

A decision tree simulation for student peer support: Coping strategies to referral options

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Structured Abstract

PROBLEM/BACKGROUND

Nursing education provides students with the necessary knowledge and application to successfully transition into safe, competent entry-level nurses. Nursing students experience rewards and challenges including stress as they progress through the curriculum. The current research on stress in nursing education highlights the importance of nursing students developing coping skills that will carry them to academic success and out into practice (Cochran, Moss, & Mealer, 2020). Stress experienced by nursing students is a significant problem because it can affect student performance in the clinical setting leading to errors, students can be delayed in integrating data to recognize and plan appropriate care including failure to rescue (Al-Gamal, Alhosain, & Alsunaye, 2018).

PROJECT PURPOSE

The purpose of this planned project is to develop a decision tree simulation to teach nursing students to provide peer support for sharing coping strategies and identify signs of mental distress for referral to mental health professionals. Thus, reducing the negative effects of stress and increasing success in the Bakersfield College associate degree nursing program.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Roy Adaptation Model (RAM) and the NLN Jeffries Simulation Theory (NLNJST) were used as the framework for the DNP project (Roy, 2009; Jeffries, 2016). RAM looks at an individual as a system where input or stimuli are added, and the individual has the ability to adapt or change through coping mechanisms. The NLNJST is used to provide simulation experiences for students that incorporate standards of best practice.

METHODOLOGY

The target population for this planned project is second semester nursing students at Bakersfield College (BC), in Bakersfield, California. The topic of stress, complications from stress, and how to recognize the symptoms are taught in second semester of the ADN program. A decision tree was developed to help students determine the appropriate support for a peer struggling with stress during nursing school. The project included building two simulations for students to learn to apply the decision tree. Each simulation had a standardized participant who was experiencing different levels of stress so that students could apply the decision tree as appropriate for the circumstance. Components included development of a pre-simulation assignment of reviewing the decision tree and glossary, a pre-brief orientation to answer questions, assign roles, and explain the observation form that students watching the livestream would complete. This planned project used major stakeholders from the ADN program to review the project materials and complete a survey for feedback.

IMPLEMENTATION COMPONENTS/PROCESS

The components designed during this process include the decision tree and glossary, the two simulation scenarios, the pre-simulation activity, the pre-brief script and power point to orient the students for this simulation experience, the form for students observing the live stream, instructions for the standardized participant, and the objectives for the simulation. These components were developed using research on student stress and coping in nursing school, best practice standards for simulation, and collaboration with the BC mental health professor.

EVALUATION PLAN

The evaluation for this planned project was a review of the components by key stakeholders in the BC nursing program. The stakeholders responded to a survey to determine if this project met the purpose of helping students support each other and refer students appropriately for services. The stakeholders agreed that this project had unique potential to help students support each other using the decision tree. The comments acknowledged that the simulation gave an opportunity for students to reflect in the debriefing about how they can support peers and what signs of mental distress needed reporting for evaluation. The stakeholders agreed this project should conduct a pilot study to validate the effectiveness with students.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

There are many benefits to nursing education and nursing practice resulting from this planned project. The approach of using simulation to help students apply a decision tree and use peer support to cope with the stressors of nursing school is novel. This problem has been identified in the ADN program at BC as the critical challenge facing students. From research, it is apparent that this is a universal problem in nursing education. Nursing students who can improve coping skills will enter the profession better equipped to handle the stress in nursing, providing safe, competent care and retention of nursing workforce.

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