Student-Developed Case Studies

The literature stresses the importance of incorporating dynamic learning activities in nursing education (Grossman, Krom, & O’Conner, 2010; Hoag, Lillie, & Hoppe, 2005; Hoffman, 2008; Shattell, 2007). Historically, the baccalaureate nursing program at our university has worked with local elementary and high school nurses to fulfill a portion of the pediatric clinical experiences. However, many nursing students verbalized dissatisfaction with the learning experience, reflecting “Sometimes there is a lot of down time or time that we are just ‘watching’ the nurse.”

To make this experience more meaningful to the nursing students, course faculty collaborated with the school nurses to create a new set of learning objectives based on the teaching and learning methodology of “using case studies to improve clinical decision making in nursing” (Grossman et al., 2010, p. 138). The new objectives require each student to develop a case study based on a real-life clinical scenario. This article describes the methodology used to create a learning opportunity for nursing students. Assembling case studies provides an opportunity to identify concepts from theory and apply them to practice within a pediatric population in a school setting.

Case Study Development

Students develop a case study that represents their own knowledge, skills, and attitudes, as well as those reflected by the school nurse. The learning activity incorporates multiple aspects of understanding growth and development, a health issue or disease process, and the collective effect on a child’s health and well-being. The case study is based on a child of particular interest recommended by the school nurse or a child who visited the school nurse during the clinical day. Key elements that must be incorporated in the case study include the: (a) explanation of the health or developmental issues of the child; (b) description of the adaptive and ineffective responses of the child; (c) description of influences the peer
group has on the socialization of the child; (d) description of the influences the school and family have on the development and socialization of the child; (e) notation of any specific cultural practices that are applicable; (f) level of development of the child based on one of the theorists; (g) identification and explanation of the roles of the school nurse in relation to the child chosen; and (h) identification of appropriate nursing diagnoses, goals, and interventions. Following the case study, the student must provide an overall reflection and evaluation of the clinical experience.

Conclusion

Faculty and the involved school nurses agree that requiring the students to create a case study has been a successful addition to this clinical experience. The case studies have included children with a wide spectrum of health conditions, from congenital anomalies to urgent care. In addition, the case studies have expanded dialogue on issues including, but not limited to: (a) health and well-being issues and trends in the community’s pediatric population, such as pediatric obesity and teen parenting; (b) roles of the nurse, such as educator, team leader, and family liaison; (c) family culture, composition, coping styles, and dynamics and how these may influence a child’s development, such as self-inflicted violence, abuse, and neglect; and (d) influences of peer groups and schools on the socialization of children, such as bullying.

Since the implementation of the new set of learning objectives, formative and summative student evaluations of this clinical experience have been positive. Students reflected:

- “This is a great learning opportunity... I learned so much by being able to really investigate what this child has to deal with every day in a real life situation.”
- “This experience makes what I learned in theory class ‘come to life.’”
- “This experience was an amazing eye opener and great learning opportunity.”

This activity requires the student to analyze data and to synthesize and connect the information to assemble a real-life solution. Designing a case study engages the student in clinical learning. The authors believe this teaching strategy strengthens clinical learning through application of theory to practice. In addition, the approach can be easily adapted to a variety of settings.

References


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