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Are they ready? A study of student nurses' infection prevention skills

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**Introduction:** Curriculum guidelines for undergraduate nurses specify infection prevention and control (IPC) skills and knowledge to be taught. Recent research focuses on qualified nurses' practice in areas such as hand hygiene or the effectiveness of training initiatives and has not explored the competence and confidence of nurses in IPC at the point of qualification. This pilot study was undertaken in one university and involved academics, nurses, teaching staff and service users and aimed to explore students' levels of competence in key IPC skills and knowledge, and their self-rated levels of confidence.

**Methods:** A descriptive research design was used to assess and observe competence and confidence among third year adult nursing students. A volunteer sample of 94 third year students completed multiple choice questions (MCQ) on 10 key IPC topics, assigning a confidence rating to each answer. In addition, 12 students participated in simulated clinical scenarios. A checklist was used to assess practice and post scenario qualitative interviews were conducted to provide students with feedback on their performance and explore their rationale for, and confidence in, their practice.

**Results and Discussion:** The MCQ test indicated a limited grasp of key concepts, mean 4/10 (SD(+/- 1.38), range 2/10-7/10 correct answers. Self-rated confidence was high and not correlated with scores. In simulated scenarios, some good practical skills were observed, however, poor knowledge/skills were also evident e.g., hand hygiene, aseptic technique and glove and apron use. All students failed to challenge a consultant's poor hand hygiene. The interviews suggest that different factors affect student performance including; lack of experience, confusion over procedures and experience in clinical practice. The pilot study suggests that the current approach to delivering IPC education may not adequately equip students to practice IPC safely and that the scarcity of acute clinical experience may be an issue. A survey of English universities delivering nurse education, undertaken by the researchers, indicates variation in IPC teaching and assessment methods with minimal use of simulated practice. Work to develop an educational approach aimed at increasing IPC knowledge and competence through simulation is underway