Promoting Healthy Work Environments: Improving RN Attitudes Towards End-of-Life Care

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Introduction

- The fast growing senior population is driving an increasing need for nurses skilled in end-of-life communication and care.

- This need will continue to expand due to the population's multiple, chronic, comorbid health conditions that progress to terminal illnesses.

- Addressing the end-of-life care needs of the patients and families is a challenge for acute care nurses, especially the growing number of novices.

- Research findings reveal novice nurses feel ill prepared to deliver quality end-of-life care, thus yielding higher levels of stress and anxiety.

- Nurses who feel inept are prone to experience negative attitudes.

- Negative nursing attitudes have been linked to higher rates of burnout and absenteeism, along with decreased engagement in the workplace.

Purpose

The DNP Project was aimed at changing acute care nurses attitudes towards end-of-life care by reducing their communication anxiety through the effects of an evidence-based communication intervention.
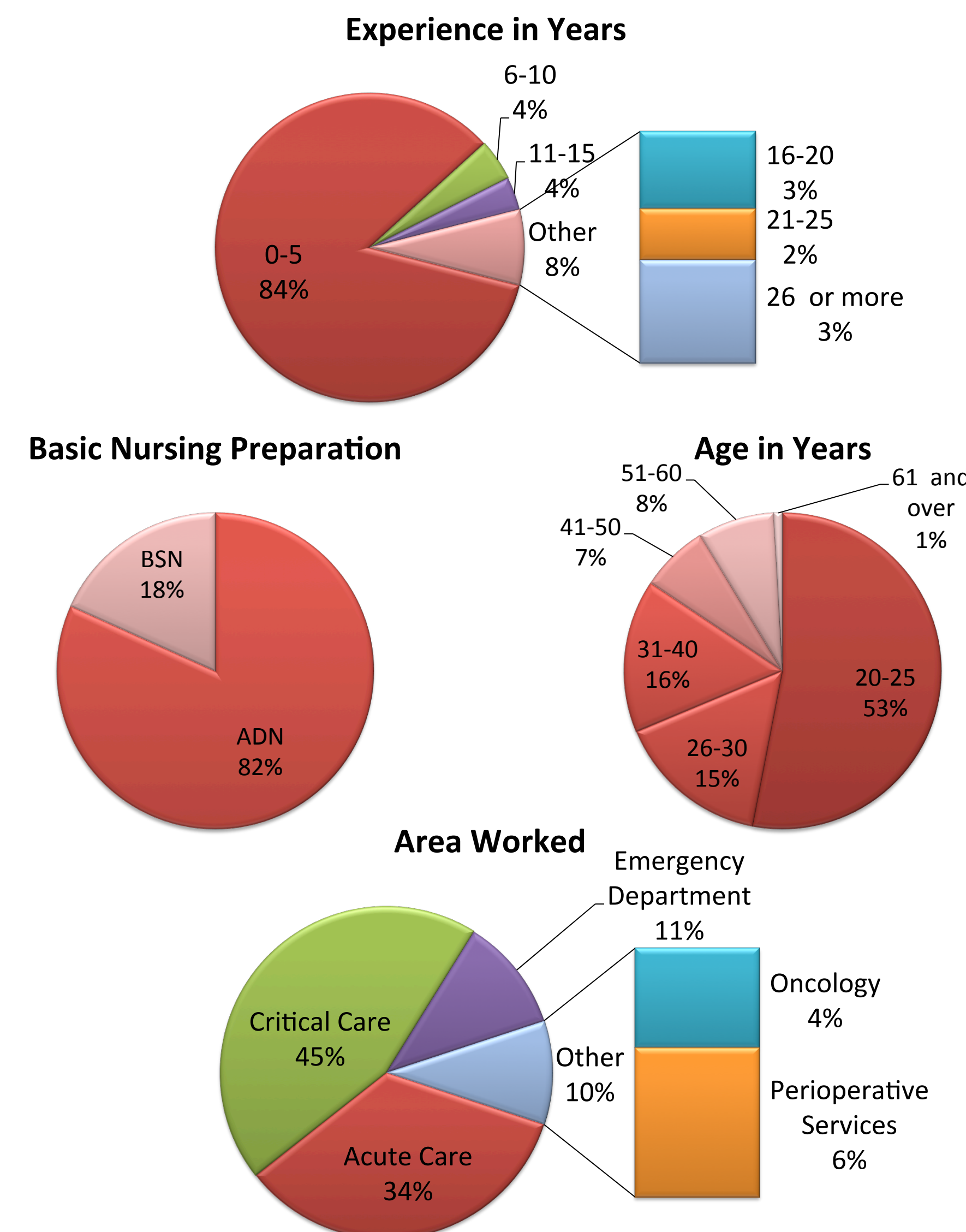
Methodology

A total of 115 nurses (N=115) from a regional medical center participated in the intervention. The methods are as follows:

- Random convenience sample

- Quasi-experimental one group pretest posttest design with a one-month follow up

- End-of-Life Nursing Education Consortium (ELNEC) Core curriculum served as intervention

- Frommelt Attitude Towards Care of the Dying (FATCOD) evaluation tool

- Independent samples t-test, repeated measures ANOVA and Post-hoc

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Sample

Experience in Years

0-5 84%
6-10 4%
11-15 4%
Other 8%
16-20 3%
21-25 2%
26 or more 3%

Basic Nursing Preparation

BSN 18%
ADN 82%

Age in Years

51-60 8%
41-50 7%
31-40 16%
61 and over 1%
20-25 53%
26-30 15%

Area Worked

Critical Care 45%
Acute Care 34%
Other 10%
Emergency Department 11%
Oncology 4%
Perioperative Services 6%

Results

- There was a significant difference in age and FATCOD total scores pre-course ($p < .05$), post-course ($p < .01$); and 1 Month post ($p < .05$).

- There was a significant difference in age and FATCOD Communication total score pre-course ($p < .05$), post-course ($p < .01$); and 1 Month post ($p < .05$).

- There was a significant difference in years of experience and FATCOD total score pre-course ($p < .01$), post-course ($p < .01$); and 1 Month post ($p < .001$). **Tables 1 and 2**

- There was a significant difference in years of experience and FATCOD Communication total score pre-course ($p < .001$), post-course $p < .001$); and 1 Month post ($p < .01$). **Tables 3 and 4**

- Results found that both age and years experience scores improved significantly over time-periods ($p < .001$).

- Post-hoc tests using the LSD correction revealed that scores increased significantly from pre-intervention to post-intervention ($p < .001$) and pre-intervention to one month follow-up ($p < .001$) but not post-intervention to one month follow-up ($p > .05$).

- No significant differences were found between basic nursing education and FATCOD total scores or FATCOD Communications total scores over time.

Table 1.
Years experience and Pre-course FATCOD total scores

	M	SD
0-5 years	122.69	10.85
Greater than 5 years	130.94	11.87

$t_{(113)} = -2.920, p < .01$

Table 2.
Years experience and 1 Month FATCOD total scores

	M	SD
0-5 years	127.84	10.99
Greater than 5 years	140.38	8.89

$t_{(100)} = -3.925, p < .001$

Table 3.
Years experience and Pre-course FATCOD Comm total scores

	M	SD
0-5 years	23.9	2.8
Greater than 5 years	26.94	2.15

$t_{(113)} = -4.359, p < .001$

Table 4.
Years experience and 1 Month FATCOD Comm total scores

	M	SD
0-5 years	25.34	2.73
Greater than 5 years	28	1.82

$t_{(100)} = -3.375, p < .01$

Conclusion

- Less experienced nurses report increased anxiety when providing end-of-life care

- Less experienced nurse identified communication as a significant barrier when providing end-of-life care

- Utilizing the ELNEC communication module provided essential communications skills needed to improve nurses attitudes towards care at end-of-life

Future Implications

- Providing the needed support and skills to handle a growing, challenging patient population.

- Integrating this and making it an integral part of nurses skill sets would lessen the burden of burnout and staff turnover.