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*

Pilot Study

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

- 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

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

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

Gender
- 8 Female
- 3 Male

Degrees Earned
- 1-associate degree
- 6-bachelor degrees
- 1-advanced degree
- 3-pursuing a degree

Age
- 19-51 years of age
- 31 years was mean age

Retention /Attrition
- 7 (64%) stayed at current university
- 4 (36%) left university

Ethnicity
- 100% White

Pursued alternative fields of study
- Engineering; Sociology;
- Psychology; Pharmacy;
- Physician's Assistant; General Education

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

Internal Struggle for a Nursing Career

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."

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Internal Struggle for a
Nursing Career

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.

"I wasn't aware of having to go through the other types of nursing that I don't think I could handle, so knowing that I changed my mind."

"I always wanted to do more than just have a nursing degree I always wanted to go beyond just a regular RN. I wanted to pursue something more."

"Is this really what I want to do? I started researching different programs through different schools to see which one would really fit best with me."

Maybe if I had more interaction with the doctor or into the intellectual process of taking care of the patient"

Internal Struggle for a Nursing Career

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."

"With all the scholarships I had. I was determined to come out with something."

"I didn't have anybody for financial support"

"You can't work full time and attend the program"

Internal Struggle for a Nursing Career

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."

Realities of Nursing

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."

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.

"Tons of it, truck loads of it"

"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."

"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*

Theme 2: *Realities of Nursing*

Subthemes

Subthemes

Inaccurate perceptions of nursing

Lack of commitment to career

Diminishing financial support

Conflict with family roles and responsibilities

Fear of failure

Overwhelmed with paperwork

Disconnect with the clinical nursing role

Pattern

Nursing Was Not Right For Me

EXIT

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

Recommendation #1

Required Orientation to Nursing Course

Written Essays on Student Perception of Nursing

Job Shadowing Experience

Discussion Panel of Experts and Students

Recommendation # 2

Review of Transcript

-Assessing for high credit hours	-Assessing for high grade point averages

Flag Files

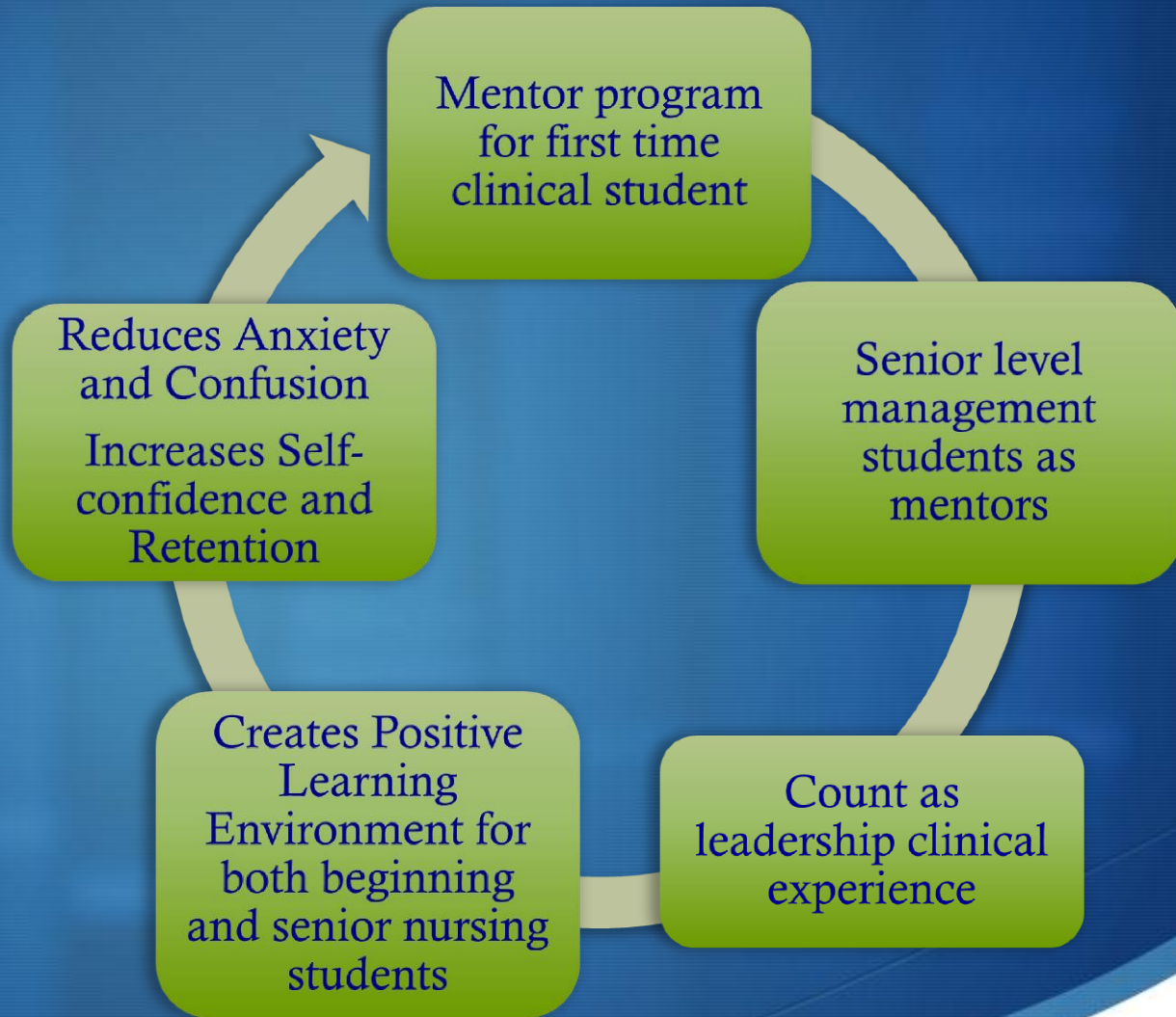| Need additional academic advisement	Need additional advisement from level coordinator

Watch for Beyond Goals

Multipotentiality	Encourage to accomplish immediate goals

Recommendation # 3

Mentor program for first time clinical student

Senior level management students as mentors

Count as leadership clinical experience

Creates Positive Learning Environment for both beginning and senior nursing students

Reduces Anxiety and Confusion

Increases Self-confidence and Retention

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

Required prior to entry of new practice area

Evaluates student's clinical ability and judgment

Increases student's confidence and anxiety levels

Recommendation # 6

What's In?
- Real time technology

What's Out?
- Traditional Paperwork

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

Recommendation # 7

Small group discussions on Theory Gap

Pre-conference, breaks, post-conference discussions

Early intervention is key for student's experiencing stress

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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