

Professional Development Final Report
Nurses' Perceptions of Student Contributions in Clinical Settings

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Significance: With the impact of the nursing shortage, nursing programs are encouraged to increase enrollment to meet the needs of the community. In an effort to meet the needs of our community and the mission of the university, the Nursing Department at Arkansas Tech University implemented a dual admission program. Approximately 35 to 40 students are enrolled in each Upper Division nursing level per semester hence students are now in clinical at local area agencies more days per week. Nurses working with students not only have students more days each week but also have students of varying skill levels throughout their workweek. In addition, the local agencies also serve as mentoring agencies for nursing students from Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) programs and one LPN to RN program.

In addition to the impact of the nursing shortage on education, clinical staff nurses are faced with dilemmas secondary to the shortage on a daily basis: increased patient care assignments and workload. Thus it is important as nurse educators to assess staff nurse perceptions of students, in an effort to provide positive rewards for both the clinical nurse and nursing student.

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to explore the benefits and limitations of having undergraduate nursing students in the clinical setting from the perspective of the staff nurse.

Methods: After obtaining Human Subjects approval from the university and access to the three acute care facilities, a 54-item survey, Nursing Students' Contributions to Clinical Agencies (NSCCA), developed by Grindel (2001) and associates in this study, and a demographic questionnaire was distributed to interested staff nurses within those facilities. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the quantitative data; constant comparison analysis for qualitative data.

Findings: The mean age of all respondents was 42.4 years with a SD of 9.76. The mean year of experience was 15.8. Nurses reported an average daily assignment of 5.2 patients (SD 3.30) and cited that they spent, on average, 2.2 days/week with nursing students. The majority of the respondents were Registered Nurses (79%); thirty-five reported having a Bachelor of Science degree in Nursing and ¼ of these were Arkansas Tech University graduates.

Student interaction in the clinical setting was viewed positively by the majority of nurses surveyed. In response to the 11 point Likert scale statement (1 = Extremely negative to 11 = Extremely positive), "Please rate the contribution of nursing students to your clinical agency, the mean was 9.31 (SD 1.33).

Additional positive comments included: Allows opportunities for mentoring (98%); allows nurses to participate in the student's professional development (95%); interacts with patient and families (93%); enhances the clinical setting as a learning

environment (88%); stimulate staff intellectually (82%); allows for reciprocal learning (81%); and expose staff to different perspectives (79%).

In addition to the positive influences students have on the clinical setting, the staff offered insight into the negative aspects as well. Nurses cited that problems students can be frustrating (77%). They also reported that students add to the confusion and noise of the unit (37%), are less assertive with important patient therapy (44%) and do not appreciate support of staff nurses (12%).

In addition to the Likert scale survey, nurse were asked to respond to an open-ended question, "Reflecting back over the last few weeks/months, tell me about the experience you have had with nursing students in the clinical setting." Data analysis revealed three key themes: Willing to help, Eager to learn, and Serving their time. Remarks that supported these themes included:

Willing to Help

"The majority of students have been very willing to help with all they are allowed. The students trigger/challenge me to be better informed about meds and treatments. I have enjoyed my experience with the nursing students."

Eager to Learn

"A student was here for several days completing her preceptorship. She was amazing help...she wasn't completely confident but she was doing great. She had appropriate questions and offered ideas as well. We could see that she was genuinely interested."

Serving their Time

"Not all students are created equal (obviously). Several show that they are just there to do their time—these are the ones that you really have to watch and instead of decreasing nursing workload, it doubles it."

Implications: Findings support the need for students to consider their attitude toward the nurse and the learning environment. Students should recognize that their attitude can directly enhance or inhibit not only their learning experience but those of future students that work with that nurse. Reflecting on the comment, "At times, they seem a little unsure of what things they are able to participate in," faculty need to clarify student understanding of clinical objectives and their ability to communicate those objectives effectively to the nursing staff. Since only 13% of the nurses surveyed agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "Staff are invited to attend student presentations," an additional recommendation for faculty is to invite staff to student presentations. Encouraging staff to attend student presentations is one avenue of promoting a sense of respect for the nurses that work with our students.