

Title: Numeracy for Nursing: The case for a benchmark

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Abstract:

In this session we shall outline and share examples of work in progress on an inter-disciplinary project for NHS Education for Scotland (NES) exploring the key issues associated with determining and supporting student achievement of competence in nursing numeracy. The project has been developed against the background of research findings and anecdotal concern that some newly qualified and experienced nurses may not have the numeracy skills required for safe practice. Some employers, who are worried about safety in practice, choose to impose their own tests of numerical competency when selecting for employment. This is concerning, because existing evidence suggests that many available tests have no empirical basis in relation to their reliability and predictive validity in respect of safe nursing practice, (measured through observed reduction in error rate against controls). There is also a lack of consistency regarding the content that may be included within such tests.

It is proposed that in the absence of any empirically valid benchmark or diagnostic assessment, it is difficult for universities and health employers to determine which skills require development, or to ascertain when practice competence has been achieved. This work provides a real opportunity to establish a UK and international benchmark for nursing competence in numeracy at point of nurse registration and enable Higher Education to develop an effective strategy for the support of nursing and healthcare students in gaining these skills.