Syllabus Selection

Innovative Learning Activity

Integrating Psychosocial Care Into Medical–Surgical Nursing

No matter what the area of practice, every good nurse also must be, in part, a mental health nurse. In other words, every patient—whether an inpatient or an outpatient, with an acute or a chronic illness, having a planned or an unplanned health care intervention, with a positive or a negative effect—has psychosocial needs. Potter and Perry (2009) called for psychosocial assessments and interventions for all patients in their discussion of development, life changes, and illness, expressing concern that “Professional caregivers do not usually address the psychosocial needs of cancer clients and their families” (p. 90). Nurses witness issues with anxiety, depression, body image, role, and self-concept in many of the patients they see. However, nursing students are often focused more on technology and on performing procedures than on meeting patients’ psychosocial needs.

How can nurse educators help students understand that psychosocial care is important in every unit, not just in the mental health unit? A psychosocial-focused learning activity was developed by faculty for baccalaureate students to implement in adult acute medical and surgical units during the second semester of their junior year. The learning objectives are:

- Perform a psychosocial and developmental assessment on a patient having behavioral or emotional difficulty.
- Analyze assessment data to reach conclusions on which to base care.
- Plan and implement evidence-based, patient-centered interventions for psychosocial problems and nursing diagnoses for patients.
- Evaluate effectiveness of that plan (i.e., were stated outcomes met?).

Each student is assigned this activity on a rotating basis instead of total patient care. Students are not responsible for administering medications or performing procedures when completing this assignment. Instructors ask whether there is a patient who is restless, crying, angry, or using the call light frequently; such patients are assigned to the students.

The assignment includes assessment, intervention, and evaluation. The assessment has multiple parts. Students collect data for a health history. Together with the patient, an ecomap is constructed that diagrams the patient’s relationships to individuals or organizations. Standardized assessments are available on multiple Web sites and can include the:

- Mini-Mental Status Examination (Folstein, Folstein, & McHugh, 1975), which evaluates orientation, memory, and language. It has been translated into Spanish.
- Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9) (Spitzer, Kroenke, & Williams, 1999), which has nine questions that assess depression.
- Abuse Assessment Scale (Basile, Hertz, & Back, 2007), which focuses on intimate partner abuse in women.
- CAGE questionnaire (Ewing, 1984), which asks four questions about thoughts and feelings about alcohol (cutting down, being annoyed when confronted about drinking, feeling guilty, and needing an eye opener). Some have modified the questions by adding “or drug use” after alcohol to each item in the questionnaire.

Assessment is not enough. Students are also required to identify psychosocial nursing diagnoses and select one as the priority. A long-term goal and two to three short-term goals are identified for that diagnosis. The clinical instructor guides students to write measurable, realistic, short-term goals. For each short-term goal, students write interventions to help the patient reach those goals. This is not just a written, theoretical activity completed after the fact. Students are expected to write the care plan within the first few hours of assessing and caring for the patient so they can implement the interventions and evaluate the effectiveness of those interventions. Students assess how well the patient met the short-term goals. This assignment has been used when students have two consecutive 6-hour days and also when they have one 12-hour day. With short inpatient stays, evaluation occurs for that period of time only.

This psychosocial-focused learning activity benefits instructors, students, patients, and nursing staff. Patient acuity has increased, but student-to-instructor ratios have not changed. Many instructors are stressed by their increased responsibility. Instructors guide and support students with the psychosocial-focused learning activity, but this assignment eliminates the medication administration and procedures that can be time consuming for instructors. Students learn there is a need to apply psychosocial knowledge, skills, and attitudes with every patient, and the patient has his or her psychosocial needs met. Staff appreciate the assignment because they are not interrupted to respond to those patient needs.

References


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The author has disclosed no potential conflicts of interest, financial or otherwise. doi:10.3928/01484834-20121023-02