



The Use of Stress Reducing Techniques in Nursing Education

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Significance of the Problem

- Nursing students have been identified as a group who are at a higher risk for stress during their foundational clinical and academic education.
- 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.
- Data was collected for three consecutive years.

Picot Question

“What is the effect of a pre exam stress relief intervention on senior nursing students prior to taking their senior comprehensive exam?”

Literature Review

- Search Engines: CINAHL, Proquest Nursing and Allied Health Source, Medline via EBSCO, Cochrane, ERIC, Joanna Briggs Institute, Psych Articles, and Virginia Henderson Library.
- Key words: “stress management”, “baccalaureate student”, “nursing student”, “intervention”, and “exercise”, “stretching”, “exams”
- Inclusion criteria: (a) adult subjects (greater than 18 years of age) (b) written in English (c) focused on stress relief or exercise in some form (with or without relaxation or deep breathing) as a type of stress management or stress intervention (d) focused on nursing students
- Exclusion criteria: (a) included part time nursing students (b) focused on types of intervention including exercise, healthy eating, MBSR, hypnosis

Best Practice Recommendation

Best practice recommendation is the use of pre examination stress relief exercises to reduce pre examination stress and anxiety.

Implementation

- Conceptual Models:
 - Neuman Systems Model: Complimentary to project in application of stress intervention in nursing students aimed at decreasing pre examination stress
 - Stetler Model: Utilized each of the five phases of the Stetler model to guide creation, planning, implementation, and evaluation of study
- Location for EBP project: Midwestern Liberal Arts College
- Participants: Senior nursing students
- Informed consent obtained pre exam date, demographics collected, post intervention survey of usefulness collected post exam
- Intervention: 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.

Evaluation Criteria

- Post exam stress questionnaire and survey used to determine whether pre exam stress relief intervention was helpful
- Post intervention self-report of usefulness survey used to assist in gathering supplementary outcomes data

Sample Demographics

- N = 87 nursing students over the course of 3 years
- Due to COVID, the researcher was unable to perform the stress intervention with students in the spring of 2020 for the 4th year. Researcher did offer an online stress intervention and prayer which was pre-recorded. The researcher received an overwhelming positive response from students who did students who did use the prerecorded stress intervention.

Findings

The pre exam stress relief intervention was found to be very successful according to student results and responses.

Outcomes

Post Intervention Survey of Usefulness 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 34 out of 37 (91.9%) 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.

Quotes from Student Participants

“The stress relief intervention allowed me time to relax and stop worrying about the exam.”

“The soft oceanwaves playing in the background along with the light exercises were helpful in allowing me to relax.”

“The exercises allowed me to concentrate on that as opposed to the exam.”

“I plan to use some type of stress relief intervention in the future.”

“I felt less stressed than usual prior to an exam.”

“I felt more relaxed before starting the exam.”

“It helped distract my stress pre exam.”

“I plan to use some type of stress intervention prior to future testing.”

Conclusions

Although the research project had limitations, it did receive an overwhelmingly positive response from student participants stating that the pre exam stress relief intervention was helpful in reducing pre exam stress.

Recommendations

- Future research should include adding pre exam stress relief interventions to course nursing classes.
- Future studies should consider utilizing Cohen’s PSS scale to determine if any correlation related to pre exam stress relief intervention and exam passing scores