Interventions to Improve Nursing Student Attitudes About People With Mental Illness

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Undergraduate nursing students possess negative feelings and discomfort in working with people who have mental illness. Nurse educators have teaching goals supporting a good orientation for students to psychiatric nursing cultures. But nursing faculty are also concerned about student attitudes about mental illness as well as knowledge and skills supporting patient-centered care. Student engagement with individuals who suffer psychiatric problems improves their attitudes but is lengthy and typically cannot be scheduled prior to students performing clinically in practicums at mental health treatment agencies. Nurse educators may better support student socialization prior to clinical exposure with innovative and practical educationally-derived strategies to improve their feelings about mental illness and associated treatment.

A growing body of evidence supports the value of engagement in support of improving college student attitudes about people with mental illness. Recent research indicates select educationally-based brief strategies prior to clinical experiences helps improve nursing student feelings about mental health. For the current study, a mixed-methods research design was used. Nursing students were exposed to content-oriented anti-stigma strategies of a brief nature (approximately 30 minutes in duration). These included a video documentary of a person who suffered a lifetime of mental illness and a live speaker articulating their own lived experience of mental illness provided to students prior to attending their mental health nursing clinical experience. Professional (BSN) nursing students were surveyed with a valid and reliable tool (for quantitative measures) and asked to describe their own impressions of mental illness before and after exposure to media and speaker interventions (for qualitative appraisal). Descriptive, parametric and non-parametric statistical analysis (paired Student t Tests and Mann-Whitney U test) were used for analyze quantitative data. Content analysis was conducted for data exploration. The completed analysis suggests the targeted educationally-based interventions support significant improvement of nursing student attitudes and comfort relative to mental illness themes. Brief interventions delivered prior to the start of scheduled clinical meetings may support improved student comfort and confidence to deliver good care while improving perceptions of the overall clinical experience.

Nurse educators may use these results to design and implement immediate and useful approaches for: 1) Improving nursing student feelings about people with mental illness and thereby decrease stigma and thereby improving the clinical experience for care delivery and student evaluation; 2) Supporting advocacy and recovery of people with mental illness by enhancing nursing student perceptions about people with mental illness and mental health care. The current study comprises a collaboration between nursing professors on two different campuses. Another study in process includes a similar design but expanded to using psychology and social work undergraduate students on two campuses in comparison to nursing students. This research supports clarification and modification of student attitudes about people with mental illness.

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Abstract Summary:

Nursing students harbor stigma toward people with mental illness which may impact their clinical experience, comfort, and care delivery with psychiatric nursing. The current study indicates the positive effect of innovative short and practical interventions through media and speaker presentations to improve student impressions of people with mental health problems.

Content Outline:
I. Introduction

A.   Undergraduate nursing students possess negative feelings about people who have mental illness.

B.   Nurse Educators benefit from the development of innovative and practical interventions supporting student orientation and improved perceptions about psychiatric treatment prior to clinical experiences.

II. Body

A. Evidence

1. Research supports the value of both content and engagement for improving college

   students impressions of people with mental illness;

2. Recent research indicates select brief strategies prior to clinical experiences helps

   improve nursing student feelings about mental health;

B. Current Study Design

1. Mixed-methods approach (survey provision with open-ended questions prompting

    narrative response) supports quantitative and qualitative analysis and evaluation;

2. Nursing students were exposed to brief content-oriented anti-stigma strategies

a.   video documentary of a person who is diagnosed with mental illness;

b. live speaker articulating their own lived experience of mental illness

3. Analysis includes descriptive and parametric as well as non-parametric

C. Results

1.   Nursing students demonstrated significant improvement in attitudes about people

     with mental illness following brief, content-oriented and education-based

     interventions;

III. Conclusion

1.   Nurse educators may use innovation and practical approaches to:
2.   Improving nursing student feelings about people with mental illness
3.   Supporting advocacy and recovery of people with mental illness

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Professional Experience: I am a nurse educator for almost 15 years and a nurse for almost 25 years. Most of my focus has been in psychiatric nursing during my career. I am vested in supporting nursing student education first for facilitating the training of sensitive and empathic caregivers. I am also a strong advocate for people with mental illness.
Author Summary: I have delivered several speaker (podium) sessions over the past 10 years related to nursing education. In particular, I have focused on innovation in support of teaching nursing students to better appreciate delivery of care to people with mental health problems.