Factors that Contribute to a Successful Nursing Student’s Decision to Withdraw from a BSN Program before Graduation

by

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Purpose of the Study

To discover the reasons that successful nursing students voluntarily left a BSN program at a mid-sized southern university in the U.S.

- **Specific Aims:**
  - (1) determine the factors that influenced successful nursing student’s decision to voluntarily leave their BSN programs
  - (2) propose evidence-based strategies for retaining successful nursing students in this educational setting
Out of 246 students, between the years 2005-2010, 58 left the nursing program.

24% attrition rate

Out of 58 students, 26 (44.8%) of these students left voluntarily

Demographics
- 88% female and 12% male
- 21 to 56 years of age
- 24- White, 1-African American, and 1 Asian

Secondary Analysis into the characteristics of the BSN students who left the nursing program prior to graduation
Study Overview

- **Methodology:**
  - *Qualitative Action Research*

- **Philosophical Framework:**
  - Heideggerian Hermeneutic Phenomenology

- **IRB approval**

- **Setting:**
  - Mid-sized southern university in the U.S.

- **Data Collection:**
  - Purposive Sampling
  - Demographic Survey
  - Semi-structured interviews via Skype

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Sample  \( N = 11 \) Successful nursing students who voluntarily left a BSN program

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Degrees Earned</th>
<th>Retention /Attrition</th>
<th>Pursued alternative fields of study</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8 Female</td>
<td>1-associate degree 6-bachelor degrees 1-advanced degree 3-pursuing a degree</td>
<td>7 (64%) stayed at current university</td>
<td>Engineering; Sociology; Psychology; Pharmacy; Physician's Assistant; General Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Male</td>
<td>19-51 years of age 31 years was mean age</td>
<td>4 (36%) left university</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100% White</td>
<td>100% White</td>
<td>7 (64%) stayed at current university</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
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Pattern: Nursing Was Not Right For Me

Theme 1: Internal Struggle for a Nursing Career
Subthemes:
- Inaccurate perceptions of nursing
- Lack of commitment to career
- Diminishing financial support
- Conflict with family roles and responsibilities

Theme 2: Realities of Nursing
Subthemes:
- Fear of failure
- Overwhelmed with paperwork
- Disconnect with the clinical nursing role

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Subtheme 1: Inaccurate Perceptions of Nursing

Conclusion:
- The participants’ perceptions of nursing were not consistent with their clinical experiences contributed to their decision to leave their nursing programs.

“I thought I would give nursing a try”
“It really takes a special person to be in the nursing field.”
“They really do take care of the patient.”

“Until you dove into it, I don’t think you understand exactly everything that is involved.”
“I wanted to stay in the medical field so I just chose nursing; because, it seemed like a good idea at the time.”

“My perception of nursing was I didn’t really know a whole lot. I just knew a couple of people that lived in my dorm that were in the nursing program. Nurses make decent money. It is a pretty good job.”

“More like being a doctor than what I considered being a nurse. That is how I felt.”
Subtheme 2: Lack of Commitment to Career

Conclusion: The participants’ high educational goals and self-worth made them less committed to nursing as a profession contributed to their decision to leave their nursing programs.
Subtheme 3: Diminishing Financial Support

Conclusion: The participants’ experience with financial difficulties and the need to obtain gainful employment contributed to their decision to leave their nursing programs.

“I had thought about the cost effectiveness and the practicality of going two more years. I didn’t want to be a life long student. I went with a degree and ran with it.”

“I didn’t have anybody for financial support”

“You can’t work full time and attend the program”

“With all the scholarships I had. I was determined to come out with something.”
Subtheme 4: Conflict with Family Roles and Responsibilities

Conclusion:
The participants experienced stress and self-doubt caused by the conflict between their family roles and responsibilities and the demands of being a nursing student. This stress and self-doubt contributed to their decision to leave their nursing programs.

“When you have children and a family you can’t really skimp on being a mom. You have to give something’s up.”

“It is hard to say, I’m not coming because I have to stay at home and do homework.”

“I was struggling with being gone all day then having to come home to handle the workload that was required to be in the program, and still take appropriate care for my son.”

“I guess that has been my biggest struggle with nursing school. A lot of things like laundry, dishes, and cooking meals for your family, there is no time for it.”
Subtheme 1: Fear of Failure

Conclusion:
The participants experienced acute fear of failure while caring for patients in a clinical setting. This fear of failure caused an overwhelming desire to escape the situation and to remove themselves from the nursing role and led the students to leave their nursing programs.

“I wouldn’t put myself forward to do things. I was scared. I was afraid to be responsible for anything.”

“I was just worried I was going to break everything I touched and hurt everybody I talked too.”

“Taking care of patients you have to take on responsibility. That person is depending on you, but you can have a number of mistakes and you will be responsible. So of course, the fear of failure was presently on my mind.”

“I don’t want to mess up because I want to do well”

“Nursing in general is very stressful. You want to uphold that standard of retaining all the information you just gained and you do not want to forget any of it. I mean it is all on your plate. You have to know it and you have to remember it.”

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Subtheme 2: Overwhelmed with Paperwork

Conclusion:
The paperwork associated with the clinical setting became overwhelming for the participants, which, in turn, engendered stress and frustration. This stress and frustration led the students to decide to leave their nursing programs.

“We had overwhelming amounts of assignments all semester; to the point I was only sleeping three or four hours a night. When it came time for a paper to be turned in, there was not time to write the paper.”

“Tons of it, truck loads of it”

“If you want to know my snapping point, it was when I had started clinical and spent days on end trying to complete clinical paperwork.”

“Dealing with all the assignments was just more stress than what I could handle. It put me over my limit. So, I just made the decision that I could not keep up with this amount of stress anymore.”
Subtheme 3: Disconnect with the Clinical Nursing Role

Conclusion: The participants experienced a marked difference between their clinical nurse role and their preconceived notions of nursing. This disconnect led to confusion and self-doubt, which contributed to the participants questioning whether nursing was a viable career for them.

“Everything was totally different than what you learned from the book. Of course, everything you learned in school just went out the window.”

“This is 12 hours of really taking care of the patient and you are seeing all kinds of bodily fluids from vomit to feces to blood. Some of the things were a little grotesque, but you get use to it. There is no amount of privacy when you are a nurse. If they have a catheter, you are right there in their private areas, of all types of people. Maybe that’s not for me, is what I was feeling. I don’t know if I can do this or if I want to do this.”

“The actual blood and stuff which I thought I was okay with it, but I really wasn’t.”

“I knew that it would be difficult. It takes a patient and special person to do nursing.”
Theme 1: Internal Struggle for a Nursing Career

- Inaccurate perceptions of nursing
- Lack of commitment to career
- Diminishing financial support
- Conflict with family roles and responsibilities

Subthemes

Theme 2: Realities of Nursing

- Fear of failure
- Overwhelmed with paperwork
- Disconnect with the clinical nursing role

Pattern

Nursing Was Not Right For Me
Recommendations

(2) propose evidence-based strategies for retaining successful nursing students in this educational setting

Internal Struggle for a Nursing Career

- Inaccurate perceptions of nursing
- Lack of commitment to career
- Diminishing financial support
- Conflict with family roles and responsibilities

Realities of Nursing

- Fear of failure
- Overwhelmed with paperwork
- Disconnect with the clinical nurse role

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Recommendation #1

- Required Orientation to Nursing Course
- Written Essays on Student Perception of Nursing
- Discussion Panel of Experts and Students
- Job Shadowing Experience
Recommendation # 2

Multipotentiality
- Encourage to accomplish immediate goals
- Need additional academic advisement
- Assessing for high credit hours
- Assessing for high grade point averages

Flag Files
- Need additional advisement from level coordinator
- Need additional academic advisement

Watch for Beyond Goals
- Multipotentiality
- Encourage to accomplish immediate goals

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Recommendation # 3

- Mentor program for first time clinical student
- Reduces Anxiety and Confusion
- Increases Self-confidence and Retention
- Senior level management students as mentors
- Creates Positive Learning Environment for both beginning and senior nursing students
- Count as leadership clinical experience

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Recommendation # 4

Faculty assess for students for psychological distress in the clinical setting

-Speak directly with the student in a non-threatening environment and non-threatening manner
- Intent is to provide support and encouragement
Recommendation # 5

Pre-clinical simulation exercise

- Counts as Practicum hours
- Increases student’s confidence and anxiety levels
- Required prior to entry of new practice area
- Evaluates student’s clinical ability and judgment
Recommendation # 6

- Increases student confidence,
- Patient care is time efficient,
- And better prepared.

What’s In?
- Real time technology

What’s Out?
- Traditional Paperwork

- Increases student confidence, patient care is time efficient, and better prepared

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Recommendation # 7

Small group discussions on Theory Gap

Early intervention is key for student’s experiencing stress

Pre-conference, breaks, post-conference discussions

I’m stressed; this is not what I learned in the classroom
Recommendation # 8

**e-Mentor**

- Providing interactions with *nursing professionals* for students declaring nursing as a major
- e-mentors recruited from current students, faculty, alumni, and local nurses
- 10 week program; 1 email per week

Promotes career awareness and builds relationships
Questions?

For a list of references and/or additional information, please contact Dr. Shelly Randall
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