Twitter™ as a Study Prompt: Engaging Adult Learners on the Go

Preparing for comprehensive tests at the conclusion of graduate nursing programs can be challenging in distance clinical education. Remote locations require students to independently study large quantities of course material. Although faculty can give general suggestions, few opportunities exist to assist and motivate students. This article describes how faculty used adult learning theory as a guide to encourage students to prepare for comprehensive examinations in a relevant and fun way without placing a large burden on faculty to monitor independent study (Magnussen, 2008).

Adult learning theory states that adults best learn information when it is immediately relevant to their goals and when it builds on existing knowledge and experiences (Knowles, 1980). Because students have a comprehensive examination at the close of the course Advanced Clinical Integration for Nurse-Midwifery and they are expected to pass board certification examinations shortly thereafter, the faculty thought students would find study questions relevant and that intermittent reminders would enhance study for upcoming examinations. Therefore, the faculty created an educational medium that allowed them to easily connect with students and encourage students to study the master’s-level curriculum content.

After reviewing available options, the faculty decided to use Twitter™, a social networking service, as a means of stimulating student study. Twitter allows users to sign up to receive text messages (i.e., tweets) on their smartphones or to review them on the Twitter Web site. Subscription is free, but individuals may incur a cost for texts depending on their mobile plans. Twitter users choose which individuals or groups they wish to follow, and messages posted by users can be pushed to other users’ smartphones. Although this teaching–learning experience was designed solely for student benefit, institutional review board approval was obtained to allow for the dissemination of results.

Faculty created an account named MidwifeSnackLearning and requested that all course students subscribe to it. However, if students did not want to receive texts, they could view the tweets on the Twitter Web site. The course faculty generated a list of thought-stimulating topics to prompt comprehensive examination study. Because tweets must be less than 140 characters, faculty compressed topics into brief questions or challenging statements. These questions were sent out via the MidwifeSnackLearning Twitter account every 3 to 7 days throughout the semester. Examples of tweets included:

- “Name the recommended daily intake for calories, protein, iron, calcium, and folic acid during pregnancy.”
- “A woman is having tachysystole. What are appropriate interventions?”
- “What are the planes of the pelvis? Pelvis types? How do the dimensions of the pelvis differ between types?”

The faculty made an effort to balance questions that prompted knowledge recall with those asking for application of clinical care.

Students were expected to view the tweets and know the answers immediately. If they did not, they were expected to independently spend time determining the answers. Faculty did not ask students to reply because Twitter is not compatible with the students’ rights according to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act. Students independently answered questions using current resources and verified their answers with other students or preceptors.

Student feedback about the use of Twitter was uniformly positive. Only one student suggested an improvement and requested more frequent study tweets. Examples of student evaluation comments included:

- “I LOVED the Twitter questions! It was something that kept me studying all semester.”
- “I really liked the Twitter ‘snack learning.’ I only wish there were more ‘tweets’ covering more topics. It was a nice review to go over to prepare for comps. . . . Twitter is a good way to reach students during the day to give us something to think about.”

In addition to positive student comments, the pass rate for first-time attempts at passing the American Midwifery Certification Board examination for the cohort was 100%. Overall, the use of Twitter to spark study for comprehensive and board examinations was low cost and easy to implement; in addition, it required only minimal faculty time. The use of Twitter was well received by students as an effective way to energize study during a semester of off-site coursework.

References


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