

Special Article

## Continuing Education and Incentives for Nurses

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### Abstract

**Introduction:** Incentives play a decisive role in the motivation process, and their knowledge and understanding are essential, in order to be able to comprehend human behavior.

**Purpose:** The present review study focuses on investigating the incentives that motivate nurses to participate in continuing education actions and programs.

**Methods:** The material of the study consisted of articles on the subject found in Greek and international databases such as Google Scholar, Mednet, Pubmed, Medline and the Association of Greek Academic Libraries (HEAL-Link). The exclusion criterion for the articles was the language, except of Greek and English. Only articles and studies accessible to authors were mostly used. **Results:** The incentives for nurses to participate in continuing nursing programs are affected by personal experiences, as well as by intrinsic incentives, and also by external factors. The most common of them are professional knowledge and development, escape from routine, improvement the ability to provide social care, and acquisition of new qualifications. **Conclusions:** Considering the incentives that motivate nurses for Continuing education, they can be oriented towards special training needs through targeted training courses.

**Keywords:** nurses, continuing education, incentives, and lifelong learning programs

### Introduction

An **incentive** is something that establishes a positive climate, or offers positive reasons to a person, in order for that person to perform positive acts. It is the desire to perform acts that serve a specific purpose.

Incentives play a decisive role in the motivation process, and their understanding is essential, in order to be able to understand human behavior.

According to Bevelson and Steiner, an incentive is “an internal situation that energizes and activates, or drives and directs, behavior towards goals” and results from the existence of a need, while it is used, in order to denote anything that can motivate a person to take action (Mihou, 2015).

An incentive can motivate people to adopt various forms of behavior, and serves as a condition for the development of an activity or

act, which “relieves” the body from the pressure applied by the incentive (Panagiotopoulou, 2012).

Heckhausen (1991) defines as **incentives** “the idiosyncratic personal dispositions towards objects that have a value. This value can be positive and cause a person to take action that allows its approach and achievement, or negative, and cause a person to take action to avoid it”. (Heckhausen, 1991)

Incentives can be considered as an inner source of energy, which direct human behavior, towards various choices, depending on the person’s social, economic, and cultural environment. Therefore, a direct relationship can be derived between the selection of training courses and incentives that affect it (Panagiotopoulou, 2012). This means that incentives motivate adults to participate in lifelong program actions, and constitute a complex concept.

**Incentives** can refer to both internal causes of behavior, such as desires, intentions, or emotions, and external, such as rewards, attractions, or deterrents. They can also be inherent, such as instincts, i.e. they can have a hereditary basis, or acquired, i.e. they can be acquired through learning and interaction processes. (Kostaridou-Efkleidi, 2011)

The strongest learning incentives, when it comes to adults, are internal, such as, for example, self-esteem and the need to enjoy job satisfaction, rather than external, such as, for example, enjoy various job benefits. Regardless of their type, incentives can provide the necessary energy and drive to a person to reach expected results. (Sideridis et al, 2006)

In all types of incentives, characteristics such as tension, stability, or instability are present. Therefore, for example, the desire to participate in a C.E. program may be a strong incentive, or not, and this fact is either weakened or enhanced by the socio-cultural environment, i.e. family, age, gender, socio-economic status, knowledge subjects, time, trainers, prevailing conditions, etc. (Jarvis, 2004).

Finally, if an individual has an incentive that is based on their personal and professional benefit, their motivation is stronger and easier to achieve, in order for them to participate in a further training course.

When it comes to **Continuing education** (C. E.), it is defined as the extension of opportunities for reading, studying, and training of individuals after the latter’s graduation from basic education. (Lanara, 1996)

In terms of the conceptual definition of Continuing Nursing Education (CNE), according to the American Nurses Association (ANA, 1984), “Continuing Nursing Education is defined as the lifelong process of the Nurse’s active participation/involvement in learning activities, in order to enhance the latter’s professional practice and contribution to health” (American Nurses Association, 1984)

The World Health Organization (WHO, 1980), as well, defines “continuing education as the education that is received by a health practitioner after the end of their basic professional training or any additional previous training, specific or general, in order to improve their professional skills, rather than acquire a new diploma or practicing certificate”. (WHO, 1980)

Actually, Continuing Education is included in Lifelong Learning (LLL). Their difference is that, whereas lifelong education/learning expands throughout a person’s life, continuing educations refers and is targeted to adults, provided, of course, that the latter do not attend any initial basic training programs. (Jarvis, 2005)

The **purpose** of the present review study is to investigate the incentives that motivate nurses to participate in continuing education activities and programs.

### **Methodology**

The material of the study consisted of articles relevant to the subject that were found in both Greek and international databases, such as: Google Scholar, MedNet, PubMed, Medline, and the Hellenic Academic Libraries Link (HEAL-Link), by using the following keywords: nurses, continuing education, incentives, and lifelong programs. The exclusion criterion for the articles was the language, except for Greek and English. Mostly, only articles and studies accessible to authors were used.

**A discussion of Continuing Nursing Education (CNE):** The purpose of CNE is the certification of nursing skills, as well updating and improving existing knowledge (Panoudaki-Brokalaki, 1998).

Through CNE, nurses aim at both optimizing their theoretical knowledge and skills, developing a professional culture, improving their relations with other professionals, and establishing standards of professional ethical conduct. (Panagiotopoulou, 2012) Moreover, nurses aim at being able to improve their performance, document their work scientifically, build trust in their skills and qualifications, and apply better career planning. (Karga, 2012) Besides, the promotion of knowledge and research results in achieving optimum quality in the care provided to the patient, and good management practice in the nursing service, also developing competent professionals. (American Nurses Association, 1984 & Tyler et al, 2001)

In terms of the **incentives of nurses** for their participation in continuing nursing education programs, they are affected by personal experiences, and are shaped by free will, as well as by intrinsic incentives, and also by external factors. All of these factors establish a framework, within which, an individual can determine their goals and targets. These incentives can be grouped into 5 (five) categories (Kamariannaki et al, 2017):

- **Professional improvement and development:** the incentives that are included are associated with nursing practice.
- **Professional service:** the incentives that are included are focused on the implementation of services with the patient at the center, and the provision of quality-based health services, in adequate quantity, to the public, in general.
- **Learning and interaction with colleagues:** the incentives that are included are associated with the exchange of views and opinions with colleagues, as well as methods to promote the way of thinking of nurses, thus contributing to better decision-making.
- **Personal benefits and job security:** the incentives that are included are associated with the personal development and security of nurses.
- **Professional commitment:** the incentives that are included are associated with the participation of nurses in professional bodies/associations, which further expand the image of nursing, thus reflecting the values of the profession.

Another system of categorization classifies **incentives** according to the attitude of nurses, into (Flores et al, 2006):

- **goal-oriented:** the incentives that are included are oriented towards education, based on the goals that individuals expect to achieve through the training program (goal-oriented).
- **society-oriented:** the incentives that are included are developed during the training activity (activity-oriented), and driven by networking, social activity, and searching for social relationships
- **student-oriented:** the incentives that are included are oriented towards learning and the acquisition of new knowledge

Research also demonstrated the need for nurses to update their knowledge, through continuing nursing education. The majority of the nurses report that an increase in their skills and knowledge is the benefit of continuing nursing education. (Brekemans et al, 2016) On the other hand, in other research studies, researchers found that the updating of information is one of the most important factors for participation in continuing nursing education. (Puteh et al, 2015 & Kavga, 2007)

The main concern of nurses is their updating on developments in healthcare and acquisition of new professional knowledge. (Tachtsoglou et al, 2020) On the other hand, when it comes to personal characteristics, rotating working hours, age, income level, and position and rank in the hierarchy of academic education affect significantly the participation of individuals in CE programs. On the contrary, working either in the public or the private sector does not seem to have any impact. (Karalis, 2009 & Lera et al, 2020) Furthermore, other studies show that a voluntary participation in continuing nursing programs, according to the nurses' needs, affects positively the nurses' incentives to participate in continuing nursing education programs. (Hamzehgardeshi et al. 2014)

Besides, the facilities that are selected, in order to run the programs, serve as a major incentive for the participation of nurses in lifelong learning programs. When it comes to the factors that motivate nurses to participate in continuing nursing education programs, the most common

ones that were identified in various research studies are professional knowledge and development, escape from routine, improvement of the ability to provide social care, improvement of social relationships, and acquisition of new qualifications. (Patelarou et al, 2009 & Tachtsoglou et al, 2020) Among those factors, improved professional knowledge and skills are regarded as the most important ones, followed by the need to maintain current professional practices and improve the nurses' ability to serve the public. (Chong et al, 2011)

Furthermore, collective learning, and more specifically, a desire to take part in interactive learning, confirms the view that adults enjoy the training process when they are with their colleagues, which motivates and rewards them. (Aiga, 2006) Therefore, a knowledge of the incentives and personal traits of individuals is important information on how to attract trainees. (Ebrahimi et al, 2012)

After all, due to the fact that nurses are adults, they need to know the reason why they should learn something, before they are introduced to the learning process. They need to make use of their ability for self-determination, as well as make their own decisions about their life. They already have a wide range of experiences, and they use those experiences as a basis for understanding and consolidating new knowledge. That is the reason why it is deemed as important that the experiences in question are taken advantage of in the training process. (Athanasiou et al, 2014 & Kokko, 2005)

When it comes to identifying the training needs, nurses prefer training orientations that are focused on specific issues, rather than on abstract concepts that are associated with academic knowledge. They need to acquire knowledge that is relevant to their working conditions, and help them deal with real-life challenges that they encounter in everyday life. (Tachtsoglou et al, 2020)

When it comes to the knowledge subjects, with which, nurses want to become more and better familiar, in international literature, there are numerous research studies that evaluate the training needs of nurses. According to research, these needs refer to emergency nursing care and the sector of Units, in general, clinical protocols and psychological support to patients, clinical skills, Communication skills, management

issues, research, and information technology. (Pierrako et al, 2006 & Tachtsoglou et al, 2019)

The selection of Intensive Care and emergency care Units is associated with the special nature and specialization that characterizes the professional field where nurses work and provide specialized nursing care, as well as their concern, when it comes to their ability to correspond to difficult working and adverse conditions. On the other hand, the selection of other knowledge subjects is associated with their limited basic training, as well as clinical practice. (Kol et al, 2017)

These subjects can be used as a basis for the implementation and development of such Continuing nursing education training programs. In addition, if the incentives that motivate nurses for Continuing education, as well as the nurses' actual training needs, are taken into account, then training planning, promotion, and strategies can be oriented towards specific training needs and targeted training programs. (Kokkos, 2012 & Andrioti et al, 2011)

Taking the above into consideration, the management of hospitals, and the nursing service, first and foremost, through the training office that operates in the premises of each hospital, should proceed with identifying the training needs of their nurses, and planning, organizing, implementing, and evaluating training programs, and seek to establish cooperation with various bodies and organizations, for the implementation of appropriate training programs. (Gkioka et al, 2018)

They should also cooperate with other training and educational organizations (Universities), in order to jointly develop continuing education programs, and ensure the development and application of modern training techniques, and increase the educational work that is produced. (Tachtsoglou et al, 2019) Further to that, they should introduce a point system to the training of nurses and certification of latter's knowledge and skills. (Polyzos, 2000)

Besides, the learning environment in the programs in question should be characterized by respect for others, and favor interaction between trainers and trainees, as well as freedom of expression and friendliness among all. (Lera et al, 2019)

Every single program should be structured appropriately, so that it does not only meet the needs of trainees, but it is also in line with the challenges that emerge in the social environment of the latter. The trainees should actively participate throughout the stages, during which, each program is implemented, rather than behaving as if they are obliged to follow the choices of the organizers. (Fotopoulos, 2016)

Moreover, each trainer should play a more coordinating role, when it comes to taking action, and serve as source of learning that can be utilized by trainees, rather than just facilitate knowledge transmission or offer explicit guidance. (Hasapis, 2000)

On the other hand, the learning methods that are followed should favor, as much as possible, the exchange of experiences, the process of seeking and finding knowledge, as well as team participation. (Panagiotopoulou et al, 2016)

**Conclusion:** The assessment of the knowledge and skills of nurses is, therefore, a continuous process, which is dictated by major changes that take place in the field of technology, nursing practice, and healthcare. Incentives, as well as personal and professional conduct, affect participation in continuing training programs significantly.

Nurses participate in CNE programs because of their desire to acquire knowledge and skills, the application of which, will result in an improvement of the provided services.

Since nurses account for one of the highest percentages of the staff of health units, it is obvious that special attention should be paid to ensuring their continuing professional education, through targeted programs, after considering their training needs and the criteria of their participation in it.

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