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Peer Teaching in an Undergraduate Health Assessment Course to Promote Skills Retention

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Introduction:

Historically, as an upper division Baccalaureate nursing program, students do not take courses in the nursing school prior to formal matriculation in their third year. To enhance connections with pre-nursing students as well as increase opportunities for students to take outside courses within the college while in the nursing program, a new initiative has been to offer courses to this student population, including pre-requisites and nursing courses. Therefore, a new course was offered to undergraduate students who would be matriculating into the School of Nursing that combined Anatomy and Physiology with an undergraduate health assessment entitled *Assessment of Normal Human Form and Function*. Completion of this course allowed students to participate in a summer elective providing health screenings in a rural setting, and also decreased students' fall course load as it took the place of the traditional health assessment course. However, one challenge associated with presenting health assessment content early was related to how students could retain the information from the time course ended in May (or the health screenings ended in June), until the students entered the clinical setting in late September as knowledge and skill loss may occur over time. Prior research has demonstrated that over time, knowledge retention can diminish, but can also be impacted by practice (Sankar, Vijayakanthi, Sankar, & Dubey, 2013). The purpose of this abstract is to describe a program implemented which was designed to impact this potential knowledge and loss.

Methods: An innovative program was piloted entitled "STARS: Students Teaching Assessment to Retain Skills." STARS students participated in a peer teaching experience in the laboratory setting. Prior research suggests that peer teaching programs can be beneficial to students by increasing confidence and proficiency in skills, enhancing interpersonal skills, and developing leadership abilities (Bensfield, Solari-Twadell, & Sommer, 2008; Harmer, Huffman, & Johnson, 2011; Ross, Bruderle, & Meakim, 2015). It has also been well-received by tutees (Weyrich, et al., 2008), and student mentors have reported verification of their own knowledge and skill ability (Smith, Beattie, & Kyle, 2015). Students who participated in *Assessment of Normal Human Form and Function* enrolled in a directed study with the health assessment course faculty and these students were utilized as peer teachers within the laboratory setting. Unique to this experience was that the STARS students were in the same cohort as the students to whom they served as peer teachers, rather than upper level students. Each STARS student was assigned to a lab group for the duration of the semester and facilitated lab activities with the lab instructor. All students also had the opportunity to participate in health screenings within a community organization. STARS students did not participate in the student evaluation or grading process.

Findings: Feedback from the STARS students' experience was overwhelmingly positive. Students reported enhancing their own knowledge through review and preparation for lab. Students also enjoyed functioning in the leadership role and developing closer relationships with faculty. Students reported that once clinical rotations started, they used time in the clinical setting to practice health assessment techniques to prepare for lab activities in subsequent weeks. STARS students have also demonstrated continued leadership beyond the semester through informal peer teaching opportunities and student government leadership positions. Due to the success of this program, a second cohort of STARS students will be participating in this program in the upcoming semester.

Conclusions: Peer teaching appears to be promote both skill retention and leadership development in students. Future directions for this program include formal evaluation of peer teachers and quantitative skills assessment.

Title:

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Keywords:

Baccalaureate Education, Peer Teaching and Skills Retention

References:

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Abstract Summary:

Students may lose skills during a prolonged break between semesters. To counteract this loss, peer teaching was used as a strategy for students to retain skills in a health assessment course.

Content Outline:**Introduction:**

1. To increase engagement with the nursing school, pre-nursing students were able to enroll in a combined anatomy –health assessment course.
2. Because of the time gap that occurred between the course and when the students entered the clinical setting, there was concern for knowledge and skill loss.

Body:

1. To mitigate this knowledge loss, a new program was developed for these students which included a peer mentoring component.
2. Students functioned as peer teachers in the health assessment laboratory setting.
3. Feedback from students and faculty was positive about the experience. Students have continued to function in leadership roles while in the program.

Conclusions:

1. Peer mentoring may be an effective strategy to promote knowledge retention and leadership skills in nursing students.

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Professional Experience: I have taught in the School of Nursing since January 2012. I have previously taught in fundamentals skills lab and health assessment. I have attended training session on simulation in the lab as well as clinical instruction. I assisted in developing the deliberate practice sessions, and have co-coordinated the course in which it was affiliated. I teach in a pre-nursing elective and developed a peer teaching initiative.

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Author Summary: Dr. Amar is the Primary Investigator for the externally-funded Building Nursing's Diverse Leaders at Emory (BUNDLE) program. As Assistant Dean for Undergraduate Education, her experience in student needs and challenges provides the expertise required for successful program development and initiation. Her background in psychiatric nursing also provides a resource for interpersonal skills that proves valuable for BUNDLE scholars and faculty.