The Impact of Service Learning Experiences on RN-to-BSN Students' Professional Practice

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By the end of the presentation, the learner will…

- Identify the benefits of service learning as a teaching-learning strategy for Nurse Educators
- Understand how undergraduate service learning experiences impact the professional practice of RNs

- No COI
- No sponsorship or commercial support
Introduction to Problem

- The purpose of undergraduate nursing education
- Need to meet expectations
  - Accreditation
  - Professional
  - Stakeholders
  - Bridge needed for between theory-practice gap
- Nursing educators challenged to identify effective teaching-learning strategies
Service Learning

- Service learning—“An opportunity for students to meet academic objectives while engaging in service opportunities in the community” (Ross, 2012)

- Evolving in nursing education as a teaching-learning strategy

- Has been demonstrated to develop requisite professional skills, e.g.
  - Critical thinking
  - Cultural competency
  - Leadership

Felton & Clayton, 2011, p. 78)
Research Question

How do graduates of an RN to BSN program describe the impact of undergraduate service learning experiences on their professional practice?
Methodology

• Basic qualitative study; sample = 8 RNs
• Interviews- semi-structured questionnaire
• Inclusion criteria -
  ▪ graduated from a RN to BSN program within the last four years
  ▪ participated in a service learning experience during their RN to BSN program
  ▪ had at least one year of part-time or full-time employment as an RN prior to starting their undergraduate service learning experience.
Results

Five themes emerged describing how participant’s professional practices were impacted.

• A Practice Innovator
• A Leader
• A Nonjudgmental Practitioner
• A Mindful Practitioner
• Civically Engaged
A Practice Innovator

• Participants shared that because of their service learning experiences they became creative, “Thinking outside the box.”

• After being exposed to substance abuse during a service learning project, one participant now considers pain control alternatives, “Can you change their position? Can you try the guided imagery thing? Put headphones on people and just let them listen to soothing music.”

• Another recognized that traditional methods of care delivery may not meet patient’s needs, “In my nursing practice now, I learn what I need to about that patient and I develop my communication around their [patient’s] needs.”
A Leader

• Leadership based on participant's service learning experiences took several forms including both role modeling and taking on leadership roles.

• One participant described directing staff in caring for ‘frustrating’ patients. “I tried to impact my peers. When I hear them [expressing frustration], I say, ‘Let's think about this a minute. If you were in this situation or if you had to go through this, how would you be?’”

• Because of a service learning experience, one participant is now “Professionally out there leading nursing peers in holistic principles, theories, & information.”
A Nonjudgmental Practitioner

• Participants recognized that they had been judgmental prior to their service learning projects, “For me, that was a big impact...I'm better at [not being judgmental]...I don't really do that anymore.”

• Several learned to look beyond prejudices based on the patient’s circumstances,
  – “Just be careful of how you judge people because you don't know what they've gone through, what they're going through.”
  – “Everybody has a story, so we need to be careful on how we evaluate people and judge people.”
A Mindful Practitioner

- Participants described changes in their professional practice based on their service learning experiences,
  - “I try to work very closely with the patients and come up with an acceptable solution that is workable with what they've got.”
  - “It just pushes me a little bit more to be more strong with trying to help people with services they may need.”

- Another participant, after learning about the challenges of poverty now routinely asks, “Do you have enough food in your house? Do you have transportation to get to the doctor? Are you able to pay for your medical care? Are you able to afford your medicines and pay the co-pays?”
Civically Engaged

• Participants gained a sense of community commitment as they worked with and recognized community needs,

  – “I just think that the service learning reinforced ... to be an active member of your community, to be involved within issues.”

  – “As professionals...we have to go beyond our nice, comfortable box. It's important for us to be involved in our community and have our practice carry over into that and just be involved.”

  – “I joined the community outreach program just because I got a really good piece of it [community involvement] during my service learning project.”
Discussion

Service learning completed during as RN to BSN program does impact graduates’ professional nursing practice.

– Develops essential skills/values which impact professional practice

– Develops requisite practice skills which may have limited opportunity to practice (e.g., leadership, civic engagement)

– Helps to bridge the theory-practice gap

– Supports nursing educators in meeting accreditor’s, professional organization’s, & stakeholder's expectations

– Flexible teaching-learning methodology (not project specific)
QUESTIONS?
References


