

Graduates vs undergraduates



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The differences between Graduate Nursing Education And Undergraduate Nursing Education The medical profession has always been looked upon with respect and admiration. Here is a profession that needs to take into consideration not only the physical illness of a patient, but also the mental trauma that results as a consequence of the physical illness. The healing touch of the nursing profession is therefore one that has always been both revered and admired. Ever since the time of Florence Nightingale, one has heard of the healing touch of the lady with the lamp whose ministrations gave succor to suffering humanity. Today, more than ever before nursing professionals are faced with challenges like catering to a global population, from diverse backgrounds and dealing with a whole host of problems that such situations throw up. Besides, with the advance of technology and an increased life span, the adult population with chronic illness makes up a significant percentage of today's patients. In addition to healing the sick, nursing professionals today have to shoulder the added burden of the changing needs of their profession in order to deliver good and cost effective care to their patients. Holistic care that is based on the physical, mental and emotional well being of the patient is the goal of every nursing professional, whether graduate or undergraduate. A health care system, needs a human interface in order to translate a health care plan and maximize its benefits to the patient. This is one of the important roles carried out by the nursing profession. Besides delivering good and cost effective health care, the nursing professional must also be capable of focusing on prevention rather than on cure. Understanding advances in technology and using this knowledge to educate communities on ways to lead healthier lives is an important aspect of the entire nursing profession. Although the core

competencies that are taught at both the graduate and undergraduate level are similar, the graduate education at the masters level in nursing gives a more in depth knowledge of health care problems, and also hones skills in critical thinking and decision making. Some of the areas where education at the masters level is different is research, clinical experiences, ethical decision making, leadership, effective communication skills and the courage to advocate change. The masters program also teaches the graduate professional to educate those at the under graduate level. In today's global environment where patients come from varied backgrounds and cultures, the generalist nurse is taught to provide basic holistic care to the patient, while the advanced practice nurse uses his/her evidence and advanced research findings to design and provide high quality and cost effective care to the patient. The experience of at least 500 hours of direct clinical practice during the masters program, makes a difference to the insights and experience s/he brings to patient care. Education at the undergraduate level prepares the nurse to be a care giver across the life span from very young children to aging patients. Although the advanced practice nurse has learned these skills, s/he is prepared to specialize in particular areas such as paediatrics or women's health. Effective communication and teaching skills are part of the curriculum at the graduate level. Although basic skills in these areas are also taught at the under graduate level, in the advanced practice nurse, these skills are honed to include highly sophisticated communication and observational skills to succeed in interviewing the patient to assess his/her previous health history, risk factors and identify symptoms of disease that the patient may not be unaware of. The advanced practice nurse is taught to provide leadership to bring about change within the health care

system, and to work with other health care professionals in order to improve delivery of health care to the patient. While at the under graduate level nurses are taught the principles of improving health care policies and their cost effectiveness in order to improve the quality of health care that reaches the patient; the masters program equips students with skills to understand the economic implications of health planning in order to make cost effective choices while using the health care resources at their command. They also imbibe a deeper understanding of the organization and financing of health care policies. Accordingly graduates are taught to “ be responsive to increasing levels of public, governmental, and third party participation in and scrutiny of the shape and direction of the health care system” (Shugars, O’Neil, Bader, 1991, p. 19). The masters program includes a basic physiology and pathophysiology course to inculcate a better understanding of the pathological changes that occur as a result of disease and help to analyze the responses of the patient to illness and treatment. The course equips the advanced practice nurse with the necessary skills to diagnose and treat common illnesses safely and cost effectively. This added advantage in the masters program is not included in the undergraduate nursing program. The areas of moral and ethical conduct are stressed in both the undergraduate and graduate programs. The message of accountability for personal and professional behavior is emphasized and students are encouraged to introspect on their values and analyze how these could influence their decisions or create a conflict of interest while caring for their patients. However the masters program helps students understand why the role of an ethics committee is important in health care and encourages them to serve on such committees. Health care professionals all agree that the advanced

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practice nurse must be able to “ provide counseling for patients in situations where ethical issues arise, as well as participate in discussions of ethical issues in health care as they affect communities, society and the health professions” (Shugars et al., 1991, p. 19) It is important for all nursing professionals to understand the importance of new knowledge gained as a result of research and apply it to improve health care. The research component of the masters program increases the proficiency of the student to utilize research in order to identify problems and enhance the decision making process. Nursing professionals at every level are a boon to society. Patients come to the healer in a state of acute mental and physical distress. A sympathetic ear and kind reassurance helps allay fears and generate confidence in the patient. Effective communication is the key to helping patients help themselves. The essence of the nursing profession lies in these qualities that are ingrained into a nurse during education at every level.

References Shugars, O’Neil, Bader, 1991 THE ESSENTIALS OF MASTER’S EDUCATION FOR ADVANCED PRACTICE NURSING American Association of Colleges of Nursing II. Policy, Organization, and Financing of Health Care A. Health Care Policy Page 7 Shugars et al., 1991 THE ESSENTIALS OF MASTER’S EDUCATION FOR ADVANCED PRACTICE NURSING American Association of Colleges of Nursing III. Ethics Page 9