Utilizing Simulation in Nursing Education to Develop Confidence and Diminish Anxiety in Clinical Practice

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Background

- Simulation is effective as a teaching strategy across the nursing education curriculum because faculty create a controlled situation that reflects real clinical situations without the risk of harming a human client (Weaver, 2011).
- In nursing education, simulation has been utilized to increase student confidence (Pauly-O’Neill & Prion, 2013; Perry, 2011).
- In foundational nursing courses, simulation can be utilized to increase skill levels and prepare novice nursing students for clinical situations (Stroup, 2014).
- Simulation experiences can be utilized to dispel negative attitudes toward mental illness (O’Boyle-Duggan, 2010).
- Simulation has been a powerful strategy in mental health nursing education to expose students to and aid them in learning skills to diminish student bias, anxiety, and fear related to treating clients with mental health disorders (Brown, 2015).

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of simulation in a traditional undergraduate nursing program. Simulation was integrated into a foundational nursing course with the purpose of increasing confidence prior to the novice students’ first clinical experience. Simulation was also integrated into a mental health nursing course with the purpose of determining if exposure to a mental health simulation day prior to clinical would decrease senior nursing students’ anxiety levels.

Theoretical Framework

Study Description

Design

A one group pre-test post-test design was used. Students were given a pre-test using the Confidence Scale prior to engaging in a simulation exercise in foundational (medical surgical) nursing (1995). Following the simulation exercise, students were asked to complete a post-test using the same scale to evaluate a change in confidence level. A paired t-test was used to examine the difference between students’ confidence level before and after the simulation.

The Psychiatric/Mental Health Nursing Survey was administered to nursing students at the beginning of their mental health experience during which students then had multiple simulations. Students were then post-tested at the end of the mental health experience. Subscales for anxiety, preparedness, negative stereotypes, perceived knowledge of mental health and desire to pursue psychiatric nursing as a career were examined using paired t-tests.

Setting and Sample

- N=39 nursing students enrolled in a small university from 2013 -2015 located in central North Carolina
- Ages ranged from 19 to 52 (Mean: 23 years)
- 97% female
- 31.5% worked as CNAs prior to the experience

Results

Results reveal that the use of a foundational (medical-surgical) simulation exercise increased student’s confidence level (t=25.5, p < .001). Results further show that a simulation exercise in mental health increased students’ sense of preparedness (t = 8.94, p < .001) and decreased their level of anxiety (t = -6.61 p < .001). There was no difference in students’ perceived knowledge of mental illnesses (t = -81, p = .406), nor was there a difference in their negative stereotypical beliefs (t = -883 p = .384) or desire to pursue mental health as a future career (t = .949, p = .349).

Conclusion and Discussion

This study identified some important findings in relation to the significance of utilizing simulation throughout a nursing program. Simulation aided in increasing confidence levels of novice nursing students prior to their first clinical experience in an undergraduate nursing program. The use of simulation in an undergraduate mental health nursing course resulted in decreased student anxiety and an increased sense of preparedness. Therefore, simulation is an effective teaching strategy to prepare students for clinical experiences in both foundational nursing courses and in mental health nursing courses in a small, rural nursing program.

Secondary findings of the study did not demonstrate a statistically significant difference in students’ perceived mental illness knowledge, in students’ negative stereotypical beliefs, or in the students’ desire to pursue mental health as a future nursing career. However, a larger sample size may demonstrate different results.

Limitations of this study include a small sample size, implementation at only one institution, lack of randomization, instructor involvement in the study, and student self-report. Future studies could be performed that decrease these limitations.

References