**Active Learning Health Terminology Activity**

Essential I of *The Essentials of Baccalaureate Education for Professional Nursing Practice* (American Association of Colleges of Nursing, 2008) emphasizes the importance of a liberal education, including life sciences, to develop innovative nursing practice. A baccalaureate nursing program must build on that prior liberal education, including prior anatomy and health terminology knowledge, and integrate theories and concepts. The goals of this active learning activity were to apply anatomical terminology to a real person during an active learning exercise, solidify prior education in anatomy and physiology, and increase comfort with physical contact with patients by building on prior education of nursing students.

Nursing students attempting to visualize the anatomy of a three-dimensional patient by studying two-dimensional photographs and drawings in textbooks often are left frustrated. The prerequisite medical terminology and anatomy courses are unlikely to teach the words in the context of nursing. When junior-level nursing students arrived at a large midwestern university, many were familiar with medical jargon, but not with the application of the knowledge. For example, a student may remember hearing the term “anterior” but may not remember that it refers to the front of a body. Researchers continue to show active learning improves knowledge retention and examination performance (Freeman et al., 2014).

During a classroom learning module on health terminology and abbreviations, students dressed in business casual or clinical uniform scrubs were paired and given 12 sticky notes. Depending on the level of comfort with being touched, students were instructed to label their partners or themselves with 12 anatomical locations, including proximal humerus, distal femur, superior vena cava labeled on the dorsal side, and naming and labeling a muscle of the leg that is proximal to the patella. Care was taken in selecting sites to minimize discomfort with being touched.

One site, the lateral epicondyle, was selected because two different bones have this landmark. This emphasized the need to ask for clarification when unsure about orders or instructions. On completing the exercise, a pair of students was selected to demonstrate their placements to the class, giving the other students an opportunity to verify their accuracy.

Most students reported feeling comfortable with the terminology, but the hands-on activity made a greater impact on their memory. In addition to the health terminology lesson refresher, students reported this exercise taught the importance of asking a patient’s permission before touching. Students who reported being uncomfortable having labels placed on them stated this activity will make them more mindful when performing patient care in the future.

In a reflective journal, one student wrote, “From putting sticky notes on other people, I learned it is important to respect other people’s boundaries and acknowledge their space.” Others thought the activity would help with more accurate documentation of injuries and wounds. Finally, one student reported, “The activity was really helpful because it was a great group project to review common landmarks and to be able to see them on an actual person really connected the dots.”

In summary, this hands-on active learning activity allowed prior learning in prerequisite liberal education courses to be applied in a nursing setting. Based on reports from students’ reflective journals and subsequent self-reported improved patient interactions in clinical rotations, this activity achieved the stated goals and purpose.

**References**


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