

Culture and language-aware nursing in South Ostrobothnia –CareEP Project

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Introduction

The nursing shortage in the Southern Ostrobothnia region as reported by Yle news (February 2023), has surged sixfold in just two years. This critical shortage of nursing workforce is attributed to global shortages, the rising prevalence of chronic diseases and an aging population. Concurrently, a distinct challenge appears in retaining nurses of foreign backgrounds with Finnish as a second language. Despite Seinäjoki University of Applied Science SeAMK producing a cohort of international nursing graduates annually, local healthcare organizations are struggling to effectively integrate and employ these new professionals. Recognizing the severity of this situation, Seinäjoki University of Applied Science launched the project named “Culture and Language-aware Nursing” in South Ostrobothnia (CareEP) Project in February 2023. The project is funded by the European Social Fund which spans from 1.2.2023-31.1.2026. The project hopes to bridge the nursing shortage as well as enhance the integration of international nursing students and graduates which will fulfill the urgent demand of qualified healthcare workforce within the healthcare industry, promoting a more integrated international workforce in the Finnish healthcare system.

Scope of the project

The CareEP project is focused on ensuring the availability of qualified nurses, especially in the South Ostrobothnia region. The models developed in the project will be used to support the clinical placement of the nursing students, the acquisition of the necessary language skills and to tailor individual qualification pathways for nurses who have been trained outside the EU/EEA countries. By matching nurses with foreign backgrounds to positions that align with their skills, the project looks to alleviate shortages in healthcare organizations. Additionally, the project aims to increase cultural and linguistic awareness in nursing organizations, promote the clinical placement of nursing students studying at SeAMK and nurses who have completed their education outside the EU/EEA, and enhance employment opportunities for students after graduation. The target groups of the project include international nursing students with Finnish as a second language, nurses trained outside the EU/EEA countries, and healthcare organizations that provide clinical placements, internships, and potential employment opportunities for these individuals.

The primary aim of the CareEP project is to enhance cultural and language awareness within nursing organizations through the implementation of comprehensive work packages. The project includes four distinct work packages, each with its own goals, aims, and implementation methodologies:

- Provincial applicant activity model to seek nurses with foreign backgrounds within the region.
- Guidance and support for nursing students with foreign backgrounds and foreign nurses with prior nursing degrees.
- Promotion of cultural and language awareness in healthcare organizations.
- Project management and communication.

Finnish Language and Clinical Placements

Finnish language barriers have hindered the clinical placements and employment opportunities of international nursing students (Korhonen et al., 2019). To address these challenges, Binu Acharya, an RDI (Research, Development, and Innovation) expert working on the CareEP project, is helping international nursing students from SeAMK with their language learning during clinical placements. Clinical placements play a crucial role in nursing education by allowing students to apply theoretical knowledge in real-life healthcare settings under the guidance of experienced nurses. These clinical placements provide students with the opportunity to deliver holistic care to patients, preparing them for future nursing careers (Jamshidi et al., 2016).

The language support model within the CareEP project is currently being developed. The project has conducted language workshops named “Hoida suomeksi työpaja” for international nursing students from various nursing groups. These workshops aim to motivate students to learn professional Finnish language. During the workshops, students engage in reading, writing, speaking, and understanding the nursing professional language. Through this, nursing students learn nursing and medical terminologies, diseases, symptoms, nurse-patient interactions, and the nursing care process. The language workshops serve as preparation for nursing students beginning their clinical placements in the South Ostrobothnia region, alongside the compulsory language courses provided by the institution. These workshops are conducted at SeAMK.

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For more information, visit https://projektit.app-staging.seamk.hion.dev/hyvinvointi-ja-luovuus/careep/**Binu Acharya**
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