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Realizing Empathy and Expertise through Accounts Lived (REEAL)-An Integrated Learning Experience

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Empathy in Nursing Education

- Undergraduate nursing students typically focus on the clinical and technical components of patient care.
- There is concern about incorporating **empathy** into nursing curricula.
- A variety of methods have been utilized to teach **empathy** including role-modelling, the study of literature and art, narrative medicine and role-playing (Cunico, Sartori, Marognolli & Meneghini, 2012).

Objectives

TEACHING

- To develop an integrated teaching method that includes didactic material, bedside clinical experience, simulation, and the patients' subsequent lived experience.

PRACTICE

- To develop nurses who engage in empathetic practice, which will lead to optimal patient outcomes, personal and professional growth, and enhanced career satisfaction.

Learner Perspectives

Early qualitative feedback via an informal survey on the integrated learning experience was overwhelmingly positive.

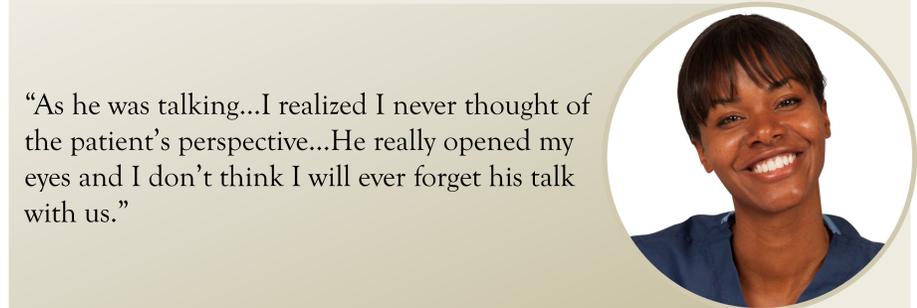


“Engaging in all of these activities in a coordinated fashion showed me that solid clinical knowledge, combined with empathetic practice, makes the best nurse.”

Background of Empathy in Nursing

Empathy has been defined in recent literature as a “cognitive (rather than emotional) attribute that involves the ability to understand (rather than feel) experiences, concerns, and perspectives of the patient, combined with a capacity to communicate this understanding” (Hojat et al, 2009).

- **Empathy** engenders trust and has been linked to decreasing patient anxiety (Halpern, 2003).
- Nursing and medical students experience a decrease in **empathy** towards the end of their programs, which may be related to “adaptation to the professional role” (Hojat et al., 2009).
- The increasing complexity and demands on nurses in healthcare today have led to a higher incidence of burnout and turnover. It is recognized that patients have felt the effects of this burnout in that they cite feeling a lack of connection and **empathy** from their clinical providers.



“As he was talking...I realized I never thought of the patient’s perspective...He really opened my eyes and I don’t think I will ever forget his talk with us.”

A Novel Teaching Strategy to Promote Empathy

We created a novel learning opportunity that integrates real patients’ lived experiences into traditional teaching methods.

Clinical groups comprised of ten senior level baccalaureate nursing students participated in the following activities over the course of one or two days:



Clinical experience in Pauley Heart Center



Interactive didactic session with therapeutic hypothermia expert



High fidelity ACLS code simulation



Classroom Q&A with therapeutic hypothermia survivor



“It helps remind us to see them as a whole person...Hearing about his story and family, and most importantly what he remembers seeing and hearing will definitely improve how I care for patients...”

Future Implementation

- The **REEAL** method will continue to be implemented with senior level baccalaureate nursing students at the VCU SON, with a goal to expand to other levels of nursing students.
- Obtain IRB approval and implement the verified Jefferson **Empathy** Scale (student nurse version), pre and post **REEAL** experience to have measurable quantitative data on potential increase in **empathy** among student nurses.