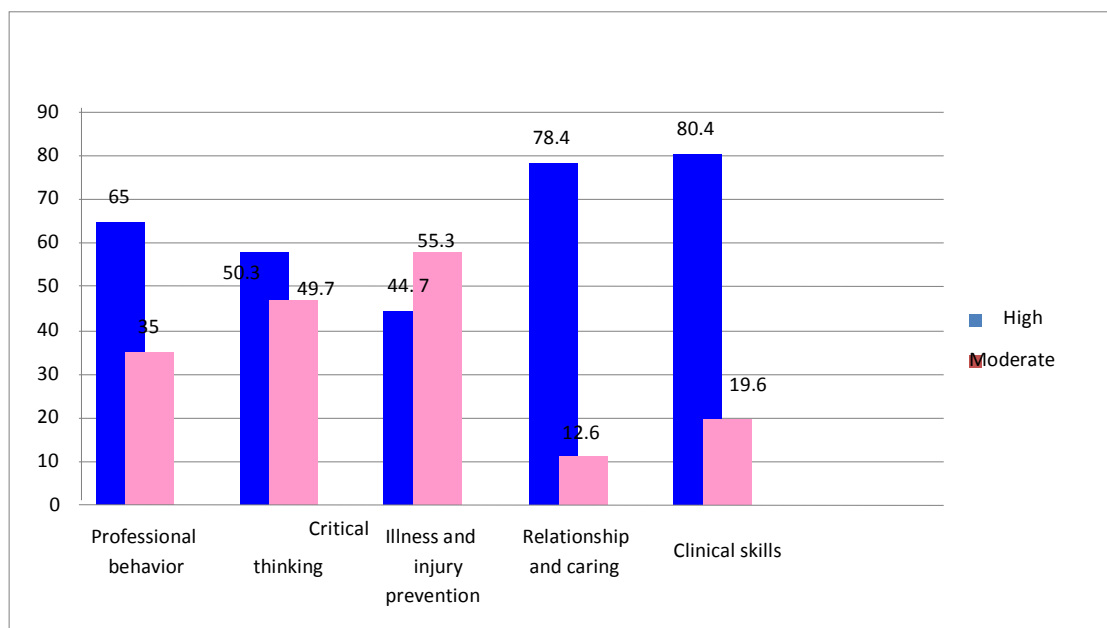
levels of performing nursing competencies ( N =286)		Dimensions of nursing competencies				
		Professional behavior competency	Critical thinking competency	illness and injury prevention competency	Relationship and caring competency	Clinical skills competency
High	N	186	144	128	250	230
	%	65.0	50.3	44.7	78.4	80.4
Moderate	N	100	142	158	36	56
	%	35.0	49.7	55.3	12.6	19.6

Table 2 and figure 2 show nurses intern s' self-evaluation of total level of performing different nursing competencies. High percent (80.4%) of nurses intern had high competency level in clinical skills, relationship and caring (78.4%), professional behavior (65.0%), critical thinking (50.3%), and illness and injury prevention (44.8%).

Moderate percent (49.7%) of nurses intern had moderate competency level in critical thinking competency, illness and injury prevention (55.3%), professional behavior (35.0%), clinical skills (19.6%),

and relationship and caring competency (12.6%). No one of the subject had a poor level of performing different dimensions of nursing competencies

**Table 3:** illustrates the correlation between level of performing each competency and others. According to the table there is a highly significant ( $P < 0.001$ ) correlations between the dimensions of competency and each other. This means that nursing interns who have high level of performing any competency tend to have high level of performing other competencies and also have a higher overall competency level.



**Figure (2)** Nurses Intern s' Self-Evaluation of Level of Performing Different Nursing Competencie

**Table (3)** Correlations Between Level of Performing Competency Dimensions with Each Other.

Competency dimensions	Test	A	B	C	D	E
<b>A</b>	Pearson correlation Sig.(2- tailed) N		.374** .000 286	.578** .000 286	.324** .000 286	.495** .000 286
<b>B</b>	Pearson correlation Sig.(2- tailed) N	.374** .000 286		.441** .000 286	.374** .000 286	.435** .000 286
<b>C</b>	Pearson correlation Sig.(2- tailed) N	.578** .000 286	.441** .000 286		.648** .000 286	.581** .000 286
<b>D</b>	Pearson correlation Sig.(2- tailed) N	.324** .000 286	.374** .000 286	.648** .000 286		.417** .000 286
<b>E</b>	Pearson correlation Sig.(2- tailed) N	.495** .000 286	.453** .000 286	.581** .000 286	.417** .000 286	

= Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

\*\* = Correlation is highly significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

A = Professional Behavior competency.

B = Critical Thinking competency.

C = Illness and injury prevention competency.

D = Relationships and caring competency.

E = Clinical Skills competency

## Discussion:

Self-evaluation for competency needs is a core function in quality assurance systems, workforce planning, and human resource management<sup>[26]</sup>. The use of self-evaluation could give a very important chance for nurses to reflect their behavior, to reassess their knowledge and abilities periodically and systematically. The feedback information could be very useful for healthcare organizations in identifying competencies needed for a successful nursing practice. Nursing interns' self-evaluation will reflect nursing interns' way of working and help them better understand their educational needs to cope with higher care complexity demands<sup>[27]</sup>.

Results revealed that high percent of nurses intern have high level of total nursing competencies. This indicates that those nurses intern tend to overrate their level of competency due to their limited experience and understanding for their working role demands. Most probably, they considered themselves competent just by passing their Bachelor Nursing exam. Or may be their high level of total nursing competencies is an indicative of their actual high level of autonomy and active fulfillment of practice expectations.

**Dellai, Mortari, and Metertoja**<sup>[28]</sup> supported the present study results. They found that nurses intern evaluated themselves in all competency dimensions higher than the researcher's observation scores. An Egyptian study by **Khamis**<sup>[29]</sup> also supported the present study results. She found that self-appraisal of baccalaureate-nursing graduates' frequency and quality of performance was higher than researcher's observation mean scores in all dimensions of nursing competencies.

Present study revealed that considerable percent of nurses intern have a moderate professional competency level. This means that those interns recognize their professional limitations in nursing practice. Those interns were partially capable regarding meeting learning needs, providing support and protection for clients who have difficulty in protecting themselves from abuse. As well as some of them were not capable of suggesting ideas to improve quality Close supervision and guidance for

those nursing interns are needed to develop their professional behavior competency, combining ethics and context of specific knowledge and skills. **Gartmeier M., Kipfmüller S., Heid L. and Gruber H.**<sup>[30]</sup> supported the present study results and found that a considerable percent of nursing interns showed moderate professional behavior competency. **Sharif and Masoumi** (<sup>[31]</sup>) supported the present study results. They found that nursing interns considered themselves as highly competent in professional behavior.

Results of the present study revealed that about half of nurses intern have moderate critical thinking competency level. Most properly those interns are in need to be skillful in applying intellectual skills for sound reasoning. This means they need skills of gathering, focusing, remembering, organizing, analyzing, generating, integrating and evaluating information. Nursing is never a superficial, meaningless activity. All acts in nursing are deeply significant and require of the nurse a mind fully engaged in the practice of nursing. These intellectual skills should be gained as the intern encounters increasingly more complex practice situations. The intern required to think through and reason about nursing in greater depth and draw on deeper, more sophisticated comprehension of what it means to be a nurse in clinical practice. The challenge of nursing; critical, reflective practice based on the sound reasoning of intelligent minds committed to safe, effective client care.

**Erwin, Sebrell, and Kimberly**<sup>[32]</sup> supported the present study results. They found that a considerable percent of nurses intern have a moderate critical thinking competency and that they acquire competency in critical thinking through time due to increasing their ability to make reflective judgment about every day nursing care situations.

Present study revealed that more than half (55.3%) of nurses intern have a moderate competency level of performing illness and injury prevention. Most properly that those interns were capable to collaborate with other healthcare members to correct discrepancies and errors, take actions to ensure client safety, apply preventive measures to ensure their own safety to

prevent the acquisition of infection during nursing care. But it seems they need more training and supervision to improve their capabilities. **Mertoja and Kilpi** [35] supported the present study results. They found that the percentage of the nurses intern using illness and injury prevention competency was high and their self evaluation to illness and injury prevention competency was as high as the manager's evaluation.

The present study revealed that the majority of nurses intern have a high relationship and caring competency level. Those interns were capable to listen to clients without diminishing their feelings, provide opportunities for clients to ask questions, explore unusual comments, attitudes or behaviors of clients to discover their underlying meaning, and use appropriate strategies to promote patient's self-esteem, dignity, integrity and comfort. They were capable of providing opportunities for clients to ask questions, exploring unusual comments, attitudes, or behaviors of clients to discover the underlying meaning, and using appropriate strategies to promote patient's self esteem, dignity, integrity, and comfort. **Steiner and Norman** [34]

supported present study results. They found that nurses intern using communication skills and caring for clients effectively and emphasized the importance of relationship and caring competency to the nursing profession. **Clouder and Sellars** [35] supported present study results and found that nurses intern have a very high relationship and caring competency and they perceived the nurse client relationship as a therapeutic and professional one that is established to meet the health care needs of the client and caring and patient satisfaction or other positive patient outcomes. **Clark** (2003) [36] supported the present study results. They found that nurses intern rated themselves as having a good or strongly developed ability to provide nursing care with a strong ability in communication with patient and a strong ability to listen to patients without diminishing their feelings.

The present study shows that the majority (80.4%) of nurses intern have a high performing clinical skills competency level. Those interns were capable to administer medications as prescribed in the ministry of health medication standard. They are knowledgeable about medications administered by clients in their practice

setting, and they could identify and incorporate other factors that affect health such as income, social status, education, employment, and work conditions. They were also capable to identify their patients' learning needs taking into account readiness and language issues respectively. This result is logical to the university hospital setting where high patient acuity and short length of stay reflect great complexity, high risk patients and the need of rapid nursing responses to patient care.

**Dellai, Mortari, and Meretoja** [28] supported the present study results. They discovered that nurses' overall clinical skills competency level was good to fulfill the required healthcare expectations. **Roberts** [37] also supported the present study results. They developed a competency-based orientation program for nurses intern and reported that (80%) of nurses intern met the requirement for competency in all competency dimensions including the evaluation of the categories of medication administration safety, technical skills and procedures, evaluation of patient's responses to treatment, clinical problem solving, the ability to prioritize problems, professional development, and teamwork behaviors. And that the development of competency based framework for nurses intern s' evaluation will help to bring those interns into specialty nursing areas with high competency fulfillments.

The present study results revealed positive highly significant correlation between level of performing each competency and others. The fact is that those nurses intern studied the professional standards during their undergraduate nursing education. Then they get the chance to practice it during the internship year. So, it is easy for them to exercise professional judgment, develop confidence in their new role, assume responsibilities, and manage complex situations. Gradually they move from complex to a more complex way of critical thinking.

Also they understand their role in health care delivery system and provide nursing care for people in different situations related to health promotion, and illness and injury prevention. Moreover, nursing interns possess rational knowledge and skills in therapeutic communication, leadership, negotiation, and basic conflict resolution



strategies thus increasing relationship and caring competency by adhering to nursing code of ethics, and demonstrating honesty, compassion, integrity and respect in the care they provide. They establish and maintain therapeutic caring relationship with clients and other healthcare members. In addition, nurses intern s' proficiency and productivity related to workload management and technical skills will increase with support and experience.

**Leslie W.** (2010) <sup>[38]</sup> supported the present study results and found that the competencies associated with quality are highly significant correlated to each other. Also found that competencies are central issues influencing job satisfaction for nurses, including professional behavior, critical thinking, illness and injury prevention, relationship and caring and clinical skills, that better be assessed by systematic observations and competency self evaluation. A positive highly significant correlation also exist between level of performing professional behavior competency and critical thinking, illness and injury prevention and relationship and caring competency.

Beside the study of **Harrison** (2003) <sup>[39]</sup> supported the present study results and found that there is a positive correlation between level of performing relationship and caring competency and others

#### **Conclusion:**

The majority of nurses intern have a high competency level in dimensions of professional behavior, relationship and caring, and clinical skills competencies. While considerable percent of nurses intern have a moderate competency level in dimensions of illness and injury prevention and critical thinking competency. There is a positive correlation between level of performing total nursing competencies and previous graduation school. Also a highly significant correlation exist between each competency and others.

#### **Recommendation :**

In the light of the findings of the present study, the following are recommended: It is important to promote self evaluation for nursing interns during their internship year, periodical evaluation of the interns' competency, making feedback and

enforcement of knowledge and skills is necessary.

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