Independent Conference Days: An Innovative Approach to Clinical Postconferencing

Conferencing at the clinical site, before or after student clinical experiences, has long served as an important function in the clinical education of nursing students. Conferencing after a clinical experience often is conducted to provide an atmosphere in which clinical faculty can facilitate open-ended discussions, to promote reflective practice for students, to discuss ethical or practical concerns from the day, and to allow students to share their experiences with classmates in a confidential environment.

In addition, this type of conferencing also allows students to share their individual experiences with their peers, broadening the scope of discussion immediately following clinical experiences and allowing faculty to facilitate student discussions associating clinical experience with theoretical content discussed in the classroom (Vezeau, 2016). However, barriers to effective clinical postconferencing persist, such as conference disorganization and low participation from fatigued students.

Clinical conference organization has been addressed substantially through reorganization and improved methodology. Harvey (2015) implemented guided questioning in an attempt to improve meaningfulness of postclinical discussion and found that preplanned questions resulted in a more organized discussion and substantive responses from participants. Bristol and Secor (2012) used an online format for conferencing to address concerns with participation. Students did report a deeper understanding of clinical experiences with this online conferencing, but they noted the importance of face-to-face communication in their clinical learning and interactions that occurred independent of clinical days.

Goals and Objectives

The objectives of this project were to overcome the barriers of conference disorganization and participant fatigue. Clinical instructors in a traditional baccalaureate nursing program developed and implemented a new strategy called “independent clinical conferencing days.” Senior nursing students from two acute care clinic sites met for 3 hours every other week for focused learning, reflection, and discussion. Students came to campus on a nonclinical day for these activities. These hours counted toward the total number of clinical hours students were required to complete throughout the rotation and did not interfere with direct patient care experiences.

Discussion topics included stress in the acute care setting, disaster triage and emergency preparedness, the role and purpose of rapid response teams, and code scenarios and simulation. Code simulation served as an exemplar for this new method of clinical postconferencing. Participation in codes was something a few students experienced during their clinical experience but often received little to no education or the opportunity to debrief. For students who desired or required debriefing immediately following a clinical experience, traditional postconferencing was still completed on alternating weeks, with no more than 24 hours between a patient care experience and the clinical conference with an instructor.

Results

At the end of two 6-week rotations, a total of 46 nursing students were surveyed using Likert-type questions to gain insight into their perceptions of independent conference days. A total of 21 students completed the survey. All but 1 of the students strongly agreed with the statement, “Having dedicated conference time independent of clinical days allows for increased discussion and understanding of topics.” The majority (86%) of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that independent conference days increased their participation.

One student wrote, “I liked having postconference separate from our clinical day, as I was often too tired to fully participate when it was at the end of a clinical day.” Face-to-face clinical conferencing at a time independent of clinical days was an effective means of overcoming decreased participation secondary to student fatigue and facilitated development of clinical knowledge and judgment, which supports previously published research.

References


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