Education about Health Care Information Technology: challenges and solutions

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The use of the Electronic Patient Record (EPR) will soon be a legal requirement for all health care professionals in the Netherlands. A frequently heard complaint is that health care professionals and technicians have difficulties in cooperating and communicating to develop the EPR. The ROC van Twente established an innovation circle “Health Care and Technology”, under the leadership of a master-teacher to bridge this gap. Health care providers in the region requested education in this area, thus offering an excellent situational context for learning. One of the first activities of the innovation circle was the development of a course about the EPR in which nursing students worked with students in the area of application development. The course focuses on continuity of care, requirements for EPR and health informatics standards and was delivered in 2006-2007.

Educational innovation consists of three components that play an important part in the development of new educational programs: searching, knowing and changing. The evaluation of this course in 2007 revealed that ‘searching’ came out sufficiently, resulting in the establishment of the course. From evaluations of students as well as teachers it can be concluded however that the components knowing and changing need more attention. The component knowing was thus addressed twofold for 2007-2008: 1) the nursing students were prepared before both student groups cooperate during the course 2) the teacher was coached by an expert. The component change was established in two areas: 1) parts of the EPR course content where spread through the whole nursing program and 2) students in the 2007 – 2008 have enlisted in large numbers to participate in the course. However, these new developments do not really attract the attention of most teachers yet, but they cannot afford to wait with teaching about these matters and must take responsibility to make the quality of education reflect the quality and development in clinical practice. Thus the challenge for changing is to let teachers become competent enough to guide students in learning to deal with new technologies in general and the EPR in particular.

We recommend continuing to teach nursing students to consider technology an essential part of their professional education and apply it in a meaningful and sensible way in care delivery. The innovation circle must further analyse the problems and traps in education within schools of healthcare. Success depends on teachers who face the future with self-confidence and who are not afraid of new technologies. Teachers must cross boundaries and cooperate, communicate with each other and share knowledge, keep an open mind to learn from each other and trust each other. When shared goals are considered important by professionals and teachers of various schools, we will be able to train the future professionals able to use the EPR. Focus of attention will thus shift to teaching the teachers.

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