Introducing poverty to nursing students through a simulation

Simulation based learning is used across the medical field and has been applied to teaching poverty in secondary education. This method is particularly effective in combating misconceptions and stereotypes about poverty. Through greater awareness and understanding of these hardships, participants are better equipped to empathize with and effectively serve their population.

Additionally, those living in poverty are less likely to engage in healthy lifestyles, including adequate nutrition and physical activity. Professionals across disciplines often work with an uninformed/experienced mind; there is very limited enlightenment the simulation event had on each individual participant.

Importance to Nursing

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Community Action Poverty Simulation (CAPS)

The CAPS is a learning tool designed to improve knowledge and beliefs regarding those living in poverty. This includes everyday struggles faced with acquiring safe, basic needs (food and shelter), time constraints, child care and family obligations, navigating and obtaining social services and resources, education, health care, and transportation.

During the simulation, participants are assigned a role as a member of a low-income family. As the simulation plays out, each family must successfully acquire the basic needs for one month by completing tasks such as paying rent, buying food, going to work or school, and traveling to community resources to meet their needs.

Each week is represented by a 15-minute time period when community resources are open, and a three minute weekend to discuss and strategize with the rest of their family unit.

Simulation community organizations and businesses are staffed with local community members who have first-hand experience living in poverty. As the simulation plays out, each family must successfully acquire the basic needs for one month by completing tasks such as paying rent, buying food, going to work or school, and traveling to community resources to meet their needs.

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At the completion of the simulation, a large group debrief occurs, where students are encouraged to speak about their experiences and interact with the community volunteers.

Common themes emerged throughout the debrief. The main overarching theme was the personal impact and enlightenment the simulation event had on each individual participant.

In their reflections, participants discussed how difficult, stressful, and emotional it was to be poor.

Participants came away from the experience with a greater understanding of how much time and effort goes into navigating life at the poverty level; between limited transportation, childcare, employment, and limited social service resources, most families were not successful at paying the bills and providing basic necessities, including food, shelter, and healthcare.

Students Statement

“I have gained a new perspective on the struggle that poor Americans endure. I could never have truly understood the challenges that people in poverty face until I experienced it myself.”

“I will always remember this experience and how it changed my perspective on life in poverty. I now understand the hardships that people in poverty face and hope to be able to support them in any way possible.”

“I believe that most of all, I will be mindful to treat every individual with dignity, respect, and compassion. I will recognize that everyone I meet is experiencing personal struggles, making it a point not to add to these life stressors.”

“This experience has reminded me to be patient and not become frustrated when I am working with other people because I do not know what is happening in these people’s lives. This mindset is applicable to my patients in the future. I will work towards being an empathetic healthcare provider and will strive everyday to give culturally competent care.”

Benefits to Students

Students benefit from this type of educational/clinical setting.

Improved social responsibility

Improved citizenship skills

The ability to improve knowledge and attitudes, and influence the way they perform in the future.

Improved assessment and clinical skills.