

by

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**Background:** Bullying in the workplace has negative influences on the physical and psychological health of nurses and their quality care. Many nursing students experience reality shock and are anxious to 'fit in' their roles (Newton & Mckenna, 2007; Malouf & West, 2011). Moreover, nursing students are particularly vulnerable to bullying behaviors and incivility for a variety of reasons: they are often younger, have less clinical and life experience, fewer acquired coping skills, very basic understanding of the work-place environment's hierarchy (Dellasega, 2009), and less familiarity with the standards and environment (Andrews et al., 2005).

Studies on clinical practice settings have exposed the existence and widespread phenomenon of staff nurse bullying toward student nurses throughout the institutional hierarchy. Bullying and incivility is strongly correlated to an increased intent to leave the nursing profession for both experienced and novice nurses (Johnson & Rae, 2009; Laschinger et al., 2010). Additionally, student nurses (90%) who have experienced or witnessed bullying behaviors in their clinical placements have reported being adamant about not wanting to work in similar areas upon graduation (Curtis, Bowen & Reid, 2007). Contributing to this problem is the stress that senior students feel about transforming into professional nurses, a transition that is intimidating (Edwards et al., 2015). The preparedness of senior student nurses about to enter the workforce remains a challenge for the nursing profession.



**Methods:** A unique, preparatory program for senior, fourth year nursing student has been underway for the past 3 years. This program includes a **classroom workshop** along with **2 days of human simulation** (with actors).

The academic course goals are to:

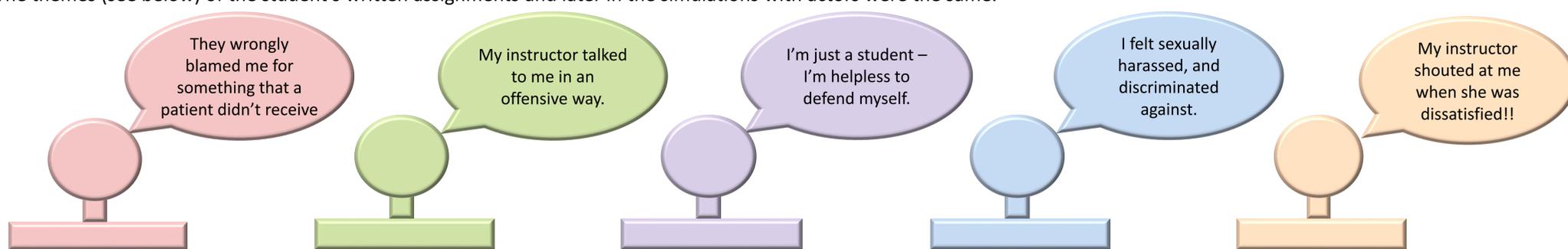
1. Enable nursing students to disclose bullying experiences in the clinical learning experience
2. Introduce the concept of assertiveness, and personal and professional boundaries
3. Encourage nursing students to develop social awareness within the workplace
4. Guide students to self-identify and position themselves within the nursing staff
5. Practice skills of recognizing uncomfortable and difficult situations, and coping with conflict

**The course** was designed to accompany the last clinical practicum – so that students could link their clinical practicum experiences with the course; and the course discussions would resonate with their clinical experience. The course uses small group workshops with many reflective exercises about situations or interactions that might occur or have occurred with the nursing staff. The focus is to address uncomfortable, aggressive and bullying interactions. By students sharing and analyzing these situations together, the educator can help students develop common themes and insights, thereby enriching their repertoire of responses. The assignments in the course are to describe and analyze specific events that they **perceive as offensive** and that **the nursing staff passed the red line**.

**Simulation.** The students bring their written assignments describing offensive or problematic events to the two-day human simulation (with actors) training. The actors play the student's role while the students direct the actors on what to do. Meanwhile, the students portray the other staff members. The two strategies - **reversal of roles** and **directing the event** – enable the students to be spectators and more objectively assess their emotional attachment and responses to the events. The result is the higher awareness of the social environment within the workplace, which gives students a different perspective. The emotional and cognitive processes that take place in the simulations resonate back to the course through the students' reflection and discussion.

## Results:

The themes (see below) of the student's written assignments and later in the simulations with actors were the same.



An example of simulation, and the process of role-playing of bullying event with a resident physician:



I was at clinical practice in surgery when a resident physician in a crass way asked me to leave the room.



Simulation 1: As myself, a nursing student, I felt insulted, embarrassed and didn't want to leave.



Simulation 2: As the resident physician, I understand that he was under pressure to complete a complicated procedure.



Simulation 3: As my clinical instructor, I felt proud that my student asserted himself and responded appropriately.



Simulation 4: I return to my original role as a nursing student and responded to the resident physician in more mindful and honest way.



Summary of the simulation: My interpretation of situation is less personal and takes into account all the individuals involved.

## Conclusions:

1. Students undergo a transformation process from being emotional and less aware of their part in a given situation, to take ownership of their responses within the context of their physical, social and professional environment.
2. This transformation is the result of the simulation and role-playing, during which students become spectators and take on roles to better understand other perspectives.

**Bibliography available upon request.**