

## **CONFERENCE REPORT**

STTI 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Tau Lambda-at-Large Conference  
Blantyre, Malawi: 02 July 2012 – 04 July 2012  
Prof L Roets, Department of Health Studies, University of South Africa  
Prof J Maritz, Department of Health Studies, University of South Africa

### **Introduction**

STTI, Sigma Theta Tau Lambda-at-Large, a chapter of an Honour Global Nursing Society, held its 12<sup>th</sup> annual conference in Blantyre, Malawi. The theme of the conference was “Evidence-based practice in nursing and midwifery”. The University of Malawi, Kumuzu College of Nursing, was the host of the conference.

The welcoming address was done by Malawi’s Minister of Health, Dr Jennifer Dohrn, the first key note speaker, addressed the conference on “Deepening our collective handprint using evidence-based practice to expand nursing and midwifery care”.

Prof C Kaponda provided a Malawian context for evidence-based practice in nursing and midwifery.

### **Evidence-based practice (EBP)**

The development of evidence-based practice (EBP) is an extremely important initiative in nursing and midwifery. EBP is a critical and thoughtful integration of the best available evidence in nursing research, coupled with clinical expertise. It allows the nurse to assess current and past research, clinical guidelines and other forms of information sources in order to identify relevant literature while differentiating between high and low quality findings. The skills necessary to provide evidence-based practice include formulating the dilemma/problem and question, identifying articles and other resources that answer the question through a systematic review, critically appraising the evidence to assess validity, considering the evidence and translating its implications in the context of nursing practice.

The conference theme provided a broad platform from which nurses could explore EBP in nursing and midwifery.

## **Papers delivered at the conference**

A total of 61 papers and 9 posters were presented at the conference. Delegates represented a number of African countries such as Malawi, South Africa and Botswana. Delegates' topics included an extensive range of nursing and midwifery practice aspects such as socio-cultural issues in nursing, codes of ethics, the role of the nurse and midwife, women's and men's health issues, primary and psychiatric health care. Nursing education received attention with topics related to undergraduate curriculum, self-directed learner readiness, postgraduate student experiences, peer group mentoring and e-coaching and mentoring of novice nurse researchers.

The authors' presentations took place on the second and third day respectively. Lizeth Roets' presentation addressed the impact of internationalisation of higher education on supervision practices. Culture and language diversity as well as the dynamic characteristics of the learners in an Open Distant Learning (ODL) environment were taken into account in implementing a scholarship development programme across language, culture and socioeconomic borders in Africa. Implementing a master's programme to enhance scholarship development in a resource poor African context through ODL was challenging. Effective supervision was essential for mentoring masters' students in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Supervision in a language not mutually understood by the supervisor and students thus challenged the traditional western methodology and paradigms. A qualitative narrative reflection was done to critically reflect on the challenges faced and to initiate the innovative ideas that emerged from this experience. New research methodology and paradigms to enhance distant education research had to be initiated and implemented.

The joint presentation of Proff Jeanette Maritz and Lizeth Roets explored the opportunities and challenges in e-coaching and mentoring of novice nurse researchers in Africa after the postgraduate supervisory relationship had ended. The conventional model of nurse research education and support had shown itself to be deficient in the face of the rapidly changing health care and educational environments. This was more so in the Open Distance Learning (ODL) context where institutions embarked on cross border initiatives to build the capacity of novice nurse researchers. E-coaching and mentoring provide a novel means for supporting novice nurse researchers in African countries. This paper built on the findings research conducted by Prof Roets. Opportunities referred to personal motivation, resilience, innovative ways of research education and technology. Challenges included issues of language, culture, resources and skill deficiencies. Based on the findings of the joint presentation, the implication for e-coaching and mentoring in ODL and nurse research education was explored. The establishment of a positive learning climate through the use of social and multimedia enhanced technology was recommended. Coaches and mentors needed a strong virtual mindset and an interest in developing and supporting students. The text-based coaching discussion could provide

an opportunity to test the rigour of logic, to explore assumptions and to clarify processes and heuristic approaches of the students. The mentoring approach would provide opportunities for acting as a listening partner, being a sounding board, helping with the development of coping strategies and exploring career paths. Resource challenges included the digital divide and the availability of bandwidth in Africa. The absence of visual cues, such as body language and tone, place a greater emphasis on language issues during electronic communication. The coaching and mentoring would mainly make use of asynchronous communication. The interactions would initially be more directive due to the language issues.

### **Division of Tau-Lambda-at-Large Africa chapter**

It was unanimously accepted at the annual general meeting that Tau-Lambda-at-Large will apply to be divided into four African regions. The proposal to divide the chapter was approved by the International Board of STTI. The motivation for this proposal was that Tau-Lambda-at-Large represents 15 universities in Africa, with only two votes at the STTI House of Delegates. The successful division will ensure eight votes with larger representation at the House of Delegates. A workshop to address the responsibility of members to timely complete all documentation for the application for the division of the current chapter and the application for the four new chapters were discussed. The 15 universities were divided into the four different new chapters. One of the chapters will remain the Tau-Lambda chapter to ensure that the history and the legacy that Tau-Lambda-at Large of the past 12 years will not be lost in future.

Further information about this and future STTI conventions and conferences can be accessed at <http://www.nursingsociety.org/STTIEvents/BiennialConvention>