RESEARCH SUPERVISION NEEDS AND EXPERIENCES OF MASTER'S STUDENTS IN NURSING

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Thesis presented inpartial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Nursing in the Faculty of Medicine and Health Science at Stellenbosch University

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Declaration

By submitting this thesis electronically, I declare that the entirety of the work contained herein is my own, original work, that I am the sole author thereof (save to the extent explicitly otherwise stated), that reproduction and publication thereof by Stellenbosch University will not infringe any third party rights and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

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Abstract

Background: Research supervision forms an essential part of higher education. The emergence of global trends in the production and dissemination of knowledge is compelling universities and university of technologies in South Africa to become more market-orientated, competitive and entrepreneurial. The supervision process is vital to successful completion of the research component of master's degrees and consequently increase throughput in higher education. Successful and meaningful supervision contribute largely to mutual satisfaction and professional development between supervisors and students. Good supervision should be an integral component of quality research governance.

Objective: The aim of this study was to explore research supervision needs and experiences of the master's students in nursing.

Methodology: A descriptive phenomenological research design was used with a qualitative research approach. A non-probability, purposive sampling method was used to select respondents in this study. The target population includes all nursing science master's students enrolled at University of Stellenbosch in the past three years (N=109). A sample size of twelve students was included in the study, whereby all twelve face to face interviews were conducted using the semi-structured interview guide. The inclusion criterium for students was that they were all currently registered students who initially enrolled for the Masters in Nursing degree program between 2008 and 2010 in the division of Nursing at Stellenbosch University.

Results: Eight themes arose from the interviews. These included: isolation; lack of skills/ time management; family dynamics/personal circumstances; supervisor support; student and supervisor roles and responsibilities; workplace dynamics and support; financial and institutional support and implications; and motivation to complete studies.

Conclusions: Successful completion of research undertaken on postgraduate level and supervision at a master's level depend on a healthy and productive relationship between the supervisor and the student. Exploring and implementing the guidance and

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suggestions in this paper will assist students in considering supervision preferences. This in turn will result in achieving a good supervisory relationship which is the key to successful master studies.

Opsomming

Agtergrond: Navorsing toesighouding vorm 'n belangrike deel van hoer onderwys. Die opkomende wêreldtendense in die toename en verspreiding van kennis verplig universiteite en universiteite van tegnologie in Suid-Afrika om meer markgeoriënteerd, kompeterend en ondernemend te word. Suksesvolle en betekenisvolle toesig maak hoofsaaklik n bydra tot die onderlinge bevrediging en professionele ontwikkeling tussen toesighouers en studente. Goeie toesig behoort 'n integrale komponent van kwaliteit begeleiding in navorsing te wees.

Doelwit: Die doel van hierdie studie was om die behoeftes van navorsingtoesig en ervaring van die magisterstudent in verpleging te ondersoek

Metodologie: 'n Beskrywende, fenomenologiese navorsingsontwerp met 'n kwalitatiewe navorsingsbenadering is gebruik. 'n Nie-waarskynlike, doelbewuste steekproefmetode is gebruik om respondente vir hierdie studie te selekteer. Die teikenbevolking sluit in alle magisterstudente wat ingeskryf is vir verpleegwetenskap aan die Universiteit van Stellenbosch oor die afgelope drie jaar (N=109). 'n Steekproefgrootte van twaalf studente is ingesluit in hierdie studie, waaronder daar met al twaalf van aangesig tot aangesig onderhoude gevoer is deur gebruik te maak van die semi-gestruktureerde onderhoudsgids. Insluitingskriteria vir die studente was dat hulle almal bestaande geregistreerde studente moes wees wat aanvanklik ingeskryf het vir die program vir die Meestersgraad in Verpleging tussen 2008 en 2010 in die afdeling van Verpleging aan die Universiteit van Stellenbosch.

Resultate: Ag temas het vanuit die onderhoude voortgespruit. Dit het ingesluit: isolasie; gebrek aan vaardighede/tydsbestuur; familie-dinamika/persoonlike omstandighede; ondersteuning van toesighouer; rolle van student en toesighouer, asook verantwoordelikhede; werkplek dinamika/ondersteuning; finansiële en institusionele ondersteuning/implikasies en motivering om die studie te voltooi.

Gevolgtrekking: Die suksesvolle voltooiing van die navorsing wat onderneem word op nagraadse vlak en toesig is afhanklik van 'n gesonde en produktiewe verhouding tussen die toesighouer en die student. Die nagaan en implementering van die leiding en voorstelle in hierdie studie sal die studente help in die oorweging van toesighouer voorkeure. Dit sal gevolglik aanleiding gee tot die bereiking van 'n goeie toesighoudende verhouding wat die sleutel is tot die suksesvolle voltooiing van magistergraad studies.

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PART A

RESEARCH SUPERVISION NEEDS AND EXPERIENCES OF MASTER'S STUDENTSIN NURSING

Research supervision needs and experiences of master's students in nursing

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Abstract

Purpose: The primary aim of this study was to explore the research supervision needs and experiences of the nursing master's students.

Methodology: An exploratory phenomenological research design was used within a qualitative research approach. Twelve face-to-face interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview guide. Participants were students who had initially enrolled at a tertiary institution for a master's programme in nursing between 2008 and 2010. Interviews were audio taped and transcribed verbatim. Thematic analysis was applied to the data to identify themes imbedded in the data sets.

Results:Four main themes arose from the interviews. These included, student self-identified needs, supervisory experiences, motivation to complete studies and student and supervisor roles and responsibilities.

Conclusion: Successful completion of research at master's level depends on a healthy and productive relationship between the supervisor and the student. Findings of the present study may inform development and improvements to supervisory practice within the faculty where the study was undertaken as well as in similar settings. Students at master's level work and study part-time to ease financial pressures but experience great difficulty to succeed as a result of the various responsibilities. There is a need for students to be provided with technical, financial and computing support and resources. Better supervisory models that promote social interaction amongst students may be the ideal method for master's' students. Such models include the workshop, conference and methodology group models.

Keywords: research supervision, experiences, postgraduate students, nursing master's students.

237 words

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of global trends in the production and dissemination of knowledge is compelling universities in South Africa to become more market-oriented, competitive and entrepreneurial (McLean-Anderson 2004). Much of this knowledge is produced through master's and doctoral supervision practices including thesis and dissertation development. Thompson, Kirkman, Watson and Stewart (2005:283) state that the quest for persuasive supervision of postgraduate degrees is vital in the academic sphere as research is considered as the fundamental human learning activity (Wisker, 2005:5 & Olivier, 2007:1126). Institutional and departmental practices in relation to research supervision vary considerably and there appears to be little empirical evidence from which to draw guidance (Thompson *et al.* 2005:284). Olivier (2007:1127) and Zhao (2003:191) point out that a high quality of supervision of postgraduate students is central to successful and timely completion in conjunction with improved research capacity. Many institutions of higher learning have taken special interest in the process of supervision to improve postgraduate throughput.

Research supervision in higher education, is a professional developmental process of support provided to postgraduate students who are undertaking research projects as part of the requirements of an institution. The strong personal and interpersonal aspect requires special attention. Research supervision is an important aspect of not only the development of the student researcher, but of academic staff and research activity in general. Olivier (2007:1137) states that successful and meaningful supervision contributes largely to mutual satisfaction and professional development between supervisors and students. Good supervision should be an integral component of quality research governance (Thompson *et al.* 2005:286). Various challenges to postgraduate research supervision have been identified. These include poor communication skills, weak postgraduate students and inadequate supervision (Fazackery, 2005). Thompson

et al. 2005:286 describe some recommendations for successful supervision include the rigorous selection of research students, supervisors and development of projects; development of departmental procedures for monitoring,feedback and intellectual property; and transparency, rigor and fairness in examination procedures.

The Division of Nursing at Stellenbosch University has increased its enrollment and dedication to master's throughput. Postgraduate students have specific supervision needs. Identification of these needs may lead to appropriate support being offered in order to ensure an appropriate experience for students and supervisors and promote research throughput. There is a scarcity of literature on supervision needs and experiences of nursing students in South Africa. Such literature is important as it may contribute to fostering improved supervisory practices.

If the students' experience is to be enhanced and challenges of supervisory practices minimised, professions, organisations and academics should collaborate to meet the need (Lee, 2009:647). Mc Cormack, 2005:240 postulated that students experienced many factors likely to negatively affect a student's chances of completing her/his studies. These included isolation (social and intellectual), lack of resources, 'absence' of, or poor supervision, and personal and/or professional crises (McCormack, 2005:240). In some cases tensions arising from a mismatch between an individual's understanding and institutional conceptions of postgraduate research were highlighted (McCormack, 2005:240). On the other hand, Malfroy (2005:170) reported that the supervisors expressed frustration at the students' attitudes and unwillingness to be independent in their learning and research development.

Various strategies have been engaged with to improve supervision. These strategies have included the provision of postgraduate training courses, making changes to the supervisory system by moving away from the traditional single supervisor model to one of a number of supervisory models. The use of experienced supervisors can be a source of positive supervision experiences. Abiddin (2006:105) is of the opinion that students normally look at the credibility of supervisor in terms of his/her expertise and the history of the students under his/her supervision.

According to Albertyn, Kapp and Bitzer (2008:749) addressing the postgraduate students' needs is essential in an era characterised by transition to ensure accountability and quality within higher education. Nevertheless, it should be noted that different students require different supervisory relationships, ranging from a high level of dependency to a high level of autonomy (McClure, 2005:3). Academic input to assess progress and evaluate quality were regarded as the most important supervision needs of students (Albertyn et al., 2008:764). Albertyn et al. (2008:761) postulate that students prefer supervisors to be actively involved in the preparation of their articles concerning research methodology,design and training. The students also request more technical support regarding their quest for information, as well as to keeptrack of their progress.

Several studies have found that various factors play a role in success or attrition in postgraduate studies. These include funding issues, social class, personal factors and social, organisational and academic aspects (Leonard, Becker & Coate, 2005:142). Students sometimes experience personal difficulties that include family difficulties or problems in personal relationships (Graduate supervision guidelines for students, 2002:16). Personal attributes, support from supervisors and institutional support are also noted as factors contributing to success (Albertyn, et al., 2008:761).

Ahern and Manathunga (2004:249) state that there needs to be a fit between the supervisor and students' conceptualisation of research. These authors were also of the opinion that the differences that may impact the process of research should be discussed by students and their supervisors. Attributes such as motivation, hard work, support by significant others, the role of the supervisor and institutional support were identified as factors to be considered.

Abiddin, Hassan and Ahmad (2009:15) state that both on a departmental and individual basis, the supervisor must be diligent about explicitly working with students to establish mutual expectations, responsibilities and benefits for working together. The supervisors should be accessible to the student at appropriate times when the student needs advice on academic (and personal) problems. Agreements should be reached and detailed advice (verbal and written) given on the necessary completion dates of successive stages of the work. Realistic timelines for feedback should be reached and both supervisor and the student should adhere to that. There is a real danger of spoon-feeding and over-commitment by the supervisors who can sometimes become too emotional, intimate and subjective.

Reassurance, encouragement and enthusiasm are necessary to maintain the student over a prolonged period of arduous study (Thompson et al., 2005:286). Boud and Tennant (2006:293) suggest that the "supervisor" acts as a learning consultant or facilitator rather than imposing the values and systems of a particular subject discipline. Manathunga (2005:24) is of the opinion that an effective supervisor is regarded as having 'compassionate rigour', a delicate pedagogical balance of compassion, providing support, encouragement and empathy while simultaneously providing rigorous feedback.

Lategan (2008:39) describe the different roles a supervisor is expected to perform as "they need to be in touch with the latest developments in your field of study,

liberate oneself from the narrow focus of one's discipline and embark on multidisciplinary research, engage in team research, value partnerships, involve students in one's research, present papers at conferences, be a mentor for fellow researchers and students, focus on sustainable projects and secure funding". Similarly, Abiddin, Hassan, and Ahmad (2009:15) imply the role of the supervisor becomes one of guide, project manager, or critical friend.

Good supervision entails responsibilities for both the supervisor and the student. Although it is the duty of the supervisor to be reasonably available for consultation, the primary responsibility to keep in touch rests with the student. The student's responsibilities include that the students should familiarise themselves with the rules, policies and procedures involved in postgraduate studies (Graduate supervision guidelines for students, 2002:13). They are also required to be knowledgeable with regard to deadlines. Students should prepare a research plan and timetable in consultation with the supervisor as a basis for the programme of study, including any proposed fieldwork (Graduate supervision guidelines for students, 2002:16).

Conflict may arise during the supervision process. Conflicts are unavoidable consequences of being in an intimate (if professional) relationship for a lengthy period of time (Lategan, 2008:29). They may arise from interpersonal issues, judgement on the approach to work and expectations, ethical standards, moral obligations or technical issues such as disagreements over methods and findings. It is advised that conflicts be resolved at the lowest possible level. If a dispute or concern arises between a graduate student and supervisor with respect to the supervisory relationship, the student and supervisor should try first to resolve any difficulties amicably between themselves. If dealt with at a higher level conflicts may be disruptive and hard to resolve.

Stellenbosch University has positioned itself as a research driven higher educational institution. It has recently set targets to stabilize undergraduate student growth and has stimulated and widened postgraduate student access. The University has an average annual postgraduate growth rate of 20% in some Divisions in the Department of Interdisciplinary Health Sciences (DIHS) over the past 4 years. The rapid postgraduate growth rates have yielded an enrollment of close to 900 students (mostly postgraduate diplomates) in the DIHS with 390 pursuing a master's programme in 2008. These developments have raised critical and urgent questions among others, about the quality of postgraduate supervision, the effectiveness of supervisory practices and the impact on academic efficiency. The quality of supervision of postgraduate students in research is crucial to the timely completion of research projects.

This study will form a useful basis to determine areas for intervention to improve the potential success in the research component of master's programme in nursing and other health sciences at Stellenbosch University and other local and international institutions. Supervision is an important element of postgraduate education. It is hoped that this study will result in an increased insight into this problem. The primary aim of this study was to explore the research supervision needs and experiences of the nursing master's students at Stellenbosch University.

Research questions

The main research questions of this study were:

What are the student's research supervision needs to successfully complete studies?

What are the challenges with research supervision?

METHODOLOGY

Design

A qualitative research approach with a phenomenological research design was implemented.

Setting

This study was conducted in the Division of Nursing at the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, Stellenbosch University.

Ethical approval

Ethical clearance was obtained from the Stellenbosch University's Human Research Ethics Committee (N09/02/073). Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to the interviews. The acting head of the Division of Nursing was approached for permission to conduct the study in the Division of Nursing. Confidentiality was assured and the researcher ensured that identifiable information about participants was not disclosedand to protect the identity of research participants. Participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any point in time without any repurcasions.

Population and sampling

The target population included all master's of nursing science students enrolled between 2008 and 2010 (N=109). The sampling method used was that of non-probability purposive sampling. Students were included in the study if they were students registered for the master's in nursing degree programme between 2008 and 2010 in the Division of Nursing at Stellenbosch University. Interviews were conducted until saturation was met. A total of 12 students participated in the study.

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Instrumentation

A semi-structured interview guide with open-ended questions developed from literature on supervision experiences was used for the interviews. The interview guide consisted of 7 open-ended questions. Probing questions were used to obtain more information.

Pilot study

One master's student from the nursing division was used for the pilot study. The pilot study was conducted in order to identify barriers related to recruiting potential participants and to modify interview questions. Additional questions were added to the interview guide and some were modified for clarity. It was difficult to contact students and ask them to come to the nursing division for interviews. However, the researcher obtained contact numbers from the university records with permission from the ethics committee.

Trustworthiness

To ensure trustworthiness of this study the principles as described by Lincoln and Guba (1985:290) were applied, namely: credibility, transferability, reliability and conformability. *Credibility* refers to internal validity in which the goal is to demonstrate that inquiry was conducted in such a manner as to ensure that the subject was accurately identified and described. Internal validity or credibility was maintained by ensuring that the participants accurately understood the questions. Experts in the field of supervision and research methodology were consulted to determine the feasibility and content of the study. *Dependability* focuses on the degree to which the findings can be repeated using the same data collection and data analysis methods. To make sure that all the information given by the participants were captured, the researcher made use of a tape recorder and took notes during the interviews with the participants. In addition, all interviews were conducted in the same manner by using an interview guide for all participants.

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After each interview, data transcription and analyzing took place. In the interpretation of the qualitative data, logical sense was use in the interpretations thereof are not figments of the researcher's imagination, but can be traced back to the data (Mertens & Mc Laughlin, 2004:107). *Confirmability* was assured through the verification of every participant's data individually, after every transcription. Thereby the researcher was assured that the data was transcribed accurately and that possible bias was excluded. Data was collected during twelve face-to-face interviews which were conducted using an interview guide with open-ended questions. These individuals had similar backgrounds and all of the individuals were registered nurses with qualifications in a post basic course. It was in this open conversation that each participant made comments, asked questions or responded to comments made by the researcher (Flick, 2002:114).

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Students were contacted telephonically and interviews scheduled at their convenience. The interviews were conducted between July 2012 and August 2012. Before commencing with the interviewing process, consent forms were given to the interviewees explaining what the purpose of the study was and the time period for the interviews to be completed. The researcher administered the informed consent after which the interviews were conducted. The interviews were audio taped and the researcher took down notes. Probing questions were used so as to elicit more of a response on the topic which the interviewee may have only touched upon in the interview (Creswell, 2005:217).

Audio taped interviews were transcribed verbatim. Thematic analysis was applied to the data to identify themes embedded in the data sets. The three C's of analysis: coding, categorizing and identifying concepts were used as described by

Lichtman (2010:198). This process can be broken down into six steps. Initial coding was conducted by moving from responses to some central ideas of the responses. After the initial coding, the researcher developed a large number of codes and identified what was redundant and what was important. After the codes had been modified, they were organized into categories. The initial list of categories was modified depending on what was perceived as less important or what needed to be combined. Categories and subcategories were revisited to remove irrelevant pieces of information and to identify critical elements. The interviewer used her own judgment about what was important and what was not. Categories were then developed into themes (Lichtman, 2010:198). It is believed that fewer well-developed and supported concepts make for stronger analysis than loosely-framed ideas (Creswell, 2005:198).

RESULTS

Four main themes arose from the interviews. These included student self-identified needs, supervisory experiences, motivation to complete studies and student and supervisor roles and responsibilities.

Student self identified needs

Several needs were idewntified by the participants in relation to the successful completion of a master's degree.

Information technology needs

Suggestions were made on what is needed to promote interaction:

" I think there should be regular face-to-face contact sessions with students."

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"… with everybody on facebook, going forward a group could set up a facebook page and keep contact with each other or a link page… develop a group just to support each other."

Time management

The need for skills development and time management to successfully finish a master's programme in time was mentioned. Difficulties in completing studies included lack of skills and time management were identified.

One participant stated that:

"…how I manage my time, how I use my time , that has been a problem in the last two years."

The following comments from a student stated that:

"… maybe it will help if they can allocate a supervisor already in the first year, then you can already build a relationship in your first year."

"I think time wise there should be a good student supervisor ratio."

One student suggested that the student and the supervisor should agree on sensible and realistic time periods for meetings:

" I would suggest that nursing students and their supervisors have mandatory scheduled meetings from the beginning like once a week for the first two weeks or three weeks and then twice a month for the next year or something, but it should be mandatory, should be sign in like register or something that you always have proof of contact."

One student mentioned*:"… meeting face to face, clears up so much miscommunications."*

Communication is a need that students express to be important in their studies.

Skills training

The importance and lack of skills to successfully complete a master's degree were highlighted. The need to gain computer literacy and writing skills were mentioned:

"… students need to attend the workshop on scientific writing because I think that is one of the big needs."

"… if you do any postgraduate course at the university, it is actually compulsory that you must be computer literate."

Need for financial and institutional support

Most of the students mentioned that financial support was a major challenge, especially because they had to fund their own studies:

"… everything I had to pay myself.. and the bursaries available is most of the time for doctors."

"… I went to ABSA bank and ask for extending this loan,… so a lot come from the loan and a lot come out of my own pocket."

Some students also mentioned that certain bursaries required certain criteria, before one can apply for a bursary:

"… a lot of criteria and this immediately cuts out anybody who wants to study … you don't even try to apply for the bursaries because of the unlikelihood of meeting the criteria,… I could not obtain a bursaries because my salary was too high."

" So no bursaries, no extra help besides me, myself and my bank."

Another aspect that was mentioned is the need for ethical approval to apply for financial assistance:

"… when you are waiting for ethical approval, you cannot apply for financial assistance as you need approval to apply for a bursary, so I did not apply for any bursary and had to financially support myself."

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Supervisory experiences

Isolation

Some students felt that they were isolated by supervisors from other students during their master's studies as stated below:

"…. I am isolated from other students, I don't ever see them unless at a workshop"

"…. almost like working on your own and for me that is a little bit difficult."

Family dynamics/personal circumstances

Students sometimes experience personal difficulties which may affect her/his studies and these can include family difficulties and personal circumstances.

The remarks below display the students' experiences:

" At that time I was newly married, I was working full-time in a hospital and I was part-time lecturing."

Another participant mentioned that:

" I had a miscarriage , I had a fall from a motorbike, was in hospital for two weeks and on crutches for twelve weeks."

" I got my ethical approval and I started to do my research and about a month into it, I got ill for three months."

Supervisor attitude/encouragement

One student put her perspective with regard to her supervisor experiences in a nutshell:

" He was inspiring, very motivating, a bit of slave driver at times but he was constantly there.

Some students experienced also positive attitudes from their supervisors:

" I felt comfortable with him, he could help me in the interaction we had with each other, he also was willing to listen to me."

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Delay in feedback

These comments should draw attention to how supervisors go about providing feedback to students. It could cause them to fail their degrees and waste unnecessary money which could or may have been used in other areas of life, as well as demotivate students with regard to completing their research studies. This could also reflect badly on the supervisors as well. Some student expressed their experiences obtaining feedback from supervisors:

" It took long for me to actually get a response from the supervisor."

"… frustrating for me at times when I had to wait for feedback from my supervisor.".

" This process is being unnecessarily dragged out and when I send her something and I know the division of nursing says they get two weeks or something were they can give feedback on it, sometimes I wait up until a month before any feedback is given, so it's very frustrating."

In addition, one student highlighted the fact that she could not finish her studies in time because of late feedback from her supervisor:

"… now I am unable to finish my studies because of this late feedback."

These comments portray how important a student-supervisor relationship should be with regard to the student obtaining good feedback and producing work of great merit.

Workplace dynamics/ support

Some students faced unexpected challenges in their workplace:

" I just can't take a day off, to come to class, I can't take off to come to see them (supervisor)."

" I did not have study leave so I had to do it in my own time and that was also challenging."

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Another student, experienced another aspect with regard to not having study leave:

" I remember one time with a workshop I had to swop with a colleague and that was not easy, it comes back to not having study leave."

The importance of granted study leave is highlighted by what a student said:

" I would love to get study leave for my master's."

Motivation to complete studies

Students were motivated by financial, personal and professional factors.
As one participant stated:

"… if I think of all the hours I have put in, all the money that went into this course, despite all the other challenges experienced, I want to finish it"

"… me and my now husband broke up,… so for a lot of people, I know that they would have broken down and get side tracked and not finish, but for me it was motivating."

"…was a bit of motivation and it would be nice to say, it is a little chip on the shoulder if you apply for work one day."

One student was driven by external motivation:

" I identified a need for breastfeeding support and promotion at my place of work…. so I can use it as a basis and that is what carried me through my master's programme and motivated me."

"I knew I had to finish or it would be another year of expenses."

Financial challenges were for this student a motivation to completing her studies in time:

" I did not have a bursary it came out of my pocket and I felt if I am spending this amount of money, I am going, I have to finish."

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For the following participant doing her master's is important for her career:

" I think doing a master's is important for career pathing."

Student and supervisor roles and responsibilities

The importance of knowing what the role of the supervisor was, was highlighted by what a student asked at a workshop:

" At the workshop I asked them specifically what is the role of the supervisor because I was not getting any support at all."

Some participants stated that the students need to discuss with their supervisor the type of guidance required:

" My supervisor is leading me and I am following."

"… the way he expected me to do things, I knew automatically that the expectation were much higher than I knew I could produce."

" I think her criticism has been helpful."

" There was no problem with communicating, getting full response from my supervisor."

DISCUSSION

The interviews used in this study provided a number of themes regarding research nursing master's student supervision needs and experiences with research supervision. Needs and experiences of master's students were drawn from the interviews with the nursing students. Postgraduate students are usually working at the same time and have family responsibilities. Being a student includes financial pressures which can make it difficult to achieve a steady progress with research (Manathunga, 2005:224). Contributions related to the improvement of practice were suggested by students themselves as they experienced these situations

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mentioned in the study. Areas that need improvement as suggested in literature include the provision of technical support, financial support, and computing resources similar with our findings (Abdulah & Evans, 2012:790). Other suggestions are that, producing a definite plan in writing with the division's view on good supervisory practice, establishing regular meetings between student and supervisor (Abiddin et al., 2009:15).

Students require social interaction for their academic success. In this study, it is evident that the level of social interaction was very low. Students reported feelings of isolation, which is a concern because isolation has been associated with high rates of termination of studies (Albertyn et al., 2008:760). Olivier (2007:1134) suggests that supervision on a one-to-one basis can result in isolation and alienation of the student. Group sessions for supervision have been recommended in literature (Samara, 2006:116). McClure (2005:15) states that candidates can have the opportunity to mingle in an informal social setting with fellow students, supervisors and staff to learn more about the university and their study programme. Supervision models that promote interaction amongst students include the workshop model, a conference model and a methodology group model (Conrad, Perry & Zuber-Skerritt, 1992).

Lack of skills and time management were highlighted by students in this study. Similarly, Albertyn et al. (2008:758) reported that some students lack skills to successfully complete their studies and have problems with finding time to conduct research and write up theses. Many universities use structured programmes to address critical skills focusing systematically on important topics that are more directive than responsive (Conrad, 2003:112). This is done using workshops which address typical needs of students rather than needs of particular students or a particular group of students (Conrad, 2003:112). These workshops may be disciplinary of multidisciplinary with topics ranging from research protocol

development and the research process to time management and juggling between, work, study and family lives. Such workshops are of value especially to academically weaker students.

Personal and professional crises during the time of the supervisory process have been documented in literature (McCormack, 2005:240). These may have an effect on the progress of a student. These may include bereavement, pregnancy and illness. Participants in this study also experienced family dynamics and personal circumstances which had an influence on their studies. Personal circumstances and pressure from employers were reasons for prolonged duration of study completion of studies (Albertyn et al. 2008:760). Obtaining study leave from employers can be challenging. In a study by Ives and Rowley (2005:542), it was reported that nearly all students interviewed had their supervision temporarily interrupted and progress on their thesis slowed by a variety of personal problems and illnesses.

Postgraduate students need support with specific skills for their studies, such as critical thinking, problem solving, time management, conceptualization and writing (Wisker, 2005:5). During supervision, supervisors engage in teaching strategies and providing challenging feedback to students (Manathunga, 2009:343). It is important for students to receive regular feedback in constructive and positive forms (Hathorn, Machtmes & Tillman, 2009:227). Master's students should be introduced to supervisors during the beginning of their master's degree and informed of support services offered by the institution. In addition, it is necessary for students strengths and weaknesses to be identified as different students require supervisory relationships ranging from a high level of dependency (top-down approach) to a high level of autonomy also known as the "hands-off approach" (McClure, 2005:13). The top-down approach is where the supervisor takes major responsibility and initiative for most aspects of the thesis while the

hands-off approach is when students are left to fend for themselves with little or no direct supervision (McGinty, Koo & Saeidi, 2010:524).

Students' understanding of key their roles and that of the supervisor is important in enhancing quality of work and timely completion. Misunderstandings have implications for expectations and can cause disappointments (Olivier, 2007:1128). Participants suggested that a student has to have a research planner/log so that both they and the supervisor can be aware of meetings and what each of the role and sole responsibilities of the supervisor and the student should be. The results emphasize that the main responsibility of a supervisor is to guide and give advice on the student's research and should do so in a timely fashion with respect towards the deadlines they provide the students with. This is echoed by Manathunga (2005:227) who states that through constant and careful monitoring, supervisors will hopefully be able to ensure timely completions for more students.

A good relationship between the supervisor and the student is very important in ensuring a smooth process of supervision. Conflicts can determine progress. The importance of an interpersonal relationship between graduate students and their supervisors as a determinant for student success is echoed in various other studies (Lessing & Schulze, 2002:147; Ives & Rowley, 2005:251). Adoption of a collaborative relationship between the supervisor and the student rather than an apprenticeship model is encouraged by Knowles (1999:).

Motivation plays a major role in success of student. A demotivated student is unlikely to excel. The motivational factors include gaining knowledge and fresh ideas, providing a change in work, aiming for promotion, personal satisfaction and pride (Albertyn et al. 2008:759).

LIMITATIONS

In qualitative research there is always a concern of potential researcher bias where the researcher may have interpreted the data according to her own perceptions rather than the perceptions of the participants. In interpretive research the researcher is the primary instrument who constructs and analyses the data and is thus challenged to keep an open mind, give a reflexive account of herself and develop emphatic listening skills. These challenges were addressed through the researcher clarifying her own assumptions and theoretical orientations about the study. The initiative in this study design stems from the research question and the main aim of the study, which is to explore the research supervision needs and experiences of nursing master's students. Taking the above-mentioned limitations into consideration, it is thus acknowledged that there is a possibility that the quality of this study could have been improved by addressing these limitations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are made;

- To integrate the learning process and the stages of conducting the research. Workshops could be spread over the length of the research work, taking into consideration, the needs of students.
- Platforms for students to interact physically and via internet should be created. Student's expectations and roles of both supervisors and students must be clarified in the beginning of supervision engagement.
- Guidelines for allocation of students to supervisors must be carefully developed to ensure that enough support is available to the student.
- Group sessions where students meet and share challenges and with each other and supervisors should be encouraged to prevent isolation. Such

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sessions should also be used to provide feedback and improving research and writing skills.

- Supervisors should be trained in supervision practice and models to improve their supervision skills.

CONCLUSION

This study will form a useful basis for determining areas for intervention to improve the potential of success in the research component of master's programme in nursing and other health sciences. Supervision is an important need for postgraduate students and its dynamics influence the ability for successful completion. With proper training and support of the nursing master's student, postgraduate research can be a rewarding experience for the student. Identifying needs and negative experiences with supervision can guide practice. Future research should target interventions to promote throughput of master's students and preparation of supervisors and students for the supervision process. Also it is imperative to consider supervision styles that support students and are more feasible for supervisors.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

This project received no funding.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

E.B. conducted the study for her master's thesis at Stellenbosch University, *O.K.* and *U.M.E.C.* were the main supervisor and co-supervisor respectively. *E.B.* obtained permission to conduct the study in the Division of Nursing and conducted the interviews. *E.B.* conducted the analysis and developed themes under the supervision of *O.K.* and *U.M.E.C.* All authors were involved in the preparation of the article for publication, obtaining ethical approval and editing of the final copy.

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PART B

APPENDICES

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR INTERVIEWS

TITLE: <u>RESEARCH SUPERVISION NEEDS AND EXPERIENCES OF NURSING</u>
<u>MASTER'S STUDENTS.</u>

The following topics were used to stimulate discussion regarding supervision needs and experiences in a face to face interviews.

1. How do you feel about being a research master student?

2. Is there anything about your supervision experience that you would like to talk about?

3. What do you consider to be the most positive aspects of the supervision you have experienced?

4. How would you like the supervision you have experienced to be improved?

5. What are a master's student research supervision needs to successfully complete studies?

6. What are the issues in postgraduate supervision?

7. What are the challenges during the research?

CONSENT FORM

TITLE OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT:

RESEARCH SUPERVISION NEEDS AND EXPERIENCES OF THE NURSING MASTER'S STUDENTS IN NURSING

REFERENCE NUMBER: N09/02/073

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Mrs. EvelynBock

ADDRESS:STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY

CONTACT NUMBER: +27 21 938 9095
RESEARCHER: Mrs. Evelyn Bock (Contact number cell nr 0729092077 or email: nikolai@telkomsa.net)

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Please take some time to read the information presented here, which will explain the details of this project. Please ask the study staff any questions about any part of this project that you do not fully understand. It is very important that you are fully satisfied that you clearly understand what this research entails and how you could be involved. Also, your participation is **entirely voluntary** and you are free to decline to participate. If you say no, this will not affect you negatively in any way whatsoever. You are also free to withdraw from the study at any point, even if you do agree to take part.

This study must still be approved by the Committee for Postgraduate Research at Stellenbosch University.

What is this research study all about?

The aim of the study is to: (1) explore the needs of master's students for successful completion of the research component; (2) explore the experiences students relate to research supervision; (3) explore perceptions of students on supervision roles at Stellenbosch University's Division of Nursing. **The aim of this study is to explore the research supervision needs and experiences of the nursing master's**

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students in the Division of Nursing Division in the Department of Health Sciences at Stellenbosch University. We would like to know if you would be willing to participate in the study. A number of twelve students will be used in this study.

Why have you been invited to participate?

The study focuses on the 2008– 2010cohort of students that participated in the nursing master's program.

What will your responsibilities be?

Participants who agreed to participate will take part in individual interviews (lasting 30 to 45 minutes), where interview guides are used. The interviews will be recorded on an audio tape and transcribed. If you cannot honour the appointment date, please contact the research on 0729092077. The participants will be required to sign the consent form below on the date of appointment before being interviewed.

Will you benefit from taking part in this research?

Current and future students will benefit from this study. Possible intervention strategies can potentially emanate from this study topromote improved success in students completing master's degrees.

Are there any risks involved in your taking part in this research?

There are no risks involved in this study.

Will you be paid to take part in this study and are there any costs involved?

No, you will not be paid to take part in this study and there are also no costs involved

Is there anything else that you should know or do?

You will receive a copy of this information and consent form for your own records.

Declaration by participant

By signing below, I ………………………………..…………. agree to take part in a research study entitled (RESEARCH SUPERVISION NEEDS AND EXPERIENCES OF MASTER'S STUDENTS IN NURSING.)

I declare that:

- I have read or had read to me this information and consent form and it is written in a language with which I am fluent and comfortable.

- I have had a chance to ask questions and all my questions have been adequately answered.

- I understand that taking part in this study is **voluntary** and I have not been pressurized to take part.

- I may choose to leave the study at any time and will not be penalized or prejudiced in any way.

- I may be asked to leave the study before it has finished, if the researcher feels it is in my best interests, or if I do not follow the study plan, as agreed to.

Signed at (*place*) ....….........…………….. on (*date*) …………...………. 2012.

....
Signature of participant   Signature of witness

Declaration by investigator

I *(name)* …………………………………………..……… declare that:

- I explained the information in this document to …………………………………..
- I encouraged him/her to ask questions and took adequate time to answer them.
- I am satisfied that he/she adequately understands all aspects of the research, as discussed above
- I did/did not use an interpreter. (*If an interpreter is used then the interpreter must sign the declaration below.*

Signed at (*place*) ....….........…………….. on (*date*) …………....……….. 2012.

....

Signature of investigator   Signature of witness

Declaration by interpreter

I *(name)* ………………………………………..……… declare that:

- I assisted the investigator (*name*) ………………………………………. to

    explain the information in this document to (*name of participant*)

    ……………..…………………………….. using the language medium of

    Afrikaans/English

- We encouraged him/her to ask questions and took adequate time to answer them.

- I conveyed a factually correct version of what was related to me.

- I am satisfied that the participant fully understands the content of this informed consent document and has had all his/her question satisfactorily answered.

Signed at (*place*) ....…........…………….. on (*date*) …………....……….. 2012.

....

Signature of interpreter   Signature of witness

LETTERS FROM ETHICS

UNIVERSITEIT·STELLENBOSCH·UNIVERSITY
jou kennisvennoot · your knowledge partner

17 May 2011   MAILED

Prof UME Chikte
Department of Interdisciplinary Health Sciences
Stellenbosch University
PO Box 19063
Tygerberg
7505

Dear Prof Chikte

"Enhancing postgraduate supervision as a scholarly academic practice in the department of Interdisciplinary Health Sciences."

ETHICS REFERENCE NO: N09/02/073

RE : AMENDMENT

Your letter dated 6 May 2011 refers.

The Chairperson of the Health Research Ethics Committee approved the amended documentation in accordance with the authority given to him by the Committee.

The following amendments were approved:
- Substudy that focusses on on research supervision needs and experiences of nursing master's students.

Yours faithfully

MRS MERTRUDE DAVIDS
RESEARCH DEVELOPMENT AND SUPPORT
Tel: 021 938 9207 / E-mail: mertrude@sun.ac.za
Fax: 021 931 3352

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Fakulteit Gesondheidswetenskappe · Faculty of Health Sciences

Verbind tot Optimale Gesondheid · Committed to Optimal Health
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Posbus/PO Box 19063 · Tygerberg 7505 · Suid-Afrika/South Africa
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UNIVERSITEIT • STELLENBOSCH • UNIVERSITY
jou kennisvennoot • your knowledge partner

18 July 2011

Mr Oswell Khondowe
Dept of Interdisciplinary Health Sciences
Stellenbosch University
PO Box 19063
TYGERBERG
7505

E-mail: oswell@sun.ac.za

Dear Mr Khondowe

INSTITUTIONAL PERMISSION FOR RESEARCH PROJECT N09/02/073
*("Enhancing postgraduate supervision as a scholarly academic practice in the Department of
Interdisciplinary Health Sciences")*

I refer to your request for institutional permission for Ms Evelyn Bock to contact students who
enrolled for the Masters in Nursing Science programme between 2008 up until 2010 for interviews
and participation in a focus group with regards to the above-mentioned project.

Institutional permission is granted that you can give her the contact details of these students
providing that it is used for the purpose of this study only.

Kind regards

PROF JAN BOTHA
SENIOR DIRECTOR:
INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH AND PLANNING

R permission N09/02/073 Evelyn Bock.doc

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CURATIONIS GUIDELINES FOR AUTHORS

Cover page

The format of the **compulsory cover letter** forms part of your submission and is located on the first page of your manuscript and should always be presented in English. You should provide all of the following elements:

- **Article title:** Provide a short title of 50 characters or less.
- **Significance of work:** Briefly state the significance of the work being reported on.
- **Full author details:** Title(s), Full name(s), Position(s), Affiliation(s) and contact details (postal address, email, telephone and cellular number) of each author.
- **Corresponding author:** Indicate to whom all correspondence should be addressed to.
- **Authors' contributions:** Briefly summarise the nature of the contribution made by each of the authors listed, along the lines of the following: *J.K. was the project leader, L.M.N. and A.B. were responsible for experimental and project design. L.M.N. performed most of the experiments. P.R. made conceptual contributions and S.T., U.V. and C.D. performed some of the experiments. S.M. and V.C. prepared the samples and calculations were performed by C.S., J.K. and U.V. wrote the manuscript.*
- **Possible reviewers:** Authors are encouraged to provide the names and full contact details (including email) of two or three potential referees to evaluate the work (referees should not be people with whom the researcher has recently collaborated or published).
- **Summary:** Lastly, a list containing the number of words, pages, tables, figures and/or other supplementary material should accompany the submission.

Article structure

Submission language: English (UK)

Title: The article's full title should contain a maximum of 95 characters (including spaces).

Abstract (first-level heading)

- Do not cite references in the abstract.
- Do not use abbreviations excessively in the abstract.
- The abstract should be written in English.
- The abstract should be no longer than 250 words and must be written in the past tense. The abstract should give a succinct account of the objectives, methods, results and significance of the matter. The structured abstract for an Original Research article should consist of five paragraphs labelled Background, Objectives, Method, Results and Conclusion.
  - **Background:** *Why do we care about the problem?* The context and purpose of the study (what practical, scientific or theoretical gap is your research filling?).
  - **Objectives:** *What problem are you trying to solve*? What is the scope of your work (a generalised approach, or for specific situation). Be careful not to use too much jargon.
  - **Method:** *How did you go about solving or making progress on the problem*? How the study was performed and statistical tests used (what did you actually do to get the results). Clearly express the basic design of the study, name or briefly describe the basic methodology used without going into excessive detail. Be sure to indicate the key techniques used.

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- **Results:** *What is the answer?* The main findings (as a result of completing the above procedure/study what did you learn/invent/create?). Identify trends, relative change or differences on answers to questions.

- **Conclusion:** *What are the implications of your answer?* Brief summary and potential implications (what are the larger implications of your findings, especially for the problem/gap identified in your motivation?).

Introduction   (first-level   heading)

The introduction contains two subsections, namely the background section and the literature review.

- **Problem statement (second-level heading):** The setting section should be written from the standpoint of readers, that is, without specialist knowledge in that area and must clearly state and illustrate the introduction to the research and its aims in the context of previous work bearing directly on the subject. The setting section to the article normally contains the following five elements.

  - **Aims of the study/Key focus (third-level heading):** A thought-provoking introductory statement on the broad theme or topic of the research.

  - **Background (third-level heading):** Providing the background or the context to the study (explaining the role of other relevant key variables in this study);

  - **Trends (third-level heading):** Cite the most important published studies previously conducted on this topic or that has any relevance to this study (provide a high-level synopsis of the research literature on this topic).

- o **Research objectives (third-level heading):** Indicate the most important controversies, gaps and inconsistencies in the literature that will be addressed by this study. In view of the above trends, state the core research problem and specific research objectives that will be addressed in this study and provide the reader with an outline of what to expect in the rest of the article.
- o **Definition of key concepts (third-level heading)**
- o **Contribution to field (third-level heading):** Explanation of the study's academic (theoretical and methodological) or practical merit and/or importance (provide the value-add and/or rationale for the study).

- **Literature review (second-level heading):** The literature review is the second subsection under the Introduction and provides a brief and concise overview of the literature under a separate second-level heading, e.g. literature review. A synthesis and critical evaluation of the literature (not a compilation of citations and references) should at least include or address the following elements, ensure these are in the literature review. Define conceptual (theoretical) definitions of all key concepts; A critical review and summary of previous research findings (theories, models, frameworks, etc.) on the topic; A clear indication of the gap in the literature and for the necessity to address this void; and A clearly established link exists between formulated research objectives and theoretical support from the relevant literature.

Research method and design (first-level heading)

This section should include:

- **Design (second-level heading):** Describe your experimental design clearly, including a power calculation if appropriate. Note: Additional details can be placed in the online supplementary location.
- **Materials (second-level heading):** Describe the type of organism(s) or material(s) involved in the study.
- **Data collection method/Procedure (second-level heading):** Describe the protocol for your study in sufficient detail (clear description of all interventions and comparisons) that other scientists could repeat your work to verify your findings.
- **Data analysis (second-level heading):** Describe how the data were summarised and analysed, additional details can be placed in the online supplementary information.
- **Context of the study (second-level heading):** Describe the site and setting where your field study was conducted.

Results (first-level heading)

This section provides a synthesis of the obtained literature grouped or categorised according to some organising or analysis principle.

Tables may be used and/or models may be drafted to indicate key components of the results of the study.

- Organise the results based on the sequence of Tables and Figures you will include in the manuscrip.
- The body of the Results section is a text presentation of the key findings which includes references to each of the Tables and Figures.

- Statistical test summaries (test name, p-value) are usually reported parenthetically in conjunction with the biological results they support, use SI unit.

- Present the results of your experiment(s)/research data in a sequence that will logically support (or provide evidence against) the hypothesis, or answer the question, stated in the Introduction.

All units should conform to the**SI convention**and be abbreviated accordingly. Metric units and their international symbols are used throughout, as is the decimal point (not the decimal comma).

Ethical considerations (first-level heading)
Articles based on the involvement of animals or humans must have been conducted in accordance with relevant national and international guidelines. Approval must have been obtained for all protocols from the author's institutional or other relevant ethics committee and the institution name and permit numbers provided at submission.

- **Potential benefits and hazards (second-level heading):** What risks to the subject are entailed in involvement in the research? Are there any potential physical, psychological or disclosure dangers that can be anticipated? What is the possible benefit or harm to the subject or society from their participation or from the project as a whole? What procedures have been established for the care and protection of subjects (e.g. insurance, medical cover) and the control of any information gained from them or about them?

- **Recruitment procedures (second-level heading):** Was there any sense in which subjects might be 'obliged' to participate – as in the case of students, prisoners, learners or patients – or were volunteers being recruited? If participation was compulsory, the potential consequences of

non-compliance must be indicated to subjects; if voluntary, entitlement to withdraw consent must be indicated and when that entitlement lapses.

- **Informed consent (second-level heading):** Authors must include how informed consent was handled in the study.

- **Data protection (second-level heading):** Authors must include in detail the way in which data protection was handled.

Trustworthiness (first-level heading)

This refers to the findings of the study being based on the discovery of human experience as it was experienced and observed by the participants.

- **Reliability (second-level heading):** Reliability is the extent to which an experiment, test, or any measuring procedure yields the same result on repeated trials. Without the agreement of independent observers able to replicate research procedures, or the ability to use research tools and procedures that yield consistent measurements, researchers would be unable to satisfactorily draw conclusions, formulate theories, or make claims about the generalisability of their research.

- **Validity (second-level heading):** Validity refers to the degree to which a study accurately reflects or assesses the specific concept that the researcher is attempting to measure. While reliability is concerned with the accuracy of the actual measuring instrument or procedure, validity is concerned with the study's success at measuring what the researchers set out to measure. Researchers should be concerned with both external and internal validity. External validity refers to the extent to which the results of a study are generalisable or transferable. Internal validity refers to (1) the rigor with which the study was conducted (e.g. the study's design, the care

taken to conduct measurements, and decisions concerning what was and wasn't measured) and (2) the extent to which the designers of a study have taken into account alternative explanations for any causal relationships they explore. In studies that do not explore causal relationships, only the first of these definitions should be considered when assessing internal validity.

Discussion   (first-level   heading)

This section normally contains the following four elements. It is suggested that sub-headings are used in this section:

- **Outline of the results (second-level heading):** Restate the main objective of the study and reaffirm the importance of the study by restating its main contributions; summarise the results in relation to each stated research objective or research hypothesis; link the findings back to the literature and to the results reported by other researchers; provide explanations for unexpected results.
- **Practical implications (second-level heading):** Reaffirm the importance of the study by restating its main contributions and provide the implications for the practical implementation your research.

Limitations of the study (first-level heading): Point out the possible limitations of the study and provide suggestions for future research.

Recommendations (first-level heading): Provide the recommendations emerging out of the current research.

Conclusion (first-level heading)

This should state clearly the main conclusions of the research and give a clear explanation of their importance and relevance, with a recommendation for future research (implications for practice). Provide a brief conclusion that restates the objectives; the research design; the results and their meaning.

Acknowledgements (first-level heading)

If, through your study, you received any significant help in conceiving, designing, or carrying out the work, or received materials from someone who did you a favour by supplying them, you must acknowledge their assistance and the service or material provided. **Authors should always acknowledge outside reviewers of their drafts and any sources of funding that supported the research.**

- **Competing interests (second-level heading):** A competing interest exists when your interpretation of data or presentation of information may be influenced by your personal or financial relationship with other people or organisations that can potentially prevent you from executing and publishing unbiased research. Authors should disclose any financial competing interests but also any non-financial competing interests that may cause them embarrassment were they to become public after the publication of the manuscript. **Where an author gives no competing interests, the listing will read 'The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationship(s) which may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this paper.'**

- **Authors' contributions (second-level heading):** This section is necessary to give appropriate credit to each author, and to the authors' applicable institution. The individual contributions of authors should be specified with their affiliation at the time of the study and completion of the work. An 'author' is generally considered to be someone who has made

substantive intellectual contributions to a published study. Contributions made by each of the authors listed, along the lines of the following (please note the use of author initials):

J.K. (University of Pretoria) was the project leader, L.M.N. (University of KwaZulu-Natal) and A.B. (University of Stellenbosch) were responsible for experimental and project design. L.M.N. performed most of the experiments. P.R. made conceptual contributions and S.T. (University of Cape Town), U.V. (University of Cape Town) and C.D. (University of Cape Town) performed some of the experiments. S.M. (Cape Peninsula University of Technology) and V.C. (Cape Peninsula University of Technology) prepared the samples and calculations were performed by C.S., J.K. (Cape Peninsula University of Technology) and U.V. wrote the manuscript.

References (first-level heading)

Begin the reference list on a separate page with no more than 60 references. *Curationis* uses the **Harvard referencing style**, details of which can be downloaded from the journal website. **Note: No other style will be permitted.**