Teaching Health? How Healthy Are You?
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ABSTRACT:
The US Department of Health and Human Services document, Healthy People (2020), directs attention to the nation’s health, the importance of empowering consumers to make lifestyle changes and adopt healthy habits to accomplish this. Research (Cochrane Database Syst. Rev. 2001, 2004, 2007) demonstrates that this complex process of change in behavior is enhanced by the encouragement of health care providers, who function as role models. Yet research (Staib et al, 2006) suggests that nursing students are similar to the general population in their knowledge of health promoting behavior.

Based on a recent large representative sample of registered nurses approximately 50% are overweight or obese (Miller et al, 2008). At the same time the public reports significantly more confidence in the ability of a normal weight nurse to teach about diet and exercise than an overweight one (Wells et al, 2006; Hicks et al, 2008). While most nurses believe in the importance of teaching about diet and exercise they routinely avoid addressing these topics because of insufficient knowledge (Dauenhauser, J.A. et al 2006) and discomfort with such sensitive subjects (Miller et al, 2008).

It is essential to increase the baseline knowledge and ability of future registered nurses to address topics central to health promotion and disease prevention. Such core education will have two long term effects-a healthier and more effective work force. This is the first of two community health courses taken by nursing students in an upper division major. First semester juniors take the course concurrently with one in nursing theory and another in nursing fundamentals. The curriculum was designed to introduce the neophyte to the study of health, illness and the pivotal importance of disease prevention (Benson and Latter, 1998).

Throughout the semester students complete screening instruments to assess health risks; compile data and establish baseline components of their own lifestyle. These tools which measure overall health, diet, exercise, time management, sleep and stress act as exemplars from which to raise questions about testing and criteria for successful screening. This active problem-based approach to learning augments course readings, didactic content and generates data sets from which to apply principles of descriptive epidemiology for implementation and evaluation of health research. Class sessions are formatted to include: a summary of critical content using a lecture format; completion of the pertinent screening tool by students individually; group collation of individual results to discuss aggregate implications related to self-care behaviors, their impact on health, effective intervention strategies based on findings, levels of prevention and evidence-based recommendations; class discussion of salient topics suggested by issues raised in group presentations.

In addition to the achievement of the cognitive objectives there are also important affective ones. As these neophyte nurses apply theory about health promotion and disease prevention hopefully to motivate change in behavior they must articulate how they will bridge “what they know” with “what they do”. The important process of self discovery stimulates examination and development of desirable professional traits including self-efficacy and empathy.
**EDUCATIONAL METHODS OR APPROACHES USED:**

Didactic presentations on content are integrated with problem-based learning activities in which individual students complete standardized self-evaluation tools related to components of health status and small groups of students assess aggregate data. Clinical faculty have access to the course syllabus so they can plan hands on experiences and discuss topics in case conferences. A shared course portfolio requires the students to include a representative sample of work produced in developing their knowledge, skills and attitudes about health promotion and disease prevention. Synthesis of course materials is also evaluated with two multiple choice exams, a short paper describing an interview with a healthy adult outlining his/her health beliefs, concerns and practices and measures of class and group participation.

**PROJECT DESCRIPTION:**

The nursing school had the vision to design a two-year upper division curriculum with two community health courses. This curricular format provided the ready opportunity to strengthen and enhance health promotion and disease prevention content and delineate which health promotion and disease prevention topics were developmentally appropriate for nursing students in the first and last semester of the major. The fact that the course coordinator is the same for both courses provides the curricular perspective and freedom to suggest which topics are appropriate for each course. In addition, nursing colleagues have been amenable to requests for increasing integration of health promotion and disease prevention topics throughout the curriculum.

The current philosophy of the institution is congruent with education for health promotion and disease prevention. The university is in a period of immense positive change throughout which it has upheld a commitment to a primary care model of health. Logistics underpin the abstraction with the Nursing School being housed on the same campus and sharing the same classroom space as the newly founded Medical School and existing School of Health Sciences.

At present each health discipline teaches a course which addresses topics related to health promotion and disease prevention from a discipline specific perspective. However the Interprofessional Education Committee has begun to create the necessary bridges between the various disciplines. In addition to a Faculty Development day on the topic sponsored by the committee they are planning the first interprofessional course which will introduce health sciences students to each other's discipline. It is seeking and has received grant monies to underwrite the development of this core set of courses to unite the teaching of health promotion and disease prevention. The course coordinator is a member of the Interprofessional Education committee.

The nursing school currently offers a course in health promotion at both the undergraduate and graduate level. Each is taught by different faculty but with the creation of the new DNP program, faculty will begin to teach across levels.

Currently, collaboration with other disciplines in this course is in the form of guest speakers. The one clinical course required in the first upper division semester is designed to be shared by all three didactic courses. The students have clinical in short term rehabilitation facilities. This past academic year the students who were in institutions that provided a continuum of care when possible made home visits to older adults previously discharged from rehabilitation. The remainder of the students made a visit to a Senior Center and completed an intensive interview with one member. The educational objectives for this clinical experience were to: interface with a representative of the aggregate of older adults who were healthy; develop communication techniques, assess health literacy and readiness to learn and create a health education plan. Using an interview schedule adapted by the course coordinator the students elicited comments about health. They then used the information obtained to identify a
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health education or disease prevention need of that particular adult and postulate with support from course materials how they would address that issue.

HEALTHY PEOPLE OBJECTIVE ADDRESSED:
ECBP-12-16 Increase the inclusion of core clinical prevention and population health content in health professions education. This first course in the nursing major covers concepts which introduce the neophyte nursing professional to health promotion as the basis for clinical prevention services. The content uses a problem-based platform to integrate content from previous courses in the humanities and social sciences to the study of individual and societal forces affecting health status and disease prevention.

PROGRAM OR COURSE GOALS:

Number of students enrolled/participating in 2010-2011 school year: 137

Health Promotion and Wellness (3 cr.)

This course focuses on health promotion, wellness, and disease and injury prevention across the lifespan. Individual prevention strategies and health interventions are explored. Knowledge, attitude, and skill acquisition opportunities are provided in campus lab and applied in clinical practicum.

137 junior nursing students will take this course in Fall 2011.

Did you conduct a needs assessment as part of your planning process? □ Yes □ No

After teaching the two courses related to health promotion, clinical prevention and population health-one in the first semester of the junior year and the second in the second semester of the senior year of an upper division nursing major the faculty member teaching both of these courses noted that while the students could articulate a broad definition of health they could not see its applicability to their practice setting. They had waited two long undergraduate years to begin in a major which they visualized to be about the complex care of sick individuals in acute care institutions. The health promotion and disease prevention topics were “common sense” and obvious. Since the students had not yet seen the ravages of chronic disease nor the preventable underlying causes they didn’t grasp the importance of promoting health and and concepts of population health.

This informal needs assessment provided evidence of the students’ health literacy and readiness to learn about selected topics. The first semester course would establish the groundwork for individual risk assessment, intervention based on levels of prevention and evaluation of potential for success. Aggregate data collected would originate from screening tools used by the students in the class. Descriptive epidemiology would provide the framework for analysis of the collective self care data. Those subjects which benefitted from multiple clinical experiences and were applicable to chronic disease prevention and population-based programming were moved to the senior year last semester traditional community health course.

PROFESSIONS INVOLVED:
The students are currently first semester Junior students in an upper division major in nursing. This is one of their first courses in nursing. The majority of topics are taught by community health nursing faculty. A physical therapist from the Physical Therapy department teaches the class on Exercise; a nutritionist based in the Athletic Training department teaches the class on Nutrition and the Associate Director of the Learning Center teaches a segment on Learning Styles in the class on Health Education. An interprofessional course, involving nursing and medicine, which will focus on understanding each other’s roles and approaches to health promotion is being planned.
LESSONS LEARNED/EVALUATION RESULTS:

Successes

As the students have been exposed to content and settings they are more likely to see community sites in which health promotion and disease prevention are paramount as choices for their final clinical precepted course and ultimately nursing practice.

The course coordinator’s connection to local community health organizations results in episodic invitations to offer students participatory experiences in mass screenings and health education classes.

Clinical placement coordinators have expanded their exploration of new clinical sites to those offering individual and population-based health promotion and disease prevention opportunities e.g., school-based health clinics, community health clinics, prisons.

Challenges

The undergraduate curriculum plan does not yet stipulate specific courses in the humanities and social sciences which would increase health literacy and build continuity in the teaching of health promotion. For example, a required course in Medical Sociology, Social Psychology, Developmental Psychology, and/or History of Medicine/Health Care would reinforce the principles presented in this course.

The nursing students type themselves as kinesthetic learners who learn best by doing. As such we are attempting to expand the clinical placements and the perspective of the clinical faculty to include opportunities to assess health needs and teach about disease prevention. The students must see the opportunities and potential for primary and secondary prevention in their roles as nurses even as they practice tertiary prevention.

Because students are just beginning the development of their professional identities and most current images of nurses are in acute care the faculty are in the important position of modeling health promoting and disease prevention behavior in clinical settings. The majority of undergraduate faculty and traditional clinical placements are acute care based with limited existing opportunities for development of knowledge skills and attitudes about health promotion and disease prevention.

CONCLUSION:

Nursing faculty and curricula are similar but also unique. Slow but steady efforts to build on the strengths of both provide the best opportunity for successful inclusion of content on health promotion and disease prevention. The personal commitment of faculty with content and clinical expertise supply perspective and resources about this historically based component of professional nursing practice. Familiarity with the increasing inclusion of health promotion topics covered on the NCLEX is also a motivating factor.

Some of the key decision points occur with: faculty hiring, curriculum development and choice of clinical placements. Do potential candidates have an expertise or expressed commitment to /interest in the topic? Will the content be housed in a dedicated course(s) or integrated throughout the curriculum? Are clinical sites equipped to provide opportunities for development of knowledge, skills and attitudes related to health promotion and disease prevention?

COMPANION MATERIALS: (Course syllabi, resource lists, tests, website, etc.)

Undergraduate Nursing Program Booklet, Course Syllabus Generic NU 304, Topic Outline and Class Schedule, Weekly Routine Worksheet (WRW), Evaluation of Health Screening, Rapid Eating Assessment for Patients (REAP), Health Self-Test, Quinnipiac Health Style
This document provides the course description, objectives, methods of evaluation and topic outline for most current academic year. The reading assignments and problem-based learning activities are referenced.

PUBLICATIONS:


Wells M, Lever D, Austin EN. The effect of the nurse’s body size on client confidence in the nurse’s ability to provide health education on diet and exercise. Unpublished manuscript, State University of New York, Binghamton. 2006

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