Implementing Moral Distress and Burnout in Nursing Education: A Preliminary Study

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Introduction

Moral Distress is defined as: when one knows the right thing to do, but institutional constraints make it nearly impossible to pursue the right course of action (Baldwin, 2010). It is the prominent factor of burnout, which leads to increased nurse turnover, low job satisfaction, and decreased quality in patient care.

Although moral distress has been studied since 1984, there is a lack of preventative interventions to decrease the consequences as a result of these issues. Whether integrated into the nursing school curriculum or through workshops, there is a need to educate nursing students of the phenomenon of moral distress and how it leads to burnout. This is necessary to increase their awareness and understanding of these issues and to provide students the tools necessary to build resilience.

Methods

A small-scale study was conducted by undergraduate nursing students through a one-day conference addressing moral distress, burnout, and coping strategies. The conference consisted of:

- **Keynote Opening Speaker** by a nurse researcher addressing the importance of mental health and suicide prevention in nurses
- **Four breakout sessions** led by two nurse educators, a clinical ethicist, and an organizational leadership and communication professor and author.
- A panel of experts consisting of all prior speakers, social workers, and students who have faced moral distress.
- **Closing Speaker** by the founder of the conference discussing action steps consisting of all prior speakers, social workers, and mentors.

The study was then evaluated through a survey given to the 75 nurses and students that attended the conference.

Results

Out of the 105 individuals registered, 75 attended: 14 experienced nurses, 54 nursing students, and 7 non-nursing graduate students.

Conclusions

Collectively, the feedback from the conference highlighted the significance of implementing an intervention to decrease moral distress within the nursing education. It further solidified the need for an increase in education regarding moral distress and burnout in the nursing curriculum and to hold the conference annually.

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References
