

STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF ENRICHMENT ACTIVITIES

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Purposes/Aims: To determine the perceptions of two groups of baccalaureate nursing students immediately prior to graduation regarding learning outcomes of enrichment activities early in the curriculum: one group discussed the patient cases in a classroom setting and a second group used a Human Patient Simulator (HPS) to simulate actual patient cases and to perform nursing actions.

Rationale/Conceptual Basis/ Background: With the complexity of patients, students are expected to possess well-developed skills prior to caring for patients. Educators continue to explore methods where students learn critical thinking skills, problem solving and prioritization in a setting with no risk to patient safety. Case study discussions and the use of human patient simulators are two such methodologies and allow students to learn in a safe environment. Additionally, in an attempt to educate more nurses due to the nursing shortage, clinical sites may be limited requiring nurse educators to explore alternative methods to provide clinical experience for students. The HPS may create experiences for clinical learning without increasing the number of clinical sites or nurses needed to mentor students. Simulations, using the HPS, are flexible, can be used anytime, and are not dependent on students being in the clinical setting to obtain patient experiences. It is important to evaluate students' perceptions regarding learning outcomes of these learning experiences.

Methods: Following institutional review board approval and informed consent, all twenty-five students involved in the original study(1) were invited to participate in a focus group their last semester of nursing school at a western mountain United States university. Four focus groups were conducted. The focus group discussions were audiotaped. The data were transcribed and analyzed line by line using content analysis. Themes and patterns were identified. Trustworthiness of the data was obtained through member checks.

Results: Themes included development of critical thinking skills, enhanced ability to care for patient in the clinical setting, and improved ability to establish priorities. Additionally, students identified the value of a faculty expert to guide them through the learning process, the importance of learning from each other in a group learning experience, and increased confidence in the clinical setting. Students appreciated the opportunity to articulate their perceptions about the enrichment activities and the value of the experience in their education as evidenced in these data bits:

"...it just helped me to see how to pull things all together because at that point I don't think I was capable or confident in doing full [care]..." and *"It did help me learn that I'm going to have to learn to problem solve more.... So I think it helped me to assess the patient holistically because the problem is affecting everything."*

In regards to the faculty mentor, *"I just remember being in like awe of how she'd think of things, like cause we didn't have those critical thinking skills yet...I just remember being like I totally want to be like that when I'm a nurse."*

Implications: The students perceived the enrichment activities as enhancing their learning and allowed them to learn things that other experiences did not. Also, all agreed similar activities ought to be incorporated into curriculum. The importance of an expert faculty member was an essential element to the activity. Schools of nursing ought to consider ways to involve faculty members in small group discussions or activities, allowing faculty to role model successful nursing practice.

1 Ravert, P. K. (2004). Use of a human patient simulator with undergraduate nursing students: A prototype evaluation of critical thinking and self-efficacy (Doctoral dissertation, University of Utah, 2004).

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