Connecting Academia to Practice: Giving Tomorrow’s Nursing Leaders a Head Start

This past spring, two of our Bethel University senior nursing students were instrumental in improving processes at area hospitals. One student led an effort to evaluate and improve the patient discharge process at the hospital where she was studying; the other student developed and presented compartment syndrome training to the orthopedic department nursing staff at the hospital where he was studying. These are two exemplars of the success we have achieved in our initial efforts to give tomorrow’s nursing leaders—and we believe every nurse is a leader—a head start.

At Bethel University, we emphasize cooperation and communication with our practice partners to develop and nurture the next generation of nurse leaders. To this end, we have revised our baccalaureate nursing (BSN) leadership and management course to include a senior project. This project has three objectives:

- To complement and enhance the communication, coordination, and cooperation between academia and practice (Griffith, 2012).
- To involve students in project planning, implementation, and evaluation.
- To expose students to leadership and management issues relevant to providing quality-enhanced, evidence-based, and patient-centered care and services.

Project conduct was guided by Bloom’s (1956) cognitive learning domain categories of application, analysis, and evaluation. We asked preceptors to ensure that projects incorporated these categories and to collaborate with our students in project selection. Most students chose a specific treatment protocol or a hospital policy addressing care delivery for analysis and evaluation. As previously stated, two of our students had the opportunity to investigate actual problems in the units where they were completing their leadership practicums.

One student observed lengthy delays in the discharge process at the rural hospital where she was assigned for her practicum. This was a source of patient dissatisfaction, and it had the potential to increase patient length of stay, as well as readmission rates. To address this problem, the student created a discharge planning map and displayed it in the nurses’ lounge. She solicited input from staff nurses to identify discharge process barriers and to suggest process modifications. A recent conversation with the hospital’s assistant nurse manager informed us that the planning map continues to be used as a tool to prompt nurses to proactively anticipate situations that could delay discharge (e.g., timely delivery of home care supplies and medical equipment set up, ordering physical therapy evaluation for the day of discharge, prescriptions for nursing home patients, transportation). The assistant nurse manager also stated that discharge process standardization based on the student’s process mapping continues to reduce the time required to discharge patients.

The second student, studying in the orthopedic unit of a regional hospital, created a comprehensive PowerPoint® presentation on the recognition and intervention of compartment syndrome. Using his presentation, the student personally instructed the orthopedic unit’s nursing staff on this potentially serious condition. Several nurses requested a copy of the PowerPoint file. The nurse manager noted that the presentation was timely given that a recent instance of compartment syndrome had not been recognized by any of the unit’s nurses. She further stated that the presentation will become a part of the nursing department’s annual skills fair and that it will be extremely useful in training nurses new to the unit.

These two projects highlight how academia and practice can complement each other’s activities, especially in the development and nurturing of future nurse leaders. Although not all senior nursing students had the opportunity to investigate and solve actual problems, benefit was still derived from analyzing extant protocols and polices to learn how they had been planned, implemented, monitored, and, when necessary, revised. With the continued cooperation of our practice partners, we hope to involve more of our senior nursing students in identifying and solving real-world problems at their leadership practicum sites.

References


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