

Nursing Education Research Conference 2018 (NERC18)

Improving Nursing Student Empathy With Experiential Learning

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Background: Nursing is both a science and an art. The quality of the relationship between the nurse and the patient is essential to the healing process. The ability of the nurse to connect with the patient in a way that is meaningful to the patient will determine the patient outcome. Empathy serves as a foundational nursing principle inherent in the nurse's ability to form those relationships from which to care for patients. Empathy is the ability of a person to understand what another is experiencing from the receiver's perspective and the ability to communicate that understanding to the receiver. There exists, however, a need to examine methods for instilling empathic tendency in nursing students. In nursing, empathy is believed to be a necessary component to the nurse-patient relationship.

Objective: Evidence shows a decline in empathy specifically noted over time in nursing students who are preparing to graduate and enter the workforce. The practice focused question for this project asked whether an experiential learning toolkit for development of nursing empathy can improve sophomore nursing student empathy as measured via the Jefferson Scale of Empathy. This project was guided by evidence that demonstrated a continued need to measure the effect of activities aimed at fostering empathy in nursing students. The literature provides a sound basis for further exploration into the effectiveness of a toolkit to promote empathy in nurses. Evidence demonstrates that empathy is inherent to the role of the nurse and essential to patient centered care. Additionally, evidence suggests that empathic behaviors can be taught and that experiential learning may be an effective intervention. However, it is unclear at this time what the most effective method of experiential learning may be or at what point in nursing curriculum it should be employed

Method: The design for this project was a one group pre and post evaluation of a current healthcare program experiential learning toolkit. The project utilized a toolkit learning activity including case study and discussion in an undergraduate academic setting to assess whether empathy can be fostered in nursing students. Empathy levels were measured pre and post intervention utilizing the Jefferson Scale of Empathy.

Results: Analysis demonstrated a 3% increase in overall Jefferson score post intervention indicating an increase in empathic tendency. Of the 20 items on the scale, most scores increased pre to post survey. The findings are suggestive that experiential learning may be a viable strategy to increase empathy in nursing students. This project holds significant value for social change with the potential to identify effective methods to develop student nurses' expression of empathy.

Title:

Improving Nursing Student Empathy With Experiential Learning

Keywords:

Empathy, Experiential Learning and Student Nurses

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Abstract Summary:

Empathy is believed to be a necessary component to the nurse-patient relationship. Evidence shows decline in empathy, noted over time in nursing students who are preparing to enter the workforce. Findings from this work are suggestive that experiential learning may be a viable strategy to increase empathy in nursing students.

Content Outline:

Content Outline

Improving Nursing Student Empathy with Experiential Learning

I. Introduction

- Empathy is significant to the nurse patient relationship
- Orlando's Deliberative Nursing Process Theory supports the need for nurse empathy
- There is a decline in empathy in nursing students
- Experiential learning may be effective in increasing empathy

II. Body

A. Background evidence demonstrates a decline in nursing students preparing to enter the workforce. For example:

- a. Difference in empathic skill correlating to more years in the program
- b. Decline in student empathy between the beginning and end of the program
- c. Repeated clinical exposure not found to increase empathic behavior

B. Empathy is important as it has been directly linked to positive patient outcome. Examples in the evidence includes:

- a. Relieves pain and aloneness and allows for therapeutic change
- b. Decrease in patient anxiety, depression and anger
- c. Increased engagement and compliance with treatment planning

C. Experiential learning may be effective in promoting empathic behaviors

- a. In a 2010 review of empathy education, experiential learning found to be most effective

b. However, authors describe that further investigation is needed

D. Investigation of an existing clinical toolkit demonstrated results that support the idea of using experiential learning as an effective method

a. A one group pre and post evaluation method was used.

b. The toolkit learning activity including case study and discussion was implemented in an undergraduate academic setting to assess whether empathy can be fostered in nursing students.

c. Empathy levels were measured pre and post intervention utilizing the Jefferson Scale of Empathy

d. Analysis demonstrated a 3% increase in overall Jefferson score post intervention indicating an increase in empathic tendency.

e. Of the 20 items on the scale, most scores increased pre to post survey.

III. Conclusion

- The findings are suggestive that experiential learning may be a viable strategy to increase empathy in nursing students.
- Significant value for social change with the potential to identify effective methods to develop student nurses' expression of empathy
- Potential for improvement in patient relationships and thus the current healthcare system by making it more patient centered
- Nurse educators should continue to explore methods of experiential learning to promote empathy

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Professional Experience: Assistant Professor, Director RN to BSN, Westfield State University 2015-present Director of Professional Development, Baystate Noble Hospital 2007-2015 Numerous accomplishments when leading the Professional Development team such as developing an effective Nurse Residency program and directed patient experience activity CONTRIBUTIONS (2015) Patient Centered Care module in Elsevier's Transition to Practice – Medical Surgical Nursing (2015) Service/Patient Experience module. In Association for Nurses in Professional Development (ANPD) Frontline Nurse Leader Development Program. 2015 (Las Vegas, Nevada) Association for Nurses in Professional Development National Conference Supporting Successful Transition to Practice - A Nurse Residency Immersion Program 2009 New England Organization of Nurse Educator Annual Symposium. Making Our Good Better and Our Better Our Best, A Collaborative Approach.

Author Summary: Dr. Holden is a dedicated nurse educator with over 15 years experience working with nurses in practice and academia. Dr. Holden has dedicated much of her effort at nurse practice development and improving the transition experience for new nurses. Dr. Holden directed the Patient

Engagement Committee in the acute care setting. In this role she assessed gaps at the macro-system level and collaborated with her team to employ successful strategies to improve the patient experience.