Engaging Students Using Feature Films

The purpose of this pilot study was to investigate nursing students’ feedback regarding viewing health care-related films as an alternative clinical assignment. Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected. It was anticipated that the students’ empathy levels and knowledge would be enhanced by offering this element of narrative pedagogy. The results of this pilot study will be used as a predictor of success for a broader study using feature films with a larger sample size. This study was adapted from research conducted by Masters (2005).

Method

In the spring 2009 semester, students enrolled in the Fundamentals of Nursing course had the following course objective (among others): “Practice responsible safe and ethical nursing care that promotes the health of adult clients in both laboratory and clinical settings.” In an effort to reinforce this course objective, students who chose not to travel to the national student convention spent their clinical time viewing two health care films entitled, Wit (Bosanquet & Nichols, 2001) and Supersize Me (Spurlock & Spurlock, 2004), with a discussion following. It was anticipated that students would gain knowledge and increase empathy. The following topics were addressed in the films: cancer, patient experience, clinical trials, chemotherapy, medication side-effects, self-determination, ethical care, nutrition, and obesity. All students signed informed consent documents approved by the Human Subjects Review Board.

Results

Each participant (N = 24) completed a survey after viewing the films and engaging in a group discussion. Of the students surveyed, 23 (95.8%) either agreed, strongly agreed, or very strongly agreed to the statement, “I liked having the option of watching a health care-related feature film as an alternative to attending a national student convention.” All of the students (100%) agreed, strongly agreed, or very strongly agreed that the films were engaging, held their attention, and added to their understanding and empathy for patients experiencing cancer, chemotherapy, and nutritional disorders such as obesity. Only 4 (16.6%) of the 24 participants felt they would rather have spent the clinical day at the long-term care facility.

Qualitative data were elicited by asking, “What were the most important points taken from the films?” and “How have your thoughts, views, or opinions been altered after watching the films?” Statements written by students yielded rich results regarding the devastating effects high-fat and high-cholesterol foods have on the body. Common themes in response to the films were caring, compassion, empathy, and an increased awareness of the body’s response to high-fat and high-cholesterol foods.

One student wrote:

Though I’m excited to start clinical, watching these movies gave me a new perspective on fast food, and also reinforces how I will strive to care for my patients. I believe Wit is great to show before going into a care setting.

Another student comment read:

Nursing really involves so many things. Patient care goes far beyond knowing how to physically care for them. It’s really about the emotional and compassion aspect as well.

In response to Supersize Me, a student noted:

Fast food in particular can lead to several diseases and can take as many as two decades off your life.

Discussion and Conclusion

As anticipated, there were many benefits to this pilot study. Students learned about the ethical responsibility of nursing care as a result of viewing and discussing the feature films. According to Masters (2005), “Compared to the educational films available in nursing, commercial films are more interesting and less expensive” (p. 113). In addition, because the findings were so positive, this study served as a springboard to a more extensive quasi-experimental study planned for the fall 2010 semester. Creativity often leads to enhanced learning and critical thinking. The results of this study have shown an alternative way to engage students outside the usual classroom, laboratory, or clinical site.

References


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The author has no financial or proprietary interest in the materials presented herein.
doi:10.3928/01484834-20110519-06

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