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## **The Nursing Process as a Strategy to Build Empathy in Undergraduate Nursing Students**

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**Purpose:** Empathy is an attitude that allows nurses to perceive the meaning and feelings of others, improving the understanding of their behavior. By recognizing and understanding human needs nurses are able to perform personalized interventions, therefore empathy is vital in the nurse-patient relationship. Undergraduate nursing courses require opportunities to develop empathy. Within nursing programs, students use the nursing process as the main method to provide care. However, students usually do not use this method to identify their own human needs as a way to enhance their personal knowledge and self-care. Then, the aim of this abstract is to describe a didactic approach for undergraduate students, in which they apply the nursing process in a personal and experiential manner to identify and intervene in their own human needs in order to develop empathy for others.

**Methods:** Case method, a problem-based learning, was complemented with another strategy called "articulation to the ethical project of life" (procedures that allow students to learn from their personal needs and goals). The didactic strategy took place in the occupational health nursing rotation, in which undergraduate students provide care to workers at an institution/enterprise. Most interventions students do in this setting are related to behavior change strategies to achieve a healthy lifestyle. Often, as part of these interventions, students provide advice and recommendations to patients, not realizing how difficult it is for the patient to modify behaviors. Therefore, five students developed a nursing process focused on their own lifestyles to improve empathy for others. Strategy implementation followed the nursing process phases and used taxonomies (NANDA, NIC, NOC). Students assessed themselves by a nursing interview and a physical examination. Focus groups within class discussions were performed to collect data that was analyzed using content analysis.

**Results:** Students lifestyle-related findings include issues with physical activity, nutrition, stress management, sleep pattern, and emotion control. They then created their own care plan identifying nursing diagnoses, potential interventions, and expected results. All the students had difficulties to implement the proposed activities to improve their lifestyle. They indicated that they had the intention to change, but not enough perseverance due to tiredness and the heavy study load. In spite of the difficulties, students demonstrated a perception of improvement on two areas: self-awareness and empathy. Students mentioned that the strategy helped them to increase self-awareness of their own actions and to identify their barriers for health behavior change. Regarding empathy, students indicated that the strategy helped them to realize how difficult it is to achieve and maintain a healthy lifestyle and provided them with more competences to improve the quality of care they provide.

**Conclusion:** Although, students referred having difficulties implementing lifestyle-related interventions on themselves, the didactic strategy helped them to experience in

their own life what they ask patients to do in an actual nursing intervention related to health behavior change. Students' appropriation of the nursing process to take care of their selves could be a strategy to promote vital attitudes to provide a humanized care such as empathy.

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**Title:**

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**Keywords:**

Empathy, Nursing Education and Nursing process

**Abstract Summary:**

This abstract describes case-based strategies implemented by undergraduate students. They developed a nursing process focused on their own lifestyle and health behavior change efforts to strengthen empathy towards patients. Students' appropriation of the nursing process was of benefit for future nurses' personal and professional development.

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**Author Summary:** Dr. Ana Solano is a professor and researcher at University of Costa Rica. With the support of scholarships from the University of Costa Rica and the Ministry of Science and Technology, she graduated in 2016 from the PhD nursing program at Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland OH. This achievement made her part of the first generation of doctorally prepared nurses in Costa Rica. Dr. Solano's research interest is the biobehavioral mechanisms influencing chronic disease self-management.