

Virtual Excursion to the Legislature

Nurses must serve as advocates for individual patients, families, and populations in their communities. *Advocacy* is “the act or process of supporting a cause or proposal” (Merriam-Webster, 2014). Tomajan (2012) identified problem solving, communication, influence, and collaboration as necessary advocacy skills for nurses. An initial step in the process of effective advocacy is learning about proposed legislation to voice an informed opinion to legislative representatives. Nursing students in their last semester practiced these skills in the Community Health Nursing class assignment, Virtual Excursion to the Legislature.

The Virtual Excursion to the Legislature assignment was designed to provide nursing students with the opportunity to explore pending health care legislation, collaborate with group members, formulate an informed opinion of a proposed bill, and attempt to influence a legislative representative by expressing an informed opinion about the bill based on credible evidence.

For the assignment, the community health class was divided into three groups. Each group was instructed to visit the state legislation Web site and review pending health care legislation. Each

group chose a bill to research from a list of pending legislation that would impact community health. For the purpose of a debate, each group divided their members into two groups. One group was supportive of the proposed legislation in their bill and the opposing side was against the proposed legislation. Each member was required to research the bill and provide at least one credible source supporting or opposing the bill. The students produced a trifold poster with panels highlighting the bill, evidence supporting the bill, and evidence opposing the bill. In class, students presented their findings, and a straw vote was taken on each proposed bill. Students were also required to write a letter to their state representative, expressing their support or opposition to the bill and including evidence to support their position.

Students reflected on the learning activity by expressing how much they had learned in preparing for the debate and in listening to both sides of the issues in the proposed bills. Many students said they felt empowered participating in the exercise and having a voice in shaping policy or legislation. Some students felt they would continue to participate in the political arena after graduation as an advocate for or against legislation. Many students were surprised that their original

views or opinions had been changed after listening to the debate in class.

After the debate, students volunteered to present their posters at a research day sponsored by Sigma Theta Tau International. They answered questions about the proposed bills and expressed their opinions about the legislation.

The Virtual Excursion to the Legislature was an effective learning activity; however, the students expressed some difficulty in planning for the debate due to the size of their groups. Decreasing the size of each group to six students, with three opposing and three supporting legislation, would improve the activity.

References

- Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary. (2014). *Advocacy*. Retrieved from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/advocacy>
- Tomajan, K. (2012, January 31). Advocating for nurses and nursing. *The Online Journal of Issues in Nursing*, 17(1), Manuscript 4. doi:10.3912/OJIN.Vol17No01Man04

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