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Night Shift Report: A Critical Thinking Activity for Nursing Students

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In the spirit of providing quality and safe patient care, the Joint Commission called for the development of a standardized approach to handoff communication. Handoff is defined as the real time transfer and acceptance of patient care to ensure continuity of care and patient safety. While it might sound simple, a high-quality handoff (most often in the form of change-of-shift report) is quite complex. Patient safety can easily be at risk if the information is inaccurate, incomplete, not timely, misinterpreted, or otherwise not what is needed.

Although nursing students typically participate in hospital change-of-shift reports on a regular basis in many clinical courses—and handoffs occur at least twice a day for every patient—the process is rarely taught in basic nursing education. It is typically a learn-as-you-go skill set that most students would likely describe as a stressful and fly-by-the-seat-of-your-pants experience in the hospital clinical setting.

Overview of Activity

To that end, I decided to develop an activity for my junior-level adult nursing students entitled, “Night Shift Report: A Critical Thinking Activity.” The purpose of the assignment was to provide students with the opportunity to take a report from the “nightshift nurse” in a safe, simulated environment, as if they were the incoming dayshift nurse. After individually receiving the report asynchronously, the entire group convened synchronously, at which time critical thinking questions were posed to the students for discussion—all with the mindset that the student was the “dayshift RN” about to go care for these three patients.

The first important part of this assignment was for the student to determine what report sheet format they preferred. If you ask any seasoned nurse if they have developed personal best practice strategies for taking reports, I wager that the vast majority will say a resounding “yes.” Sample report sheets were provided for the students to consider. However, the final decision on format was up to each student.

Using Operating Broadcast System (OBS) to record and Yuja Video Platform to store the audio recording, I recorded myself playing the role of a tired, eager-to-go-home night shift nurse handing off three complex “med surg” patients to my students (aka, dayshift). I used Yuja’s quizzing feature to insert multiple choice questions throughout my reports. These questions were specific to the content the students were studying in lecture and choosing an answer was required before the audio report would resume. The correct answer was available in real-time, but students were encouraged to try to answer the question independently before accessing the key. I created a Canvas module specifically for this exercise, which included instructions and the three handoff recordings as links. I made the recordings available to the students 72 hours prior to our large group synchronous zoom meeting, which constituted the second half of this assignment.

At an assigned time, all students (N = 83) attended a one-hour zoom meeting with completed report sheets in hand. During that time, I briefly recapped our three patients, and then asked students several questions about each of their three patients. Students worked in small groups to discuss the questions and to prioritize interventions as they planned for “dayshift” patient care. The questions were a mixture of recall, application, analysis, and evaluation. Finally, the large group reconvened to share answers, debate solutions, and make further follow-up suggestions; I provided feedback throughout the discussion as well.

Student Response

As part of the Teaching Innovation Institute, the Center for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching (CELT) conducted a mid-semester feedback session in the class participating in these Nightshift Report activities. The student feedback gleaned from that session revealed that students found the activity extremely helpful. CELT found that 99% of students (N = 82/83) either “strongly agreed” or “agreed” that the Night Shift assignment was relevant to their future career. Qualitative student feedback was also overwhelmingly positive. Students stated that the Night Shift assignment “helped me so much in clinical [practice] to be able to hear and retain the information the nurses were throwing at me first thing in the morning.” Students also cited a shift in their thinking skills in that the activity “made me truly think like a nurse” and “helped me dig deeper and better understand the big picture.” Other comments identified the activity as an important intermediate space between the intellectual work of the classroom and the hands-on realities of the clinic, claiming that the activity provided “a happy medium for me between lecture and clinical, allowing me to consider a patient case by just looking at the patient’s information but being able to critically evaluate it in a more academic sense rather than hands-on.”

Implications for Future Practice

I am encouraged by the positive student response and certainly intend to continue incorporating this activity into our undergraduate program. Only now, am I thinking to myself, “Why haven’t I thought of doing this before?” One of the primary purposes of a nurse educator is to prepare our nurse graduates to be “practice ready” upon graduation. There is strong evidence to support that transitioning from nursing school to the real-world is exceedingly difficult and stressful for graduates. I think that providing opportunities for our students to hone this skill set in a safe, simulated environment will no doubt yield better outcomes post-graduation. New graduates will benefit by drawing from these past experiences, and even more importantly, they will be prepared to offer high-quality and safe patient care, which is our end goal in the healthcare setting.

References

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Media

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