

Creating Healthy Work Environments VIRTUAL 2021

The Use of Stress Reducing Techniques in Nursing Education

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Purpose:

Stress is a complex phenomenon that has significant effects on students which may disturb their physiological, psychological, and spiritual health and well-being. Nursing students have been identified to be at high risk for stress during their training. The demands of nursing programs with heavy course loads and rigorous examinations within a competitive environment can lead to unattainable levels of stress. Most nursing programs administer a standardized predictor exam to assess preparedness for the NCLEX. A study was completed at a Midwestern, liberal arts that introduced a stress intervention prior to seniors taking their final comprehensive Kaplan exam.

Methods:

Data was collected for three consecutive years. The Stetler Model was utilized as a foundational framework to guide this study. All senior nursing students were invited to participate in the study. A total of 88 senior nursing students participated over the course of 3 years. The investigator went to all senior classes and discussed the study with senior students prior to obtaining informed consent. The project paperwork included a stress questionnaire and post intervention self-report of usefulness survey which was provided to the students upon completion of their Kaplan exam. The stress intervention took place once a year on two different testing dates. The stress intervention began when students entered the examination room with an ocean waves soundtrack playing in the background with the lights dimmed. Once all students had entered the examination room and logged into their Kaplan accounts, students were then led through 90 seconds of light stretching followed by 1 minute of deep breathing exercises. The ocean waves soundtrack continued to play in the background. At the end of the deep breathing, the soundtrack was stopped, the lights turned on and students returned to their seats ready to begin the exam. At the end of the exam, students were provided with a short post intervention of usefulness survey and stress questionnaire.

Results:

2017 study data reported 84% of students classified themselves as stressed individuals with 69% in 2018 and 71% in 2019. 92% of students reported that clinical and course work caused them stress in 2017, with 81% in 2018 and 75% in 2019. 2017 data showed that 96% of students reported that it would be beneficial for instructors to allow a time to de-stress prior to class and exams, with 92% in 2018 and 83% in 2019. Data from 2017 showed 91.9% (34 out of 37) of students stated that the stress intervention helped decrease their testing anxiety with 96% (26 out of 27) of students in 2018 and 83.3% (20 out of 24) in 2019.

Conclusion:

Implications for future practice have been validated by the results of this study. Based on the positive results, the integration of pre-examination stress interventions in undergraduate nursing curricula should be considered to reduce pre-examination stress among nursing students. Future research would include incorporating stress interventions for nursing faculty to help reduce academic work fatigue in addition to stressors from social and clinical duties.

Title:

The Use of Stress Reducing Techniques in Nursing Education

Keywords:

Comprehensive exams, Nursing students and Stress Interventions

Abstract Summary:

Nursing students have been identified to be at high risk for stress during their training with course examinations and clinical practice being identified as 2 of the most perceived stressors. The demands of heavy course loads and rigorous examinations within a competitive environment can lead to unattainable levels of stress.

Late Breaking Reason:

My research addresses nursing student stressors with special attention to a stress relief intervention. The research is timely as students and faculty alike must be prepared with a toolbox to deal with daily stressors in school, work and social environments. Decreased stressors increases the likelihood of healthy work environments.

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Author Summary: Dr. Bauer has enjoyed working with undergraduate nursing students in helping to reduce stressors related to the rigorous demands of nursing programs. Her doctoral EBP project looked at stress reduction techniques in undergraduate nursing students. The results were positive leading her to continue implementing stress interventions for nursing students. She thoroughly enjoys working with students to decrease stress and improve their mental health.