Integrating National Patient Safety Initiatives Into Prelicensure Clinical Learning

The integration of patient safety initiatives into the nursing curriculum is critical to preparing nursing students for delivering safe and high-quality patient care (QSEN Institute, n.d.). The focus of patient safety is to “minimize the risk of harm to patients and providers through both systems effectiveness and individualized performance” (QSEN Institute, n.d.). Although patient safety has always been inherent in nursing practice, guidelines from the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (2008), the QSEN Institute (n.d.), and The Joint Commission (n.d.) have increased the emphasis on patient safety in nursing education and practice. Nursing faculty across the country are challenged to incorporate the application of patient safety principles into clinical education. Encouraging novice nursing students to apply national patient safety standards, critical thinking, and nursing care plans helps to provide them with the foundation necessary to deliver safe patient care and improve patient outcomes (Armstrong & Barton, 2013; Preheim, Armstrong, & Barton, 2009).

Strategy

The goal of this clinical experience was to apply the nursing process and prevent environmental safety hazards in long-term and acute-care facility settings. Current national patient safety goals (NPSG) appropriate to fundamental nursing course outcomes were selected for the course, which was the first medical–surgical clinical course in a baccalaureate program in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. Patient safety concepts were introduced in the classroom and reinforced in the clinical setting. A worksheet and guidelines were developed for each setting to direct students to identify and evaluate strategies for meeting each goal in long-term and acute care environments. The students identified the NPSG that were met, as well as areas for improvement. On the basis of their findings, students formulated a nursing care plan, which focused on creating a safe environment for patients.

Results and Reactions

Anecdotal feedback from the students and faculty indicated that this learning activity effectively introduced nursing students to safety concepts during the first clinical course. Both clinical faculty and the students reported that the activity facilitated meaningful application of classroom content in the clinical setting. Because the activity was presented early in the nursing curriculum, it also provided students with the opportunity to use the nursing process to plan nursing care, which was an area previously identified as a course weakness. Information about medication safety presented in a corequisite pharmacology class was also reinforced, which enhanced learning in both classes.

In addition to facilitating worthwhile learning experiences, the activity supported a consistent focus on patient safety and the nursing process among clinical groups and throughout multiple clinical settings in the course. The worksheet was later modified for use during clinical rotations in other settings, including the perioperative environment. The use of the worksheet in multiple settings reinforced the constant role of safety in nursing practice across the continuum of care.

This learning activity was easily updated to reflect new NPSG as they were released each year, which ensured relevance with minimal worksheet revisions. The course coordinator (L.F.) found some degree of variation in implementation among adjunct clinical faculty. In response to the initial implementation, the learning activity was reviewed during clinical faculty orientation, and the importance of its consistent use was reinforced during regular communication among faculty. In addition to supporting situated learning in the medical–surgical content area, the teaching strategy was easily adapted and made relevant to multiple clinical settings.

Anecdotal findings suggested that patient safety initiatives can be easily embedded into the existing clinical curriculum to meet the objectives of clinical courses and accrediting bodies and to improve patient outcomes. Furthermore, providing clinical learning experiences enhances student understanding of safety standards and helps students to learn the value of nurses in mitigating errors and influencing patient care delivery.

References


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