

Promoting literacy, promoting change: genetics education within the nursing professions

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Background

The NHS National Genetics Education and Development Centre was created to facilitate access to appropriate genetics education and resources.

Its work to engage non-genetics healthcare staff is underpinned by educational principles, a strategic approach based on Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behaviour (Fig. 1), and an understanding of the views, learning needs and skill requirements of the different health professional groups and their educators.

To help promote a positive attitude towards genetics in practice, the nursing professions programme is working to:

- raise awareness about the relevance of genetics to everyday practice
- identify educational needs amongst practitioners and their educators
- develop and provide access to relevant resources for teaching and learning

The **Theory of Planned Behaviour** is a model for how human actions are guided. For example, an individual's intention to learn about genetics ('the behaviour') can be predicted by three variables

- beliefs about, and attitudes towards the behaviour
- perceived expectations of key individuals and social pressures to engage (or not) in the behaviour
- perception of factors that may impede or facilitate the behaviour and an individual's perceived ability to perform

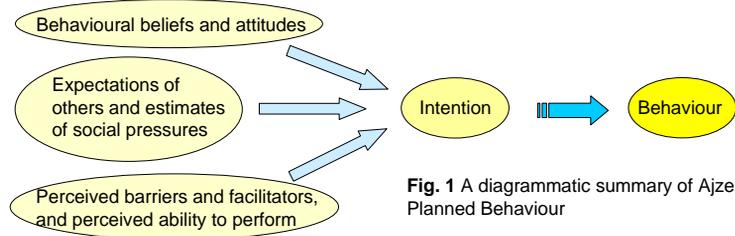


Fig. 1 A diagrammatic summary of Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behaviour

Promoting genetics amongst the nursing professions and their educators

The genetics competence framework for nurses, midwives and health visitors (Kirk *et al.* 2003) underpins the approaches taken by the nursing professions programme. A number of approaches have been used to raise awareness of genetics within practice (Panels 1-5), and needs assessments have targeted both practitioners (Panel 3) and educators (Panel 4). An innovative resource has been developed (Panel 5) using real stories (placed with an educational framework) as a means of providing 'clinical substitutes'. Access to additional genetics resources will be facilitated through the Centre website: www.geneticseducation.nhs.uk



1. Genetics Series – Nursing Standard



Delivered over consecutive issues (Sept-Nov 05) each article focused on one of the seven core competence statement.

2. Champions' Networks

Electronic networks for educators and practitioners have been established providing opportunities to network and keep up-to-date with developments in the field.



3. Genetics in specialist practice



Awareness raising articles and a questionnaire to determine attitudes towards genetics in practice have been published in seven specialist nursing journals (September 06). Results will be available shortly.

4. Nurse and midwifery education



The findings of this recent study to identify current genetics provision and needs of UK HEIs teaching pre-registration courses is now available: http://www.geneticseducation.nhs.uk/downloads/NursingEducatorsSurvey_Report.pdf

5. Multi-media 'tool box'

Launching shortly, and aimed at the nursing professions, www.geneticseducation.nhs.uk/tellingstories will provide real stories in written and video format to help practitioners learn how genetics fits into clinical practice.



Taking it forward – learning, teaching and assessment

What we know:

Learning

- Practitioners are able to identify some of their needs with respect to genetics education, however
- Many are unsure of how the subject applies to their particular role or how genes and genetic information may impact on their patients

Teaching

- Current genetics education for the nursing professions is patchy
- Educators have identified areas where they need support on **what to deliver** and **how to deliver it**
- Many educators feel unsure about teaching genetics because they feel they have no direct experience of it to relay to the students

Assessment

- 'Competence in genetics' for health care professionals is a relatively new concept
- How best can competence be assessed?
- How can (pre-registration) students and practitioners be satisfactorily assessed if those assessing have also yet to achieve competence in genetics?

Support we can provide:

- Awareness raising approaches will help guide individuals to identify what it is they need to know and how this can inform their practice
- Providing access to clinically relevant resources and tools that guide and support both educators and learners
- Recognising that individuals learn in many different ways and supporting a variety of learning styles

Summary

The NHS National Genetics Education and Development Centre is taking a multifaceted approach to support and encourage genetics education amongst health care staff. The Theory of Planned Behaviour allows the nursing programme to recognise many of the barriers and facilitators that may influence individuals in their intention to learn more about genetics, and provides a foundation to promote engagement with genetics and integration into working practice.

For more information about the NHS National Genetics Education and Development Centre's work with the nursing professions please contact Emma Tonkin: etonkin@glam.ac.uk 01443 483156