Connecting Classroom to Clinical Through Focused Clinical Activities

Sheryl Cornelius EdD, MSN, RN, CNE
Queens University of Charlotte

Abstract and Introduction

For a nursing student to succeed many connections must be created throughout their program of study to allow for retention of information. Students must see nursing as a process and the client as a whole as opposed to the tasks involved in their care. One issue that has plagued educators over time is how to connect the content that is presented in the classroom or the lab to the clinical practice in a manner that encourages those connections.

Prior to this project students were acquiring skills in a lab centered atmosphere where they would read material, view an instructor facilitated demonstration or video and then perform the skill for a “check off”. Once the “check off” was complete the student was able to practice the skill in the clinical facility with a faculty member. All skills were front loaded at the beginning of the Fundamentals course as to ensure the student was ready once the skill was offered in the clinical setting. The students were learning the skills in isolation and memorizing steps to “pass the check off”. The material surrounding the skill was not discussed in the classroom for weeks to months later. Students were anxious about the “check offs”, faculty disliked the repetition of observing 20 students perform the same skill in an 8 hour day and most students were unable to answer application style questions about the skill without the corresponding body system, concept, or preclinical experience.

In an effort to combat this disconnection the calendar for the course was arranged so that skills were introduced at the same time the student was learning the content in the classroom setting. This same material was discussed in the classroom, demonstrated and practiced in the lab setting, and then focused on in the clinical setting as an activity. The students then came together as a group following the clinical time for a small group debriefing of the material.

Hypothesis

Implementing focused clinical activities that correlate a skill with the corresponding body system, concept, or pathophysiology of a disease process will increase student’s perceived understanding of course concepts leading to decreased anxiety/increased satisfaction with learning and increased retention of students.

Methods & Materials

Steps to Process:
1. Literature Review
2. Creating the Activities/Synching in the Calendar
3. Adjunct Faculty Professional Development
4. Implementing the change with the students
5. Collecting the data to test the benefits

A Likert scale survey of student perceptions of understanding of content, anxiety level surrounding skills acquisition, and feelings of preparedness for the clinical event is to be utilized.

Data comparison of course completion rates pre and post current delivery of content.

A Likert scale survey of faculty perceptions of student understanding of content with new delivery method.

Questions

• How can we connect the skills acquisition of lab and clinical with the class content?
• Will connecting them increase student understanding of content?
• Will a new delivery method increase satisfaction of student learning in reference to the material?
• Will a new delivery method decrease student anxiety in reference to the material?
• Will this increased satisfaction/decreased anxiety lead to increased retention of students in the course?
• How will faculty react to completely changing the delivery of the course they have been teaching for years?
• How will adjunct faculty react to the changes in scheduling and delivery of clinical day?

Sample Activity

Student Activity

Concept: Oxygenation

Participate in report with assigned RN. From this group of clients choose 3 adult clients to perform the following:

Activity 1: Perform a full body assessment with focus on the respiratory system and oxygenation status.
Activity 2: Scan EMR for medications that will impact the oxygenation of the client.
Activity 3: Seek out a respiratory therapist and discuss at least one of your client’s treatment plans including any oxygen modalities
Activity 4: Conference with your faculty member about more options to highlight the oxygenation of the client.

Faculty Toolkit

Concept Oxygenation

Ensure student looks at oxygenation of all clients they see and does not say the patient is Within Normal Limits

• Ask questions about different types of clients to help them think more about the concept. For example: How does diabetes effect a client’s oxygenation of tissue? What oxygenation issues do we anticipate in a client with a total hip replacement? What oxygen modalities are available for a client with a trach or with COPD? How will the breathing treatment help?

Discussion

• Implementing the new delivery of materials was not difficult at all in reference to the students.
• Faculty aversion to change was an issue that was overcome.
• Adjunct faculty reported feeling more connected to the success of the student and interacted more with the course coordinator.
• The debriefing sessions became an extension of the classroom experience with cases to discuss from the clinical setting.
• Adjunct faculty participating in the debriefings with full time faculty members reported a greater understanding of what was going on in the classroom.
• An unexpected issue was the response by the clinical personnel not understanding the new process for their learning, “its definitely not like when I was in school” said several nurses.

Results

Data is still being collected to decide whether this is an effective tool for retention of students but anecdotally:

1. Students reported:
   1. Understanding the concepts at a deeper level
   2. Being less anxious for exams and clinical hours
   3. Feeling more prepared for clinical when the focus was narrowed
   4. Making connections they understood with debriefing
   5. Having more input in the debriefing because they felt they understood the topic at focus

Faculty reported:
1. More discussion from students when they had a case to link the content
2. Enthusiasm for clinical, classroom and debriefing sessions
3. Adjunct faculty felt more connected to the success of the student

Conclusion

Further data is being collected to utilize a reasonable sized sample. Preliminary and anecdotal data suggested increased student preparedness for exams and clinical. Students are reported less anxious and enjoy the comparisons of multiple client’s with the one focus.

Further education with clinical facilities will be made to focus in fostering understanding of the new method of clinical experience.

It is intended for final data to be collected and published at a later date.

References

Harvey, G. (2015). Connecting Theory to Practice: Using guided questions to standardize clinical post conference. Journal of Nursing Education. 54(11), 655-658