Title: Supporting the Childbearing Family: An Interdisciplinary Service-Learning Approach to Education

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Abstract Describes: Ongoing Work/Project

Applicable Category: Clinical, Academic, Students

Keywords: Interdisciplinary, Patient-centered and Service-learning

Abstract Summary: This presentation describes an interdisciplinary service-learning approach to studying maternity care in which students train to become birth doulas and work in interdisciplinary teams to serve a diverse population of clients. Students describe the positive impact of the course experience in surveys, narrative reflections, and debriefings.

References:
Abstract Text:

Purpose:
Service-learning is a course-based educational experience in which students participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs and furthers their learning of course content. Previous authors have described the integration of service-learning courses into curricula preparing nursing students for professional practice. However, studies have not reported on interdisciplinary service-learning in a course preparing students to serve as doulas. The purpose of this study was to design and evaluate a service-learning experience for interdisciplinary students in a hospital-based volunteer doula program.

Methods:
Supporting the Childbearing Family, an interdisciplinary service-learning approach, was developed and used to study maternity care in the United States through an experience in a doula program. In this semester-long course, students are prepared to provide emotional and physical support to individuals and families during pregnancy, labor, birth and the immediate postpartum period. The course is front-loaded to include childbirth education, breastfeeding education and professional doula training over the first four weeks. Following this education, students worked in interdisciplinary teams to serve a diverse population of clients in a hospital-based volunteer doula program. They also received mentorship from experienced doulas in the program and took on-call shifts at the hospital. To evaluate the course students completed surveys, narrative reflections and engaged in debriefing sessions. Data were analyzed with descriptive statistics and content analysis.

Results:
Since 2014, the course has been taught 6 times and has included 91 students from the following disciplines: nursing, public health, medicine, women and gender studies, pre-law, anthropology, and pre-medicine. Students described the positive impact of course experiences, including an interdisciplinary team-based approach to providing non-clinical client care and support. Students described learning about challenges in the current maternity health care system and the role of the birth doula in providing patient and family-centered labor and birth support. Students described the impact their service as a doula would have on their career choices and their approach to patient care. A focus on providing non-clinical care and support provided the students with opportunities to practice the skill of “being with” patients and families during pivotal life and health care experiences.

Conclusion:
This course was effective for understanding the role of the doula and the significance of a supportive presence during labor and birth. Students also gained important experience and perspective while working in interdisciplinary teams. Further opportunities for nursing students to practice non-clinical skills related to patient and family support as well as collaboration with non-nursing students should be explored in nursing curricula.