Preparing Nurses to Provide Primary Palliative Care: Outcomes of an Experiential Learning Project

Toni L. Glover, PhD, GNP-BC, ACHPN
Ann L. Horgas, RN, PhD, FGSA, FAAN
Susan Bluck, PhD
Sheri Kittelson, MD
Paula Turpening, MN, ANP-BC, ACHPN
Disclosure

The authors have no financial disclosures to report
Session Objectives

• Describe the Comfort Shawl Project – an innovative experiential learning project that provides explicit training in primary palliative nursing care.

• Discuss outcomes on attitudes toward death, empathy, and confidence in providing primary palliative care among nursing students.

• Discuss the project impact on students’ written responses and narrative reflections.
Background and Significance

- Worldwide population aging and the growing number of individuals living longer with serious illness increases the need for palliative care.
- The World Health Organization defines palliative care:

  an approach that improves the quality of life of patients and their families facing problems associated with life-threatening illness, through the prevention and relief of suffering by means of early identification and impeccable assessment and treatment of pain and other problems, physical, psychosocial, and spiritual.
Background and Significance

• The nursing role includes providing compassionate care at the end of life, yet many nurses feel unprepared to provide care. (American Nurses Association [ANA], 2016)

• The nurse spends the most time with patients and is the most trusted of all healthcare professions. (Gallup, 2018)

• Nursing experts developed the CARES competencies to identify palliative care skills all nursing students should achieve prior to graduation. (Ferrell, Mazanec, Malloy & Virani, 2016)

• Observing positive role models in practice can enhance student learning. (Kolb, 2015)
The Comfort Shawl Project

The project began in 2014 with three goals:

1. Provide handcrafted comfort shawls to patients receiving palliative care.
2. Provide nursing students the opportunity to have meaningful interactions with patients and families facing a serious or life-threatening illness.
3. Foster community involvement and intergenerational engagement between nursing students and volunteers.
Methods

• Data collection occurred at the beginning, mid-point and end of the immersion experience.

• CARES competencies
  – 14 competencies aligned with the goals of the Comfort Shawl Project

• Death Attitudes Profile (Wong, Reker & Gesser, 1994)
  – Fear of Death
  – Death Attitudes Profile

• Interpersonal Reactivity Index (Davis, 1983)
  – Empathic Concern
  – Perspective Taking
Setting and Participants

- Large academic medical center in the southeastern United States.
- Nine female nursing students who voluntarily participated between June 2016 and April 2017.
- A total of 234 shawls were gifted to patients of all ages for a variety of illnesses including cancer, heart disease, dementia, stroke, and congenital conditions.
- All procedures were approved by the Institutional Review Board.
- Data was analyzed using SPSS. (IBM, version 25)
Research Question

Did the Comfort Shawl Project result in significant changes in CARES competencies, death attitudes, and empathy for senior nursing students who voluntarily participated?
Results

Change in CARES Competency Scores

Mean Correct

Time of Measurement

* p < .05
Students’ Responses to Gifting

• After each gifting experience, students wrote three words that described the experience.
• Responses were content-analyzed.
• Common responses reflected the categories of:
  – Comfort and Kindness
  – Thankfulness and Appreciation
Students’ Narratives Reflect CARES

- After each gifting experience, students wrote a narrative gifting reflection.
- Narratives were content-coded for themes relevant to the CARES competencies.
  - Individual Values and Diversity
  - Compassionate Communication
  - Fostering Quality of Life
  - Self-Insight and Emotion
- The most frequently reported CARES competency in the students narratives recognized individual values and diversity.
Results

Change in Fear of Death

Change in Death Acceptance

* $p = .02$

* $p = .04$
Results

Change in Empathic Perspective Taking

Change in Empathic Concern

* * p < .05

* * p = .06
Conclusions

• Participation in the Comfort Shawl Project resulted in students having increased confidence in providing primary palliative care.
• Students participating in the Comfort Shawl Project had less fear and greater acceptance of death compared to students who completed the ELNEC-Undergraduate modules.
• Through experiential learning students internalize the key nursing concepts of *caring* and *compassion* by interacting with patients and families receiving palliative care.
References


