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Alternative Clinical Education Opportunities for Undergraduate Nursing Students During COVID-19

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Abstract

Background

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in spring 2020 created opportunities and challenges for meeting clinical learning needs for pre-licensure nursing students. The Nurse Managed Wellness Clinic (NMWC) Nurse Support Program II–funded project (#18-301) addressed the need for student clinic hours and hands-on experiences by developing, implementing, and evaluating two alternative clinical experiences to better prepare graduates for the changing health care environment and entry into practice.

Objectives

The NMWC clinicals provide nursing students the opportunity to participate in health education and wellness services. Two clinical opportunities were developed in fall 2020. The COVID-19 Vaccination Clinic and Health Assessments provide real-world clinical experiences that combine evidenced-based practice, clinical reasoning, and communication skills.

The student learning objectives focus on safety, communication, and teamwork. The experiences align with the nursing program goals and the core competencies of Quality and Safe Education for Nurses knowledge, skills, and attitudes of nursing. These also support the core competencies of interprofessional education.

Methods

The clinical learning opportunities are based on the adult learner's need to apply nursing theory and evidence-based practice skills to current real-world events. Online resources, virtual and face-to-face discussion, and hands-on practice support cognitive, psychomotor, and affective learner objectives, which represent the domains of education. All students received learning objectives, a preclinical assignment, and evaluation tools prior to the clinic day. Students meet for a virtual preclinical discussion prior to the clinic day to review objectives, expectations, and questions. A brief postclinical discussion with time for self-reflection is provided at the end of each clinic day.

Results

One hundred thirty-four nursing students from first through fourth semester of the two-year program students participated in a COVID-19 Vaccination or Health Assessment clinic between February 9, 2021, and April 28, 2021. Evaluation tools include a course evaluation survey, student reflection, and a course rubric. A focus group will be conducted for student participants in May 2021.

Conclusions

The NMWC alternative clinical activities are timely, addressing the need for hands-on clinic practice experience for undergraduate nursing students. The academic partnership with the community health system and the county health department have increased understanding of the role of nursing and education in providing for the health of our community while meeting the student and program learning goals.