Academic dishonesty is on the rise in higher education due to emerging advances in technology, which has created a dilemma in the nursing profession. A lack of integrity during the pursuit of a nursing degree can persist in student’s professional nursing practice.

The purpose of this project is to reveal the issue of cheating among nursing students and determine ways to diminish its existence, maintain the integrity of the college and profession, and ultimately, improve patient outcomes.

Students have a less stringent definition of academic dishonesty than faculty do. Several methods of cheating exist as behaviors that diminish integrity. Important shifts in societal norms include student claims of ignorance during instance of plagiarism, and the notion that as long as a student completes a program, their performance or use of shortcuts does not matter, which is also a reason that students pursue opportunities to cheat. The problem with that reasoning is that dishonesty in an academic career parallels behavior in professional practice.

Implied Implications for Nursing

Academic Implications

- Students do not actually gain the knowledge necessary for practice
- Faculty investment in academic dishonesty investigation taxes time available for teaching and mentoring

Clinical Implications

- Students may harm patients due to lack of knowledge and the spread of false documentation
- School may lose clinical site
- School reputation may be tarnished

Behaviors That Diminish Integrity

- Academic – Plagiarism:
  - Looking at another student’s exam
  - Photographing exam & distributing to students
  - Using another student’s work as own
  - Sharing assignments via private Facebook groups

- Clinical – Shortcuts:
  - Documenting false information to save time
  - Claiming illness to justify absences
  - Continuing actions that did not cause immediate harm

Challenges of Maintaining Integrity

- Competitive, strenuous schedule
- Challenges of technology
- Ease of technology
- Large class sizes
- Lack of support in keeping students accountable
- Inexperienced faculty
- Moral ambiguity surrounding academic integrity

Actions That Promote Integrity

- Seeding the concept of integrity during recruitment process with integrity-based question for admissions essay topic
- Stating clear consequences in the institutional policies regarding academic dishonesty
- Building faculty confidence with administrative support

Recommendations

- Offer anonymous hotline for students to report suspicious/dishonest behavior
- Sign contract of expected behaviors
- Create admissions essay topic of integrity to seed focus
- Develop faculty mentorship program for new faculty and student mentorship program for incoming freshmen
- Weave ethical decision-making lessons into all courses
- Promote ownership of mistakes and environment of accountability

References

