Design and Implementation of a Caring Curriculum in Nursing Education

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Abstract

Although the nursing profession has traditionally been associated with compassionate, patient, and caring behaviors, living in this advanced technological environment where patient related skills and tasks are often rushed caring behaviors are sometimes not seen. In order to improve high school nursing assistant student caring behaviors as well as their interactions with long-term care residents, a person-centered care-giving lesson was incorporated into the usual curriculum. Interactions and behaviors with long-term care residents were observed to be more caring and nurturing, after the curriculum change, as nursing assistant students performed nursing skills and interacted with patients.

The nursing profession has traditionally been associated with compassionate, patient, and caring behaviors. Living in this advanced technological environment where patient related skills and tasks are often rushed, has perhaps devalued caring behaviors and has required that nurse educators teach and incorporate concepts in health care and caring into nursing curriculums (Gramling and Nugent, 1998). A caring curriculum was implemented into a rural public high school nursing assistant program in an effort to increase the caring behaviors of students as well as improve student-resident interactions. Interactions and behaviors with long-term care residents were observed to be caring and nurturing as nursing assistant students performed nursing skills such as feeding, bathing, repositioning and transfers.

Background

Twenty-five percent of this rural public high school's nursing assistant students formerly demonstrated poor person-centered care-giving behaviors as observed by this instructor. The problem identified did not affect the nursing assistant exam passing rate, but this problem depicts nursing assistant students' failure to demonstrate compassionate care and concern for their patients. Numerous studies such as those by Williams et al., (2006), Hoover, (2002) and Pullen et al., (2001) have found that patients considered the meaningful administration of nursing skills that provided for their physical comfort, hygiene, and safe medical treatment to be a vital part of good nursing care.

Watson, 2003 states that in order to provide competent patient care, nursing education must incorporate respecting patient's values, privacy, and dignity, especially in decision making. The author also states that person to person caring behaviors and treatment methods appear to be enhanced by incorporating into a daily routine, various aspects of care and caring. Nurses must not only be technologically proficient, but must also care for and demonstrate concern for their patients. There is a current national movement to reshape the essence and philosophy of Long-Term Care

(LTC) so that care-giving becomes more person-centered, rather than "institution-centered" (Grosch et al., 2008).

Through nursing education, students receive the guidance and foundation necessary for becoming proficient nurses. Nursing professors in distinct instructional and educational settings not only impart theory and demonstrate patient care and skills, but also have the responsibility of modeling and representing caring behaviors that patients expect. Duffy (2003), states that patients and their families have reported feeling helpless, uncomfortable, and anxious when interacting with uncaring nurses. Patients and families long for caring interactions with nursing staff. According to the *Social Policy Statement for Nurses* (ANA, 2003), "provisions of a caring relationship that facilitates health and healing is an essential feature of nursing knowledge." Educators are integrating caring content which includes caring and its associated attitudes, values and behaviors into nursing curriculums in order to meet the needs of the current health care system.

Instructional Landscape

Classroom: The setting was a rural public school that contains both a classroom and a clinical laboratory accessible to nursing students. The classroom accommodates up to 30 learners and contains tables, chairs, a white board, an Eiki projector, and a class set of portable laptops with internet access. Nursing Assistant resource texts and workbooks as well as medical dictionaries are available. The skills lab is equipped with eight fully functioning hospital beds which are set up with individual privacy curtains, a shower stall, a toilet, (4) Intravenous (I.V.) poles, a wheelchair, (2) bedside commodes, (2) walkers, a cane, (2) male and (2) female mannequins.

Clinical Facility: Students perform their clinical practices and are observed for safe practice of nursing assistant skills as well as incorporation of person-centered care-giving behaviors at a local nursing and rehabilitation center. The nursing facility safely accommodates up to 120 residents.

Both private and semi-private rooms are available in the East and West Wings. Nurses' stations, dining, and recreation areas are available in both wings. A physical therapy department is conveniently located within the nursing facility. Physical therapists occasionally work with residents at the bedside, but more often, staff members transport residents via wheelchair to the rehab area.

Instructional Change

The instructor's five year experience teaching nursing assistant courses at the high school level provided observations of students exhibiting poor and/or limited caring behaviors with residents. The observations of inadequate caring interactions between student nursing assistants and their residents prompted the instructor to implement a curriculum change. By incorporating a caring curriculum into the current nursing assistant training program positive caring interactions and behaviors could be encouraged.

The person-centered care-giving lesson consisted of presenting to students a Power Point (PPT) presentation, a Digital Video Disk (DVD) entitled *Putting Person Before Task*, a class discussion, and a role-playing exercise in which students took turns playing the role of the nurse assistant as well as that of the resident. The person-centered educational lesson for geriatric nursing assistant students, aims to help students provide care in person-centered ways. Thirteen nursing assistant students received this enhanced curriculum.

Design and Implementation

The patient-centered care-giving instruction was incorporated into the current nursing assistant curriculum in an effort to enhance care-giving behaviors and assist students in becoming more responsive to the needs of LTC residents. This person-centered care-giving lesson consisted of presenting to students a Power Point (PPT) presentation, a DVD entitled *Putting Person Before*

Task, a class discussion, and a role-playing exercise. The PPT defined, described, and provided

students with examples of person-centered care-giving behaviors. *Putting Person Before Task* is the

title of a 7-minute DVD created jointly by Grosch et al., (2008) and two certified nursing assistants

(CNAs) which showed care-giving behaviors. This DVD demonstrated two nursing assistants

practicing person-centered care-giving behaviors such as greeting the resident, orienting the resident

to the task, as well as discussing topics important to the resident while performing nursing tasks such

as dressing, grooming and ambulating a female resident at a long-term care facility.

The instructor engaged the learners in sharing information immediately following the PPT and the

DVD presentation. However, a challenging moment emerged when only silence followed with no

questions, comments, or feedback from students. During the class discussion, the instructor

reviewed previously presented care-giving information and requested from learners examples of how

students could demonstrate and incorporate caring into their nursing tasks. The instructor then

allowed time for student comments. Students diligently suggested the possibility of demonstrating

caring behaviors when taking time to greet residents, when smiling, listening, when inquiring about

patients' illness, pain, or discomfort. Students also suggested offering residents options and choices

about what foods they wished to eat first from their meal tray, and what clothing they preferred to

wear. What began as a lesson led only by the instructor, ended up being a very productive and

engaging class discussion to which all class members contributed and hopefully benefited from.

Students were asked to incorporate caring behaviors into their role-play. Students took turns

playing the role of the nurse assistant as well of the resident. Care-giving behaviors were

incorporated into the following skills: repositioning, grooming, hair care and dressing. Students

were observed to be attentive to the "residents" and to the patient's individual and personal needs.

They maintained appropriate eye contact, inquired about preferences, giving choices and options

when appropriate and listened to "resident's" comments. The differences observed, as compared to previous nursing assistant courses taught, were that this group of students became very involved during the class discussion and very responsive and emotive as they discussed and empathized how lonely, isolated, and possibly neglected long-term care residents could be.

Curriculum Evaluation

The first two days of student clinical practice are always challenging. First, students have prior hospital experience, but hospital nursing assistants do not work as intensely as nurse assistants in a nursing center. Residents in a long-term care facility are totally dependent of their personal and physical care on the nurse aides. Second, the majority of nursing center residents are bed-bound and require that the nurse aide lift, turn, reposition, and transfer to bedside chair, toilet, commode, wheelchair, or shower chair. Beginning with day one at the clinical facility, students appeared to be a little more at ease compared to other classes. Most students glanced at the instructor and gave a distinct look indicating that care in this facility was different from what they had previously experienced; however, they were prepared for this challenge and continued with their assigned duties. As the instructor performed student observations, students were noted to be interacting appropriately with the nursing center residents. Residents were observed to gaze lovingly and with admiration into student's eyes. Patients were seen blowing kisses at students, even kissing their hands in demonstration of gratitude for their presence, dedication, and hard work. What an awesome sight to observe as residents convey love and appreciation to the students. Based on student observations, the new curriculum impacted the need to provide instruction on caring behaviors and is worthy of a permanent place in the overall nursing curriculum.

Summary

In order to improve high school nursing assistant student caring behaviors as well as their interactions with long-term care residents, a person-centered care-giving lesson was incorporated into the usual curriculum. This lesson consisted of presenting to students a Power Point (PPT) presentation, a DVD entitled *Putting Person Before Task*, a class discussion, and a role-playing exercise in which students took turns playing the role of the nurse assistant as well as that of the resident. The person-centered educational lesson for geriatric nursing assistant students aimed to help students provide care in person-centered ways. Thirteen nursing assistant students received the enhanced curriculum. Students became acquainted with the residents, their likes and dislikes, staff members, the facility's routine, and student duties and obligations. The instructor observed student interactions with long-term care residents and witnessed very touching student-resident relationships as students practiced and performed nursing skills such as feeding, bathing and grooming. Several nursing center staff members (licensed nurses as well as nurse assistants) commented that this group of students, compared to previous classes, appeared to be "more advanced". Other comments included that this group of students "communicated and interacted very well with the residents". The instructor attributed the nursing assistant student's success to the Caring Curriculum which was implemented earlier in the semester. The next step in the curriculum change is for the instructor to incorporate caring behaviors into all the skills that students practice (role-play) in the skills lab.

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