The articulation of Admiral Nursing, specialist dementia nursing practice: A case study exploring the use of the PebblePad eportfolio in professional nursing practice.

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The Context

This project aimed to address various challenges that face Admiral Nurses (ANs) in demonstrating their advanced practice and to meet professional and practice development requirements. ANs are registered nurses specialising in dementia care. Within a care management approach ANs work with whole families affected by dementia in a variety of settings to improve quality of life throughout the journey of the illness (Harrison Dening, 2010).

The charity Dementia UK\(^1\) supports each AN through a robust process of facilitated peer group clinical supervision and practice development workshops which are held on a monthly basis within various regions of the UK. One of the cornerstones of the clinical supervision sessions is the use of models of reflective practice. ANs, in turn, present cases that may be complex, challenging or require the shared knowledge and experience to critically explore relevant issues that a peer group can offer. Concurrent to this is the need to support ANs to articulate their level of expertise through the medium of their bespoke competency framework (Dewing & Traynor, 2005).

Articulating Competence

The AN Competency Framework (CF) (Dewing & Traynor, 2005) supports the nurse in working towards advanced occupational competency by facilitating the collation of evidence to demonstrate specialist and advanced nursing skills as required in the AN role. The CF affords a systematic approach for improving and standardising care through reflective practice and articulation of practice. Whilst the Nursing and Midwifery Council\(^2\) (NMC) has not yet decided on its approach to accrediting advanced practice there have been moves in other countries in the UK to assign

\(^1\) [www.dementiauk.org](http://www.dementiauk.org)
\(^2\) [www.nmc.org.uk](http://www.nmc.org.uk)
‘academic levels’ required for advanced and specialist nurse practitioners. Whatever the future holds in this respect ANs must ensure their preparedness in demonstrating a ‘specialist’ level of practice through engagement and utility of the CF. This process is in addition to each nurse’s occupational appraisal so the purpose of introducing PebblePad had the potential to align these separate imperatives to avoid any unnecessary duplication for these busy nurses.

Validation of Practice

We also saw that ‘on the horizon’ for the nurses were the changes to professional registration processes. The NMC went live with the new revalidation approach in October 2015 with registration renewal dates from April 2015 (NMC, 2015). From this point nurses are required to maintain their registration by providing evidence of continued professional development to the NMC to remain on the nursing register. The purpose of revalidation is to improve public protection by making sure that a health professional remains up to date in their practice over their career. Several other health and social care professions are also required to adhere to revalidation regulations. Revalidation for nurses is built upon existing post registration education and practice processes (PREP). Whilst PREP required the nurse to maintain a professional portfolio that evidenced continuing professional development, revalidation goes significantly further (see Box 1).

Undertake 35 hours Continuing Professional Development (CPD) relevant to your scope of practice in the 3 year period since registration was last renewed, or when the nurse joined the register. The record of this activity must not only record the number of hours but also aspects such as how the CPD relates to the NMC code (ref) and evidence you undertook the activity.

The nurse is required to have practised for a minimum of 450 hours over the time frame of three years or they may be required to undertake an appropriate return to practice programme. The practice hours are those that rely upon your skills, knowledge and experience as a registered nurse within your current scope of practice.

The nurse is required to evidence at least five pieces of practice-related feedback; this can be from patients, carers, peers, managers, etc.

There is a requirement to provide a minimum of five written, reflective accounts. These can relate to an instance of CPD, practice related feedback and or an event in the nurse’s professional practice, however, each must reference the relevant aspect of the code that applies. The reflections are to enable the nurse to identify areas for improvement or change to their practice to evidence what they have learnt from the issue reflected upon.

Further to the written reflective accounts the nurse is required to discuss these with another NMC registrant; this must be evidenced by their signature, NMC Pin and email as well as the date discussed.

The nurse must provide a declaration of health and character.

Box 1: Requirements of revalidation
The Approach

A project group was established to develop an approach that would unite all of the current and expected demands for ANs to meet and demonstrate their professional and practice development. It was essential that such an approach had the key element of avoiding duplication of effort as its driver.

It was decided that the utility of an eportfolio could facilitate all the requirements for appraisal, the articulation of reflective practice (as engaged in clinical supervision), developing competencies and revalidation of professional practice. Of equal importance was Dementia UK’s wish to enable ANs both to realise their worth and to be able to demonstrate this using their eportfolios.

PebblePad licenses were purchased and ‘gifted’ to all ANs as Dementia UK’s commitment to their professional development. However, it soon became clear that, to support equity within the workforce of the charity, eportfolios would also support the development needs of all staff so the licenses were gifted to all charity employees and members of the board of trustees.

Familiarisation

A project plan was developed to enable the steering group to move through the milestones identified. A small group was established to develop a ‘revalidation workbook’ that would sit within ATLAS and act as a resource for all ANs. The workbook has been developed to enable the AN to incorporate their documented reflective practice, arising from clinical supervision sessions, to both form their revalidation requirements and also to articulate their specialist professional competence using the framework.

To best enable successful uptake and use of the PebblePad eportfolio we allowed a period of one year where nurses could familiarise themselves with their portfolio and its mechanisms and indeed, to ‘play’ and explore its opportunities. This was supported with peripatetic sessions within their practice development workshops around the country facilitated by the Professional and Practice Development Team and also in their annual national practice development forum.

However, it was important to embed the use of PebblePad into other professional development activities also. To support the process of familiarisation, a 20 credit academic module at Master’s level was commissioned with the University of Worcester (MSAP4110 - Working with people with dementia: Applying the Admiral Nursing Competency Framework¹). The module combined the key elements of employment of the CF to their practice and use of reflective practice models, all using the medium of a PebblePad eportfolio. As part of the course, nurses were issued with a university PebblePad license but upon completion of the module all assets were combined with their Dementia UK version so no assets were lost. The module was first run in Spring 2014 with

two intakes of nurses per year. To date there has been a 100% pass rate and some other very positive outcomes too.

A distinct and creative benefit to using PebblePad in developing evidence against their reflective assignment was in the development of multi-media assets; for example, the seminar presentation that was a component of overall marks was evidenced through a PowerPoint presentation, photographic evidence of the presenter in viva, a podcast of their talk, and a 360° evaluation of the overall seminar presentation. Nurses that have completed the module have become PebblePad ‘champions’ within their regional practice development groups supporting colleagues who have not yet enrolled on the module to make full use of their eportfolio. Some have also become members of the PebblePad steering group within the charity to support the development of additional workbooks and templates as well as supporting the project to roll out PebblePad to all users.

Revalidation Workbook

A key resource that members of the steering group developed was a workbook (see Figure 1) that combines the requirements for NMC revalidation, linking them to existing reflective practice processes within their clinical supervision, with example templates of reflection (e.g. Driscoll, 1994) and the AN CF domains.

Figure 1: Admiral Nurse Revalidation Workbook
This was an important development to ensure duplication avoidance and multiple uses of processes (see Figure 2).

![Figure 2: A model for Admiral Nurse PebblePad portfolio development](image)

**Reflection on Practice**

Reflective practice in nursing has historically been regarded as a process through which nurses can grow and mature as professionals through the integration of theory and knowledge into practice. Johns (2009, p 41) describes reflection as:

“.. *a window through which the [nurse] can view and focus self within the context of a lived experience in ways that enable one to confront, understand and work towards resolving the contradictions within practice...*”.

Indeed, the new NMC revalidation process places a strong emphasis on reflection, requiring nurses to reflect on what they have learned and how it has changed their practice as one way of demonstrating adherence to the NMC Code. A key premise of reflective practice is that an experience alone does not necessarily lead to learning but that a deliberate reflection on experience is essential.

Through the academic module and the Revalidation Workbook we introduced several reflective models and templates that the nurse could select from to structure their reflective thinking and demonstrate their learning. The following two images are examples of a nurse’s use of the *What? So What? Now What?* reflective tool (see figures 3, 4 and 5).
Figure 3: Example 3 of reflective practice in PebblePad

![Image of PebblePad interface with a reflection on information and knowledge sharing]

Figure 3: Example 3 of reflective practice in PebblePad

Figure 4: Example 2 of reflective practice in PebblePad

![Image of PebblePad interface with a reflection on decision making]

Figure 4: Example 2 of reflective practice in PebblePad
Within the NMC Code there are four themes that signify good nursing (and midwifery) practice (see figure 6). The reflective templates within the Revalidation Workbook allow ANs to align their outcomes to the themes.

Prioritise people
Practice effectively
Preserve safety
Promote professionalism and trust

Public protection

Figure 5: Example 3 of reflective practice in PebblePad

Figure 6: NMC Code themes of professional activity
Competency Framework Refresh

As discussed earlier, the AN CF is an approach whereby nurses are able to articulate their level of expertise within the field of dementia care to a level that is required of specialist practitioners. The first AN CF was developed in 2005 and although it was modified in 2012, it required a significant ‘refresh’ to ensure that it remain contemporary in its ability to evidence a nurse’s strengths and areas for further development. In 2015 the Association of Dementia Studies, University of Worcester, was commissioned to review the framework and update it accordingly. Part of the specification within the tender was to present the final refreshed framework within ATLAS in the Dementia UK PebblePad, and completion of this is imminent with its launch planned for May 2016.

Lessons Learned

Linking various streams of activity through PebblePad eportfolios provides ANs with a systemic approach to their professional and practice development. There are many demands upon a nurses’ time and often they can ‘disembody’ their own needs, especially clinical supervision, portfolio development and formal reflective practice. Developing an ‘infrastructure’ that has PebblePad at its core (see Figure 2) has enabled ANs to maximise their professional and practice development activity and avoid time wasting duplication.

Whilst we gave all ANs a year to ‘play’ with their PebblePad eportfolios the sign on and uptake was slower than anticipated (70% after 6 months). A more structured approach using regular workshops rather than using the practice development days on an ad hoc basis may have facilitated a better response.

The academic competency framework module where PebblePad was the learning platform has been very successful for several reasons; it has enabled nurses to articulate their reflections on practice to an advanced level and gain level 7 credits, as well as becoming advanced users of PebblePad.

Developing materials and templates for use within ATLAS has taken more dedicated time than initially planned. Going forward we will either ‘ring fence’ an individual’s time to undertake this or commission others to do so. Creating effective and stylish materials has been key to engaging users; a good example was the Revalidation Workbook.

The Future?

As all new AN posts and services are commissioned we will contract that nurses access the CF module within 18 months of commencement into position to facilitate early adoption and use of PebblePad. This will promote use of all the benefits that will support ANs in demonstrating
their expert practice, support their individual revalidation with the NMC, and provide their host organisations with confidence in practice outcomes during appraisal.

References


