Engaging RN-to-BSN Students in Medical Reserve Corps Training

The events that occurred on September 11, 2001, changed the lives of many Americans. This disaster influenced nursing education by bringing attention to the need for disaster preparation for nurses. The American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) noted nine Essentials to describe outcomes expected of baccalaureate-prepared nurses (AACN, 2008; Culley, 2010). Of the nine Essentials, both Essential VII and Essential IX reference the importance of knowledge regarding emergency preparedness (AACN, 2008; Culley, 2010). Thus, nurse educators are being challenged to find ways to include this topic in the nursing curriculum. This article describes a unique partnership between nursing faculty and experts in the community to engage students in Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) training.

Nursing faculty at a state university in south central Kentucky collaborated with a district health department to provide students enrolled in an RN-to-baccalaureate nursing (BSN) program the opportunity to participate in a 1-day (8-hour) didactic MRC training program. Included in the program was vital information regarding the responsibilities of nurses during disasters, such as an overview of MRC and the role of interdisciplinary members; large scale or mass vaccination clinics; biological agents such as anthrax, botulism, tularemia, and smallpox; and emerging infections such as SARS, Monkeypox virus, West Nile virus, and pandemic influenza. Attendees were required to achieve 70% or better on a 25-item assessment to meet the outcome of MRC membership eligibility.

Faculty conducted a descriptive study to examine RN-to-BSN students’ perceptions regarding the activity. Permission was obtained from the institutional review board at the institution where the students were enrolled. A convenience sample of RN-to-BSN students taking a required public health nursing course and participating in the MRC training program was used for the research study. A researcher-developed questionnaire, consisting of eight items, was used to collect data. Four of the items were demographic questions and four related to participants’ awareness and perceptions of MRC training. Completion of the questionnaire was considered as implied consent. Of the 27 students attending the training, 26 participated (96.3% response rate).

Demographics of the sample included age ranging from 24 to 55 years, with a mean of 34.8 years; and experience as a nurse ranging from 1 to 27 years, with a mean of 6.8 years. Twenty-three participants were women and three were men. The majority of the participants worked in acute care (61.5%); this was followed by home health (15.5%).

Prior to the training, 17 (65.4%) of the participants were not aware of the MRC. The researchers were most interested in examining the participants’ perceptions regarding the benefit of MRC training for nurses. This question was posed as an item on the questionnaire, with a five-point Likert-style response scale (1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = neutral; 4 = agree; and 5 = strongly agree). A majority (53.8%) of the participants indicated they agree or strongly agree that the MRC training was beneficial for nurses; 26.9% responded it was neutral. No statistically significant correlation was noted regarding perception and age, gender, or area of practice.

The researchers noted the limitations of a small convenience sample. They also believed that administering the questionnaire immediately following the 8-hour program may have impacted students’ responses. Researchers recommend replication of the study with electronic administration of the questionnaire 1 week after the training. This would offer the opportunity for reflection on the training and completion of the instrument at a convenient time.

Findings indicated that a majority of the students thought the program was beneficial. The program had a significant impact by providing necessary knowledge to understand the nurse’s role in emergency preparedness and the application of nursing care during disasters, which are noted as essential outcomes for baccalaureate-prepared nurses (AACN, 2008).

References


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