Poverty Simulation: A Pedagogical Approach to Population Health for Future Healthcare Professionals

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Poverty impacts every aspect of life; those interacting with the poor often do not have an understanding of the daily difficulties that are experienced, perpetuating the poverty cycle. Poverty in America is one of the greatest social and public health issues of the 21st century; it has a major impact on every aspect of life and has major implications for those interacting with people who are struggling. Health disparities are extremely prevalent; they are disproportionately likely to suffer from overall poor health and chronic health problems, including cardiovascular disease, obesity, metabolic syndrome and mental health issues. Those living in poverty may not have the means to improve their health status; many low-income families are uninsured or are unable to afford doctors’ visits and prescriptions even with government aid. 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/unexperienced mind; there is very limited understanding of life in poverty, often filled with misconceptions and stereotypes. However, through greater awareness and understanding of these hardships, professionals across many disciplines can work towards reducing these barriers and helping poor Americans improve their health status. The secondary education sector is an optimal place to reach the upcoming generation of professionals as they are being molded to better serve their population through their chosen field. Simulation as an educational tool is a valuable tool, staged social interaction can be used to improve conceptual clarity about real-life situations and circumstances. Simulation based learning is used across the medical field and has broad applications including improving knowledge, confidence, competence, and critical thinking in any discipline. Introducing poverty to nursing students through a simulation experience has the ability to improve knowledge and attitudes, and influence the way they perform in the future.

Title:
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References:

Abstract Summary:
Poverty is a reality for many Americans. Understanding the complexity of poverty will help nursing students better understand why their patients maybe unable to comply with healthcare instructions and how to help them lead healthier lives.

Content Outline:
Simulation based learning is frequently used in nursing this type of experiences can improve knowledge, confidence, competence, and critical thinking. Introducing poverty to students across disciplines through a simulation experience has the ability to improve knowledge and attitudes and influence the way they care for patients. The nursing department at The College of New Jersey (TCNJ) purchased the Community Action Poverty Simulation (CAPS) from the Missouri Action Committee® in 2016. 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. 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.

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