Do Nursing Students’ Perceptions of Older Adults Change Over Time?
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Disclosure

- The author has no conflicts of interest to disclose.
Background

- Baccalaureate program at private faith-based institution
- Originally stand-alone course on older adults
- Phase out of stand-alone course to increase course credits to adult courses
- Integration of older adult content throughout curriculum
Purpose

Determine whether students’ perceptions and attitudes regarding older adults would change over time.
Methods

- Written assignment over three semesters
- Maximum 2 questions per assignment
- 1 – 2 paragraphs reflective response
- First semester – Health assessment
- Second semester – Foundations of nursing
- Third semester – Community and Adult/older adult
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In 1 – 2 paragraphs, describe your perceptions on what it is like to be an older adult in today’s society.
Results Semester One

- Older adults viewed as
  - Lonely and depressed
  - Dependent on others
  - Unable to travel
  - Not understand millennials
  - Not able to use or learn advancing technology (computers and smart phones)
“...loneliness leads to depression...due to technology advancing at an alarming rate, many are not able to keep up and or lack the interest to, which causes them to be further isolated and unable to socialize since most technology requires some technical knowledge.”
Comments

• “It is hard to teach them the technologies we have and therefore we tend to ignore them…”

• “An older adult also ends up needing more help doing tasks that were once simple like walking, eating and possibly even using the restroom.”

• “…little in common with millennials.”
In 1 – 2 paragraphs, describe your perceptions of what it is like for an older adult living in long term care.
Results Semester Two

- Reflected on positive and negative experiences
- Perceptions beginning to change
- Focus on importance of
  - Communication with clients
  - Showing respect
  - Providing holistic care
Comments

• “...changed my lenses and perspective... older adults ...assist and be independent in many ways... 79-year-old resident whipped out her cell phone and called the hair salon to schedule her hair appointment.”

• “...majority of older adults I encountered appeared to be either depressed or just satisfied with their living situation... misconception that older adults have difficulties with technologies is false...”
Comments

- “Patients want to still feel as if they have their independence... A lot of the older patients just want that interaction with others to feel important...”
- “Because living in a nursing home can get very lonely, I think the residents are at risk for depression. Living a life in constant loneliness and not having that much human interaction can really take a toll on a person.”
In 1 – 2 paragraphs, describe your perceptions of what it is like for an older adult living and/or being cared for in community settings.

Reflect on your perceptions of older adults for the past three semesters and describe a strategy that you feel would be successful to help the older adult age successfully at home. Provide a rationale(s) for your answer.
Results Semester Three

- Expressed concerns over
  - Ways to better assist older adults
  - Keeping home environment safe
  - Assist to stay physically and mentally active

- Suggestions on how nurses can provide oversight to assist older adults to maintain health and independence
Comments

• …keeping the older adult active, independent and injury free.”
• “…disabilities such as dementia, an adult daycare facility…provide the caregiver with time to themselves while allowing the older adult to participate in socialization and activities…”
• “More one on one interactions with the older adults…it would help them gain more cognitive and motor skills.”
Comments

- “...make sure the proper resources are available.”
- “...keep the older adults busy, have them keep using their memories, their hands, keeping their minds and bodies engaged.”
- “...make them a part of the community so that they feel useful and have a sense of purpose...staying active and keeping the mind busy...”
Conclusion

- Perceptions changed
- Focused more on positives
- Wanted to work with older adults to maintain independence
- Saw them as individuals with distinct needs
Future plans

- Follow up with this group of students in last semester of program (Spring 2019)
  - How have their attitudes changed?
- Continue assignments with next cohort of students
Questions?