HEALTH LITERACY: THE KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDES, AND BEHAVIOR OF BEGINNING BACCALAUREATE NURSING STUDENTS OF THE USE HEALTH LITERACY STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE PATIENT UNDERSTANDING

Need for the study: There is overwhelming support for the need for increasing awareness of low health literacy among healthcare providers. Healthcare professionals often are unaware that patients do not comprehend health teaching professionals are trying to communicate. There is a substantial gap between what healthcare professionals teach and what consumers actually comprehend. Nielsen-Bohman et al. (2004) reported that low levels of health literacy can be improved when healthcare providers and the members of the community are equipped to recognize low health literacy in their patients and learn how to intervene.

The purpose of this mixed study was to investigate ways that the implementation of focused health literacy instruction would affect ways in which beginning baccalaureate student nurses respond to patients with low health literacy in terms of their knowledge, behavior, and attitudes.

There has been a paucity of research by nurses about the implementation of health literacy strategies into nursing practice in hospitals and nursing schools. Only a small number of studies have addressed the learning needs of nursing students. More research needs to be done to determine the best strategies for integrating health literacy knowledge and experiences into nursing school curricula in order to improve knowledge and prepare students to meet the needs of individuals with low or marginal health literacy skills.

Research questions: Three research questions are addressed in this study:

RQ1: To what extent, if any, and in what ways does knowledge about health literacy increase in student nurses participating in health literacy-specific instruction compared to student nurses who do not receive instruction?

RQ2: Does nurse–person interaction with patients with low health literacy change for student nurses participating in health literacy-specific instruction compared to student nurses who do not receive instruction?

RQ3: Do attitudes toward patients with low health literacy shift for student nurses participating in health literacy-specific instruction compared to student nurses who do not receive instruction?

METHODS: Parts 1 and 3 of the Health Literacy Knowledge and Experience Survey (HL-KES; Cormier, 2006) was administered to two cohorts baccalaureate nursing students (total of 80 students) to measure their knowledge about health literacy. Following the initial administration of the survey, the experimental cohort of 42 students received a 30-minute long instructional intervention in the form of a teaching session on basic health literacy concepts and strategies. The second phase of the study involved the observations of eight randomly selected nursing students (four students per cohort) who participated in a standardized patient simulation scenario involving a low health literate patient.

The key findings from this study were that there was an increase in basic knowledge and understanding of health literacy after one short intervention, there were no measurable changes in attitude, and students demonstrated a change in how they interacted with low health literate patients in a simulation intervention.