Teaching Nursing Care for Those with Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities: A Service-Learning Format

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Abstract

Individuals with intellectual/developmental disabilities (I/DD) constitute a vulnerable population worldwide. Despite health care disparities & co-morbid conditions many with I/DD face, few nursing schools include formal course-work addressing the health care needs/issues & nursing care for this population. When this content is taught using a service-learning format, students not only gain knowledge but practical experience interacting with these individuals.

Purpose

To understand the rationale for including a course on I/DD in nursing school curricula & how to implement such a course using a service-learning format

Significance

- The prevalence of I/DD is increasing, > 4 million in US
- Those with I/DD have a life expectancy comparable to those in the general population
- Coursework, that does exist is presented in the context of maternal/child concerns versus the entire lifespan
- Nurses & other health care providers are ill-prepared to address the care needs of individuals with I/DD
- Health care providers’ lack of preparation is compounded by fear & stigma toward those with I/DD
- Individuals with I/DD, particularly adults, experience more health care disparities than the general population

Implementing the Course

1. Logistics
   - Contact administration of organization that supports individuals with I/DD, elicit interest in partnership
   - Clarify goals of course, share syllabus
     - No hands-on care; foci are in-field observations (e.g., at work & day programs) & presentation of health-related material to adults with I/DD
     - 12 hours in-field minimum, senior-level students
   - Establish affiliation agreement
   - Provide organization with nursing school’s administrative &/or legal contacts
   - Confirm/provide documentation re: student FBI clearances, immunization status, etc.
   - Invite organization’s administrative staff to present in class; seek staff input on course decisions pm
   - Confirm organization’s hours of operation, align with students’ class/clinical schedules
   - Secure in-field staff contact info, maps of observation sites; distribute to students
   - Maintain flexibility, make mid-course revisions pm
   - Assess/eliminate student concerns-aim to empower their peers & others, both while in school & once they are licensed to practice nursing

2. Time-line considerations
   - Begin planning at least 9-12 months in advance
   - Accommodate organization’s schedule for students’ in-field work
   - Teach foundational information on I/DD before students go out in the field

3. Service-learning objectives
   - Provide experience for the student-learner to design & present health-related educational information appropriate for adults with I/DD
   - Promote awareness of potential biases or personal challenges that impact the student-learner’s skill in interacting with adults with I/DD &/or staff who support these individuals
   - Enhance the communications skills of the student-learner as a future professional nurse
   - Provide insight for the student-learner on the need to advocate for the dissemination of knowledge regarding those with I/DD within nursing

Methods of Instruction

Written assignments
- Interviews with health care providers
- Reflection papers
- Term paper on topic of choice

Education project
- Observation
- Prepare & present health related topic to those with I/DD

Guest speakers
- Organization’s admin staff
- Those with personal & professional I/DD experience

Lecture
- Small group work
- In-class discussion

Assigned readings
- Film
- Web-based media

Implications

- Nursing students gain knowledge & confidence working with individuals with I/DD & those who support them
- Students are empowered to share this information with their peers & others, both while in school & once they are licensed to practice nursing
- Individuals with I/DD benefit as more nurses act on their behalf as advocates & change agents

Selected References


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