Teaching Health Promotion: Motivating Students Through Collaboration

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Nurse educators are in an excellent position to promote the health of students through innovative classroom and clinical learning experiences. In learning, it is important to involve the learner in such a way as to identify personally with the content. In addition, students are better able to assist other in risk reduction through modeling of health-promoting behaviors, which is common to the nurses' role (Geppinger, Baglioni, Brunke, & Brunner, 1989). This article describes a creative teaching strategy using a health risk appraisal tool based on a collaborative model.

The strategy emphasized the importance of nurses and the role of nursing in promoting the health of others. Course coordinators collaborated with a community health nurse who also served as an adjunct faculty member. The adjunct faculty member was employed by an affiliating clinical agency. In the agency, this community health nurse assesses risk and develops group health programs through the use of a health risk appraisal tool.

The collaborative model was used in the community health nursing course. Baccalaureate students participated in assessing their own health risks. Becker and Janz (1987) noted that positive results are obtained when risk appraisal is used in conjunction with clinical experiences. Therefore, following the classroom experience, students were guided to apply health risk appraisal and interventions to identified at-risk groups in the community.

Health Risk and Appraisal

*Healthy People 2000 (United States Department of Health and Human Services [USDHHS], 1990)* has focused attention not only on personal health but on targeted populations within specific risk groups. The literature, especially in the 1980s, focused on instrumentation rather than specific populations at risk (Doerr & Hutchins, 1981). Recently, however, health risk appraisal tools used to identify health risks, to guide health promotion activities, and to encourage self-health care have emerged (USDHHS).

In the community health nursing course, determining risk for populations is an important concept. Health risk appraisal has become a technique frequently used by nurses and other health care professionals in health promotion activities for individuals and groups. Health risk appraisal instruments are useful tools that can be used to determine controllable risk factors, such as cholesterol, weight, smoking, and stress, and they may function to motivate individuals and groups to change health practices (Killeen, 1989).

Description of the Teaching Project

The goals of this project were that the students would: (1) identify their own health risk behaviors, and (2) use health risk assessment to develop community projects that promote healthy behavior. During the first class period, students enrolled in the course voluntarily completed the Healthier People Health Risk Appraisal Tool (HPHRAT). Anonymity was assured through the use of a student-generated identification code.

The HPHRAT is a self-reporting instrument. This instrument uses national data bases to individualize health risk (Stanhope & Lancaster, 1992). A variety of reliability and validity studies have been conducted on the tool (Killeen, 1988; Smith, McKinlay, & McKinlay, 1989). This tool, used by the community health nurse to guide health promotion interventions, was also available to students for their required community projects.

The community health nurse completed data analysis on the students' HPHRAT. The results were grouped. However, each student received his or her results describing controlling factors for each of 12 major causes of death. The analysis identified the number of years of life to gain by adopting selected health habits. For example, a 36-year-old student with diabetes, who was 5 feet 4 inches tall and weighed 246 pounds had a risk age of 52.26 years. By following the prescription to improve her risk profile (lower cholesterol, decrease weight, and wear seat belts) she could expect to add an additional year of life.

Two weeks following the completion of the HPHRAT, the community health nurse was invited to bring the results to class. Prior to presenting students with their results, the community health nurse presented a brief introduction to the nurse's role in use of the HPHRAT. Using the group data, the adjunct faculty member discussed implications of the findings. Through this activity students had the opportunity to learn about their health risks as an aggregate and make comparisons with national data bases. Additionally, students received their personal health risk assessments and were provided the opportunity to discuss findings. Students received information about available resources related to their risk behaviors, which included access to the university's wellness center and counseling services.

Throughout the term, classroom topics...
included important factors in health promotion and risk reduction, such as healthy nutrition, exercise, and stress management. In addition, group dynamics and formats useful for working with groups of people (role playing, skits, games, and discussion) were included to assist the student in planning strategies that encourage and motivate change in behavior (Stanhope & Lancaster, 1992).

**Evaluation of the Project**

All students enrolled in the community health nursing course completed the HPHRAT. Faculty reported that students expressed an increased awareness of specific risk factors based on their appraisal. A majority of the students' self-reports disclosed risk factors such as overweight and limited exercise. Although not a majority, in terms of the group data, individual students expressed concern about the risk produced by cigarette smoking.

As the course progressed, students consistently identified morbidity and mortality statistics among risk groups and compared this to their group data. Nursing interventions were designed that included changes in diet patterns, physical exercise programs, and stress reduction techniques.

Faculty did not require community health projects that focused on health promotion. However, over 75% of the students selected a project concerning health promotion through risk reduction. Examples of projects included: (1) diabetes screening for a group of elders, (2) identifying health risks for a population of university students, (3) nutritional assessment of affluent teen males, and (4) breast health teaching for a group of older black women.

**Summary**

The collaborative model provided a number of benefits. Personalizing general health risks enabled the students to translate health promotion knowledge to individuals and groups in the community. The presence of the community health nurse permitted confidential dialogue with students regarding their personal appraisals. In the clinical setting the community health nurse served as a role model for students and demonstrated use of the tool among a variety of groups.

Nurses are expected to identify populations at risk for various health problems and to promote healthful outcomes. This model was useful in assisting students to apply and synthesize health promotion concepts in an active and creative manner.

Collaboration with an effective nurse role model was critical to the project.

**References**


