Promoting leadership in senior nursing students: Implementing a quality improvement and evidence-based practice project to address common clinical problems

Kristy Chunta, PhD, RN, ACNS, BC Michele Gerwick PhD, RN, & Benjamin Martin, MS, RN
Department of Nursing and Allied Health Professions, Indiana University of Pennsylvania

Introduction

• The American Association of Colleges of Nursing’s (AACN) Baccalaureate Essentials (2009) recognize need for nursing students to develop leadership skills to promote quality care.
• Quality management focuses on identifying potential health care problems and improving care and quality (Sullivan, 2013). These include opportunities to assist or begin basic quality improvement (QI) initiatives.
• Student nurses also need learning experiences to prepare them to address safety and quality concerns.
• These opportunities may be limited in the clinical setting. Students need other creative methods to understand the process of quality and safety in the clinical setting.

Nursing Management Course

NURS 440 Nursing Management Clinical
• 31 students worked in pairs or groups of 3 to complete the project

QI topics included:
• Hand-washing
• Medication administration
• High risk for falls
• Isolation policies

Findings from Students’ QI Reviews

• Staff did not wash their hands entering or leaving the patient’s room. Hand sanitizer not used on a consistent basis. Sinks not in areas conducive to hand washing in one unit.
• Majority of RNs followed medication administration policies. Did not consistently ask the patient’s name and DOB. RNs frequently interrupted during medication administration.
• Many staff did not follow isolations precautions (even Clostridium Difficile).
• Protocol for high-risk for falls not consistently implemented. Difficult to identify these patients on the units, i.e. no magnet on the door frame, no yellow socks.
• All policies/protocols readily available to staff.

Best Practice Recommendations

Students suggested the following recommendations:
• Proper signage on the doors and in bathrooms to remind staff to wash hands; clearly identify isolation rooms with signs
• Place sinks in areas were handwashing is conducive
• Assign a daily champion on the unit to discuss QI initiatives in huddles and monitor compliance
• Review policies and working with frontline staff to facilitate workflow and compliance
• Wear an identifying garment when administering medications to prevent interruptions
• Provide unit education intermittently and share unit observations in huddles
• Charge RN to share compliance reports daily

Learning Activity

The aim of the learning activity included the following:

1) Provide an opportunity for students to address a quality improvement issue in a nursing management/leadership clinical course.
2) Allow senior students to build on research skills from the junior level by using evidence-based practice guidelines (EBP) related to the QI topic.
3) Assist students to understand QI by reviewing policies and collecting data on the clinical unit.
4) Promote professional role by having students create a poster of the QI/EBP project.

Lessons Learned

• Learning activity provided hands-on experience related to QI practices and the use of EBP research
• Students were able to access hospital policies to review recommended practices
• Students did experience some “down time” throughout the day while completing the experience
• Future recommendations include:
  • continuing the learning activity during the leadership/management course
  • providing students with more structured guidelines related to the clinical day
  • partner with clinical agencies to have students share their poster presentations with hospital staff