Enhancing Interprofessional Competencies Using Reflective Writing in Clinical Nursing Education

Given the growing realization for health care professionals to be competent practitioners within the broader health care team, there is a need to formally evaluate the students’ perceptions of their roles within the interprofessional team in the clinical setting. The use of a reflective writing assignment, which includes integrating interprofessional competencies, can help students explore the necessary skills and behaviors to be part of an interprofessional team.

Reflective Writing Assignment

During an acute care clinical placement, third-year nursing students were expected to seek opportunities on their unit in which they would interact with at least one or more health care professionals from a different discipline. Examples of experiences sought out by students included joining a family meeting, participating in discharge planning, and following a patient through the perioperative stages. Students were then required to complete a reflective writing assignment about the experience. The learning objectives of the assignment were for students to (a) reflect on the skills and knowledge needed to function as members of the interprofessional team; (b) identify their own strengths and knowledge gaps within the interprofessional competencies; and (c) analyze how this experience will influence their future practice as nurses. Using the fundamental patterns of knowing (empirical, aesthetic, personal, and ethical) for nursing knowledge described in Carper (1978) as an organizational framework, the students were asked to analyze the experience using at least three of these patterns and to reinforce their statements with concrete, creative examples and evidence. The fundamental patterns of knowing allow students to understand their roles within the holistic complexity of situations encountered by health professionals (Carper, 1978).

Upon analysis, students were expected to reflect on the experience and discuss how the experience contributed to their development of professional skills and behaviors within a minimum of one of the outlined interprofessional competencies. The competencies include interprofessional communication, conflict resolution, role clarification, team functioning, and collaborative leadership with a patient-centered focus (Canadian Interprofessional Health Collaborative, 2010). This assignment was a formative assessment. Evaluation was done using a grading rubric and students received a numerical grade. Students were evaluated on their level of reflection and grasp of the situation, application of the patterns of knowing when reflecting on the experience, demonstrated understanding of the interprofessional competencies, and insight as to how this experience will influence their future practice. Students were expected to use specific examples to detail how the experience fit within the chosen interprofessional education competencies. In addition to receiving a numerical grade, instructors gave written feedback to promote further critical reflection. These probing questions can challenge the students to consider multiple viewpoints, various settings, and different values.

Discussion

Clinical instructors from varied acute care settings have supported using this reflective writing assignment to help students develop interprofessional competencies in their nursing practice. Feedback from instructors established that it does promote a change in perception of the student role within the interprofessional team. Additionally, nursing students have found that reflective writing about an interprofessional experience they had in the clinical setting was an effective way to develop interprofessional competencies, to identify the behaviors and skills needed to function as part of the interprofessional team, and to improve their confidence as members of this team. Creating a formal assignment enriched the interprofessional experience by allowing students to reflect on it in depth through this structured written assignment.

References


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