Pediatric Student Experiences in a School Nursing Clinical

Brenna Quinn PhD, RN-BC, NCSN, CNE
Diana McAuliffe MN, RN, CPN
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Pediatric Clinical Challenges

- Shortage of clinical sites
- Need to meet clinical learning objectives
  - Simulation
  - Non-traditional clinical sites
- Clinical in the school health setting is one solution
Purpose

- Describe experiences of undergraduate nursing students in a pediatric clinical with a school nursing component
- Identify challenges and benefits of school health placements
Methods

- Qualitative analysis of student reflective journals
  - Students in pediatric course attended two days of school health clinical
  - Consent obtained
  - Reflective journals blinded, provided to researcher
  - Conventional and directed content analysis
    - NVIVO
Results

• 38 (100%) of invited students consented to participation and submitted reflective journals as part of pediatric coursework

• 3 major themes
  ① Benefits of the clinical experience
  ② Suggestions for improvement
  ③ Appreciation for the school nurse role

• 3 sub-themes
  ① Greater responsibility than anticipated
  ② Resource constraints
  ③ Lack of support
Benefits of the Experience

- Students thought school nursing experiences aided knowledge of atypical child growth and development
  - “When it came to interacting with and recognizing different cognitive abilities and adjusting to those needs this [clinical] provided a completely hands on experience”

- Confidence in communication skills for children with range of ages and cognitive abilities

- Exposure to role outside of acute care setting
  - “eye-opening”, “got to see a different side of pediatric nursing”

- Psychosocial concerns and social determinants of health
Suggestions for Improvement

- Some students noted the experience was laid-back, slow
  - “Non-hectic job option before retirement”

- Students requested more days in the setting

- Students suggested moving between school levels
  - “…the two weeks was quick and I was just beginning to build relationships with some of the students”
Appreciation for School Nurse Role

- Students gained an understanding of the broad scope, challenges, and responsibility to the community that the school nurse has.
  - “It is never as simple as quickly treating students coming in with stomach aches or bruises and I think people fail to understand this.”

- Surprised by variety of concerns and people the school nurse is responsible for.
  - “[the school nurse] seemed to be the person everyone went to if they had any concern or question, ranging from what foods can someone eat to if they were able to participate in gym class.”
Greater Responsibility than Anticipated

- School nurses carry more responsibility than students thought a community-based nurse would have.
- The school nurse was recognized as an imperative component of healthy development for schoolchildren.
- “[school nurses] are a very important constant in students’ lives”
Resource Constraints

- Students noted limited availability of physical space, oxygen, and other healthcare professionals
  - “There was only one nurse for everyone”
  - Students noted they had always learned healthcare was a team effort, were surprised to learn school nurses worked alone
  - School nurses seemed relieved to have a student to help with daily duties
Lack of Support

- Students did not think teachers always used the health office appropriately
  - “Many teachers will send ‘troublesome’ kids to the nurse when they ‘need a break’ from the child”
- Communicating with parents was noted as a significant barrier to school nurses working effectively
  - Students did not expect parents to need multiple phone calls and reminders to send in medications and emergency plans, or to withhold health information
Implications for Educators

- We encourage nurse educators to incorporate school health experience in pediatric curricula
- Partnering with school districts in which student enrollment reflects diversity in culture, socio-economic status, and access to healthcare should be a priority
- Although students requested visits to different schools, visiting the same school has benefits
- Short orientation for school nurse preceptors
- Assigned readings for students regarding school nurse work
Future Research

- Research regarding the balance between clinical hours in the acute and community settings is needed.
- Impact of school nursing experiences on student success:
  - E.g. NCLEX-RN pass rate, course exams, subsequent courses
- Impact of school nursing experiences on RN job choice
“There was only one nurse for everyone”: Student reflections of a school nursing clinical experience☆☆☆

Brenna L. Quinn, PhD, RN-BC, NCSN, CNE *, Diana McAuliffe, MN, RN, CPN, Clinical Instructor

Solomont School of Nursing, University of Massachusetts Lowell, 133 Wilder Street, Suite 200, Lowell, MA 01854, United States of America
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