Introduction & Research Goal

Many nurses do not have or use effective therapeutic communication skills. Among the findings in the global nursing research literature, nurses’ use of therapeutic communication:

- Helped circumvent dehumanizing treatment of patients with Alzheimer’s disease
- Helped cancer patients cope with their illness
- Facilitated effective nurse-patient relationships that led to patients taking greater autonomy in their care
- Influenced the nurse-patient therapeutic relationship and the quality of patient care provided
- Facilitated strong emotional support during childbirth with women who had a history of miscarriage

Continued rising healthcare costs necessitate low-cost solutions to healthcare problems. This study compared the efficacy of two low-cost interventions in increasing nursing students’ use of therapeutic communication.

Methods

BSN students taking Mental Health Nursing were randomly assigned to one of four groups. Yates’ Staff-Patient Interaction Response Scale for Palliative Care Nursing (SPIRS-PCN) was used to measure therapeutic communication three times:

- Pretest (start of semester)
- Posttest (end of semester)
- 3-month follow-up

Weekly emails were sent to the email and email + quick reference guide groups between the pretest and posttest. Participants typed a response to each patient statement. Two mental health faculty members independently rated the level of therapeutic communication each response exhibited, on a scale of 1-9, using definitions of each level. Discrepancies were resolved by discussion.

417 participants had 20% or less missing data. Of those, 64 students took the instrument all three times – pretest, posttest, 3-month follow-up. Analyses were based on the 64 full-set responses.

Results

A linear mixed model analysis revealed:

- A significant effect for time
- A significant effect for treatment
- No significant interaction between time and treatment.

Conclusion

Weekly email reminders and examples of nurse-patient therapeutic communication can increase nursing students’ development of this critical skill.

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References