Augmenting a Focused Bedside History for Prelicensure Nursing Students

Challenges exist in directing students to collect a condensed, current, and pertinent health history in a timely manner that accompanies a focused bedside examination. Today’s nursing students are overwhelmed with gathering and synthesizing a comprehensive health history as they sift through a plethora of information hidden in electronic medical records (EMR). It is estimated that 70% to 90% of a diagnosis can be made by eliciting a precise patient history (Muhrer, 2014). When done well, an abbreviated history can help students achieve a new level of critical thinking.

Students were introduced to two mnemonics—OLDCART and NEWS-C—during their first medical surgical rotation to mitigate a noted weakness in history taking. Faculty observed that students spent the majority of their time reviewing the EMR and then approached patients for a focused physical examination. The implementation of this mnemonic duo directed students to “find OLDCART” and “get the NEWS-C” for every patient encounter in the classroom and clinical setting.

The goal of this exercise was to help students collect a timely, patient-centered, focused bedside history to accompany the physical examination. Objectives were for students to synthesize the data from a bedside history and physical examination, formulate an applicable nursing diagnosis, and create a precise plan of care.

OLDCART is a symptom assessment mnemonic model to help health care providers ask appropriate questions and focus on key assessments in formulating an individualized plan of care. Clinical faculty were introduced to this new assessment approach through student presentations during grand rounds.

As the semester progressed, student and faculty learning were reinforced through demonstration and practice. Combining OLDCART and NEWS-C created a succinct, thorough, and manageable patient-centered history, and faculty found these mnemonics also augmented the focused bedside examination. Future implementation will include the application of these mnemonics in subsequent paired didactic and clinical courses across the curriculum.

Patient history changes daily. An innovative focused history collection using question-specific mnemonics (OLDCART and NEWS-C) allowed students to focus on key points when entering a patient’s room, begin a conversation with the patient, and set goals for creating a plan of care. Faculty can use this approach to rethink health assessment strategies as a means to direct patient care and enhance critical thinking of students. This innovative approach to collecting a patient-centered history is unique and applicable to multiple patient situations.

References

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