

Nursing Students and Gerontology: Are Positive Attitudes Enough?

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Problem

- Few undergraduate nursing students express an interest in working with older adults
- This growing population needs good nurses!
 - Comprise a significant proportion of health care expenses, hospitalizations, and resources
 - Older patients and their families benefit from both health promotion and illness care geared towards the older adult

Research Question

- What factors influence undergraduate nursing student attitudes toward working with older adults?
- How can the nursing program influence these attitudes to increase students' interest in, and commitment to, caring for older adults?

Methods

- Review of the literature:
 - Undergraduate geriatric curricula
 - Known factors influencing student attitudes
 - Recommendations for educational practice
- Review of geriatric curriculum at local BSN programs, including faculty interviews at Seattle University and Seattle Pacific University Schools of Nursing

Results

- Focused educational experiences improve student attitudes toward older adults.
 - Important factors:
 - Faculty expertise and interest in gerontology
 - Attitudes of facility RN staff towards older adult care
 - Setting of clinical experience, appropriateness for skills
 - Students' knowledge about the population

(Lovell, 2006; Wade, 1999; Haight, Christ & Dias, 1994)

Results continued

- Despite improved attitudes, the number of students planning to work with older adults did not increase.
 - Most students initially choose generalist roles for initial practice

Educational/Professional Insights

- Students need exposure to wider variety of nursing roles and older adult patients.
- Nurses and educators must also address:
 - Public knowledge about aging, e.g. normal age-related changes vs. preventable disease complications
 - Public health measures, community resources
 - Health care worker attitudes toward gerontology

Conclusions and Implications

- Strengthening the UW BSN program:
 - Examine issues of ageism
 - Intentionally promote cross-generational interactions for students
 - Diversify clinical placements
 - Promote opportunities to learn from other students' experiences

Next Steps

- Complete recommendations for UW BSN Curriculum Committee on incorporating John Hartford Foundation/American Association of College of Nursing modules for 2006-2008
- Design a poster and pursue conference presentation opportunities in gerontology and nursing education

Thank you!