African American Nursing Students’ Identification of Social Support Networks while attending a Historically Black College

Presented By: Dr. Elfleta L. Nixon

Abstract
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Background
In December (2010) Healthy People 2020 was released it continues the tracking and measuring the progress in reducing health disparities. In the final review of Healthy People 2010 the analysis of data collected showed no significant change in health disparities by race and ethnicity. Healthy People 2020 initiative continues to highlight the need to increase the diversity of healthcare professionals in order to reduce racial disparities in accessing healthcare and improve health outcomes for African American populations. Many factors have been documented as increasing the health disparities for African American populations the most significant is the inadequate access to appropriate and quality health care. Most African American populations are living in locations with severe shortages of health care professionals. Increasing the number of African American nurses would help the nursing shortage and contribute towards eliminating health disparities. The rate of African American nursing students who fail to complete their nursing program little is known about the role of social support.

Methods
This descriptive study describes the relationship of social support networks, and “intent to stay” among African American nursing students at a Historically Black College and University, (HBCU). The Personal Resource 85 by Weinert (2000). Assessed students’ social network satisfaction with their work and the utilization of their network in the last six months. The Personal Resource Questionnaire 2000 (Weinert) identifies the level of perceived social support. In addition, relevant demographics (ethnicity, age, gender), relevant nursing education characteristics, (time in school, pre-nursing education, family influence, faculty influence, self-reported grades), and “intent to stay” in the nursing program were assessed. Simple logistic regression was used to examine the relationship of each to “intent to stay”.

Results
One hundred surveys were completed although some were not usable, resulting in a final sample of sixty, (n=60). Nearly 32 percent reported that they did not intend to stay in nursing school. The students’ perceptions of social support have a significant influence on “intent to stay”. For every point increase in perceived social support, a student is about six times more likely to report “intent to stay”.

Discussion
The results provide an exploratory step in the understanding of the influence of social support in predicting “intention to stay” in the nursing program among African American nursing students. Nursing educators and administrators must be cognizant of the crucial role of social support in successful completion of nursing programs. Strategies to address these issues might include social support groups within the school, the development of learning communities so students can support each other, utilization of social network groups like twitter and an expansion of the student success activities.