

## Nursing Education Research Conference 2018 (NERC18)

### The Student Nurse Athlete: What Can We Learn From Them?

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Healthcare is constantly undergoing major transformations that require the need for highly qualified healthcare workers and leaders, particularly in response to technological advances, the aging population, and the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. Because not all challenges can be anticipated, nursing and nursing education must be adaptable to these evolving healthcare landscapes. Nursing education in particular is charged with renovating the curricula to develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes to prepare graduates for these transformational changes in healthcare. In addition to critical thinking skills, collaboration, teamwork and leadership have been recognized as necessary requirements to assure safe patient care (Benner, Sutphen, Leonard & Day, 2010; Institute of Medicine [IOM], 1999; 2011). Teamwork within the healthcare environment is becoming more essential given its importance in preventing medical errors (Clancy & Tornberg, 2007). The educational preparation of all health professionals must transition from one of silos to one that fosters communication, collaboration and a team approach (Clancy & Tornberg, 2007).

This emphasis on healthcare teamwork began as a result of the publication of the Institute of Medicine's (IOM) report, *To Err Is Human: Building a Safer Health System* (IOM, 1999). A principal finding of the report was that systematic failures in the delivery of healthcare account for more errors than does poor performance by individuals and that success and failures depend on a great extent on the performance of teams. John M. Eisenberg, a leading groundbreaker in patient safety and former administrator for the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) observed that "patient safety is a team sport" (Clancy, 2005). It is nearly unthinkable to imagine a winning team composed of individuals with essential and complementary abilities who have not practiced together, yet healthcare professional training has historically been isolated in silos (Clancy & Tornberg, 2007).

The Institute of Medicine, the World Health Organization, the American Association of Colleges of Nursing and the Association of American Medical Colleges all boost the promotion of teamwork and collaboration as one of the core competencies for all healthcare educational programs (Finkelman & Kenner, 2012). It is the intent that all new graduate nurses will utilize evidence-based practice, quality improvement, informatics and teamwork and collaboration to assure safe, patient centered care. Yet embedding these core competencies throughout the nursing curricula has been a difficult movement for nurse educators (Bryer & Peterson-Graziose, 2014; Barnsteiner, Disch, Hall, Mayer, & Moore, 2007). If healthcare institutions expect new graduate nurses to have the tools necessary to communicate, collaborate and work in interprofessional teams, then academic institutions and nurse faculty must seek innovative resources within their institution or community to enhance teamwork opportunities with students of all disciplines.

Collegiate athletics have long been a part of university life. Physical educators, sport experts and researchers have touted the conflicting benefits and disadvantages of playing a collegiate sport while prioritizing academic performance. The general benefits frequently agreed upon include enhanced leadership qualities, competition, character building, student engagement, confidence, motivation, improved health, a persistence to stay in school, and the ability to learn how to deal with failure and difficult situations. It is no doubt that many of these characteristics would be of great benefit to the nursing profession, yet no studies have been done citing nursing student's collegiate sport participation and the attributes and characteristics gained from playing a college sport. It is interesting to note that at the time of this research in 2016, there were only a few research studies done identifying student nurses' activity in any collegiate activity, never mind sports.

This research used a phenomenological design to illuminate and bring light to the experiences of having dual collegiate roles; that of the student nurse and the student athlete. Thirteen practicing nurses were interviewed about their collegiate experience. Each role, that of student nurse and that of student athlete, had various challenges and coordinating both roles was not easy, yet the participating nurses shared very poignant stories of how and why both roles enhanced the other. This study proved that student nurses can and should have the opportunity to participate in collegiate activities as do other college students. Nursing courses should not limit a student's drive to succeed in more than one role and that athletics may not be the only way nursing students can build a sense of belonging in their college community as they build their confidence in nursing.

Although this study's goal was not to identify whether playing a sport in college increased the nurses ability to communicate and collaborate, it did identify that despite the rigors of nursing school and the physical and time demands of playing a college sport, nursing students were able to be successful in both endeavors. Most explained that each role enhanced the other; taking one away would be a conflict of their persona. The repeated themes that were shared throughout the interviews destinguishing the dual role phenomena were: 1) Athletic Identity, 2) Perseverance, 3) Support, 4) Acceptance and Belonging and 5) Transitioning the Sports Mentality into Nursing. The presentation will expand on these themes and will share some of the stories of these student nurse athletes; their determination to succeed at both roles and how their experience affects them as nurses today.

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**Title:**

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**Keywords:**

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**References:**

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### **Abstract Summary:**

Collaboration and communication is necessary in healthcare. Research on collegiate athletes note attributes such as teamwork, collaboration, and communication. Nursing Education has had difficulty imbedding these into the curriculum. This study identified nurses who played a sport in college and how their experience can help both nursing in the future.

### **Content Outline:**

**Intro:** Healthcare is in constant flux. Nurses need to constantly think both “in and out of the box”, yet nursing education continues to be very regimented and structured. How do we teach nursing students to be both competent and independent, if educators don’t necessarily foster this in the curriculum?

**Main Point #1:** There is much to be learned in college outside of the classroom, lab and clinical setting. Participation in college activities are known to create a greater persistence to stay in college. Some activities build communication and leadership roles. Many college students get the opportunity to play a collegiate sport, participate in student government or continue their passion of music by playing in the college’s marching band and yet there are very few, if any research studies, that link student nurses with extra-curricular collegiate activity.

**Main Point #2:** A Phenomenological research design study was done to shed light on the experience of student nurses who played a collegiate NCAA sanctioned sport while attending nursing school. Thirteen practicing nurses from 9 different colleges, playing 9 different sports at various levels of play were interviewed. Five essential themes were identified as the “wonder” in what that experience must have been like. The nurse’s experiences were very unique to each other, yet all expressed how they had an athletic identity (theme#1), how they had to persevere (#2) because “quitting either nursing or the sport was not an option, how they needed supporters (#3); their parents, their coach, and sometimes their nursing professor; to help them through the tough schedule, how their sport gave them their sense of belonging (#4) in college and finally how their “sport” mentality transitioned them into their new role as a graduate nurse.

**Main Point #3:** The most powerful theme that came out from this study is that of belonging. Belonging includes more than just connecting with people. It involves a reciprocal feeling of connectedness; a feeling of being welcomed and not threatened. Seeing themselves as a member of a smaller group (team) imbedded in

the larger community (college) helped these student nurses build a sense of confidence in them as students so that they can build a sense of confidence in themselves as nurses.

**Implications and Further Study:** This research will hopefully open up conversation in the nursing educational forum about student nurses participating in collegiate sport as well as other time consuming and committed collegiate activities. Academic recommendations will be discussed as well as implications for further study.

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**Author Summary:** Dr. Engelke is an Associate Professor at Nassau Community College. She has been there in various educational capacities for over 15 years and has worked both independently and with a HRSA grant to mentor and retain nursing students with a focus on healthcare diversity. She received her Doctorate of Education from Teachers College, Columbia University where she published her dissertation: Dual Collegiate Roles: The Lived Experience of the Student Nurse Athlete: From Becoming to Belonging.