

Innovative Education to Address Addictions Learning Needs of Nursing Students

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Abstract

Background

Substance use and substance-use disorders (SU/SUDs) are enormous problems that require extensive financial and health care resources, yet evidence indicates that patients often receive inadequate or deficient care for SU/SUDs. Among health care providers, lack of knowledge has been identified as a barrier to providing quality care to persons with SU/SUDs (Haffajee et al., 2018; Neville & Roan, 2014). Currently, few schools educate nurses to identify, prevent, and treat SUDs (Savage et al., 2014; USDHHS, 2016). Meanwhile, Maryland has disproportionate rates of opioid emergency department visits and hospital admissions (HCUP) compared to the U.S. overall and, as of 2018, continues to rank among the highest in the nation for opioid-related deaths (NIDA, 2019).

Methods

To address these concerns, a learning-needs assessment survey was created to measure students' need for addictions content and education. This online anonymous survey was distributed to the enrolled student body at the University of Maryland School of Nursing in fall 2019 with over 600 students responding (32%), most of whom have previous work experience in health care (83%). The survey adapted items regarding therapeutic attitudes from the Alcohol and Alcohol Problems Perceptions Questionnaire (Cartright, 1980) and the Drug and Drug Problems Perceptions Questionnaire (Watson et al., 2007) in addition to questions about their knowledge and interest in learning more about SU/SUDs and other addictions.

Findings

The vast majority of students were interested in taking an addictions course (80%), and virtually all agreed that it is important to be educated about SU/SUDs (96%). Students in the RN-to-Bachelor of Science in Nursing program also expressed strong interest in having an undergraduate focus area on SU/SUDs (61%). Students thought that having an addictions specialist nurse as a resource in their practice would be helpful (96%). These responses demonstrate overwhelming recognition of the need for nursing education in SU/SUDs and the

need for specialty clinical nursing resources. Many students tended to feel they had sufficient knowledge about the effects of substances, e.g., perceived enough knowledge of physical effects of alcohol and drugs (87% and 85% respectively); however, fewer agreed that they could appropriately advise about the effects of alcohol (72%) and drugs (68%). Students also took the opportunity to add in their own unmet SU/SUDs learning needs, such as how to better communicate, locate resources, manage intoxicated and withdrawing patients, and support patients in treatment and recovery.

Outcomes

Survey findings are being used to inform curricular development. New for fall 2020 is an RN-BSN focus area in addictions nursing with coursework and skill development for use in direct care settings. At the graduate level, online addictions coursework is under development that combines student-driven learning with evidence-based content taught by addictions-certified faculty. Learning activities will be provided and discussed in further detail.