Meeting the Needs of Pre-Licensure Students
Integrating Skills into the Clinical Coursework

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Background
In recent history, the mastery of clinical skills has turned to an “education by random opportunity.” With the increasing complexity of healthcare delivery, preparing new nurses to enter the workforce clinically competent, as measured by confidence and experience, is vital. The focus on task completion rather than overall learning requires a change in the delivery of nursing education (Irons, McNeilis & Ebright, 2014). The charge to transform education delivery is not only recognized within the realm of education but also within the profession itself, especially within the first year. In a qualitative study by Chandler (2012) first year nurses recognized their inexperience and applied self-judging principles as a reaction. Therefore the development of a supportive environment by both preceptors and administration alike facilitated growth and development rather than a focus on the deficit seen in clinical competence. Through the combination of a fostered learning environment and an increase in clinical skills opportunities one can expect that pre-licensure nursing students will see an increase in the level of confidence and thus clinical competence (Rush, Firth, Burke & Marks-Marlan, 2012).

Purpose
The purpose of this study was to determine if there was an increase in the level of clinical competence in relation to the performance of clinical skills.

Aim 1: To determine the number of times each student performed the clinical skills within a clinical course.

Aim 2: To identify if the level of confidence in clinical skill performance was increased based upon the integration of clinical skills into the coursework.

Aim 3: To identify the level of student satisfaction with the integrated skills lab experience.

Implementation
Based upon student feedback, a clinical skills lab calendar was developed that allowed clinical skills to be introduced, through educational videos, reinforced through faculty guidance (1:4 faculty to student ratio) and demonstrated through test-out opportunities weekly. To answer the charge to educate a nursing workforce prepared for the complexity seen in clinical settings, each student prepared by utilizing educational videos and pre-test activities (average 14 hours 28 minutes/student). These preparation activities supported the 32 faculty-led skills lab hours with experience in seven skill areas (ostomy care, wound care, NG insertion, tracheostomy care, IV insertion, IV management, central line dressing changes). This integrated approach to skills lab allowed direct faculty assessment and evaluation weekly to encourage critical thinking through the analysis of case studies and the application of safe medication administration principles.

Results

Aim 1: Students were asked to indicate the number of times they performed the selected skills within the skills lab as well as in the clinical practicum. While all students indicated that they were able to perform each skill at least once during the skills lab and clinical practicum experience the majority of students were able to complete the selected skills 3 or more times.

Aim 2: Overall, most students rated their confidence in the selected skills as confident or higher. The two skills where students rated their confidence level highest were Tracheostomy Cares and Medication Administration thus indicating a correlation between the number of times a skill is performed and the level of confidence.

Aim 3: In total, 89% of students agreed or strongly agreed that the skills lab environment increased their confidence for completion of skills within the clinical practicum.

Conclusion
Through the increase in the level of individual confidence and the number of experiences the student has with each clinical skill, the level of clinical competence was increased. This study demonstrates the value of integrating clinical skills teaching that corresponds with the student’s clinical practicum. These efforts allowed the students to complete the process of introduction, reinforcement and demonstration needed for clinical competence. Continued research that measures preceptorship preparedness and transition into professional practice is essential to determine long-term implications and success.