Another Perspective on Men in Nursing
To the Editor:
The article titled “Exploring Men’s Perceived Educational Experience in a Baccalaureate Program” by Ellis, Meeker, and Hyde in the December 2006 issue of the Journal of Nursing Education (Vol. 45, No. 12, pp. 523-527) was one that I read with interest. I am a 47-year-old man currently enrolled in my final semester of an accelerated BSN program.

I write to share some of my own perceptions of my BSN educational experience as they relate to the themes resulting from this research brief. I preface my comments with the fact that being a career changer, I have had what I consider advantages over the traditional student who is entering nursing as their first profession. For most of us who are choosing nursing as a second career, life experience has provided maturity, self-confidence with one’s identity, and a view of what is important and what is not.

In regards to the first theme of survival, despite the academic rigor of the program, I believe the curriculum warrants being demanding due to the level of responsibility, clinical competencies, and knowledge expected of RNs. Unfortunately, many students have financial and family responsibilities that conflict with the program’s time requirements. In the program in which I am enrolled, we were well forewarned of the demands of the program.

The theme of the difference in communication between men and women was one that interested me because I agree that this distinction is an important one to be considered. Program faculty should be encouraged to review their lecture content, test questions, and written course material for gender-biased language. On occasion, I have encountered test questions that assume the nurse is female, where the correct answer would have been inappropriate for a male to have chosen that action.

Another point under the theme of differences included the lack of male instructors leading to frustration. I don’t necessarily think that the lack of contact with male instructors has been a hindrance in the classroom; however, I do believe there are certain questions and concerns that come up in the clinical rotations specific to being a male student where it would be helpful to have a male nursing professional address them. It’s unrealistic to think that a female clinical instructor should have these answers. According to Chad O’Lynn, PhD, RN, Assistant Professor at the University of Portland School of Nursing, and secretary of the American Assembly for Men in Nursing, men enrolled in nursing programs are more likely to drop out than are their female counterparts (Williams, 2006). O’Lynn suggested that mentorships be offered and encouraged to male students to serve as a support system.

Another theme in the article by Ellis, Meeker, and Hyde focused on the requirements of the program and the perception that some assignments are simply “busywork.” On the basis of my experience and conversations with fellow classmates, female students share a similar perspective regarding the time requirements and the workload involved in a BSN program; therefore, I believe this sentiment is not exclusively shared by male students.

The last theme of career goals was one that was familiar since I have found that my fellow male classmates and I share similar ambitions such as pursuit of more technical fields of nursing like nurse anesthetist, critical care nurse, and emergency department nurse. Of course, choosing these areas for practice may simply be because these are areas where male nurses are already employed, offering less chance of “sticking out.”

My own incentives for choosing the nursing profession include the wide range of available career paths, opportunities for advancement, future job security, and making a difference. On a positive note, most of the comments and opinions of those whom I have encountered since beginning this journey have been encouraging and complimentary, which has only enhanced and reinforced my decision to choose the nursing profession as a new career.

Reference

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