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Understanding Nursing Students' Attitudes and Knowledge in Caring for People with Disabilities



PRESENTERS:
Cassidy Kaczor & Ashley McDonald

BACKGROUND

Content in nursing curricula specific to disability health care is limited. Smeltzer and colleagues discovered an absence of disability-related content in pre-licensure nursing textbooks.¹ People with Disabilities (PWDs) have indicated four areas of concern regarding their care by nursing staff: poor communication, lack of competence, negative attitudes, and quality of care received.² This study focused on exploring the knowledge, attitudes, and comfort level of undergraduate nursing students in caring for PWDs. We hypothesized if education on the health care of PWDs and standardized patient experiences are implemented into nursing school curricula, then nursing students will have an increase in knowledge and an improved viewpoint in delivering equitable care to all patients.

METHODS

Participants: Sophomore level nursing students enrolled in Health Assessment course (N = 124). Age range: 18-28 (mode: 19 years of age); 91% identified as female.

Design & Methods: A pre-post course survey design. 31% of students enrolled also had a scheduled encounter with a standardized patient consultant with a disability in the simulation lab, and 49% of students reported encountering patients with a disability in their clinical experience.



“Most People with Disabilities Are Not Ashamed of Their Disability.” – Sophomore Nursing Student



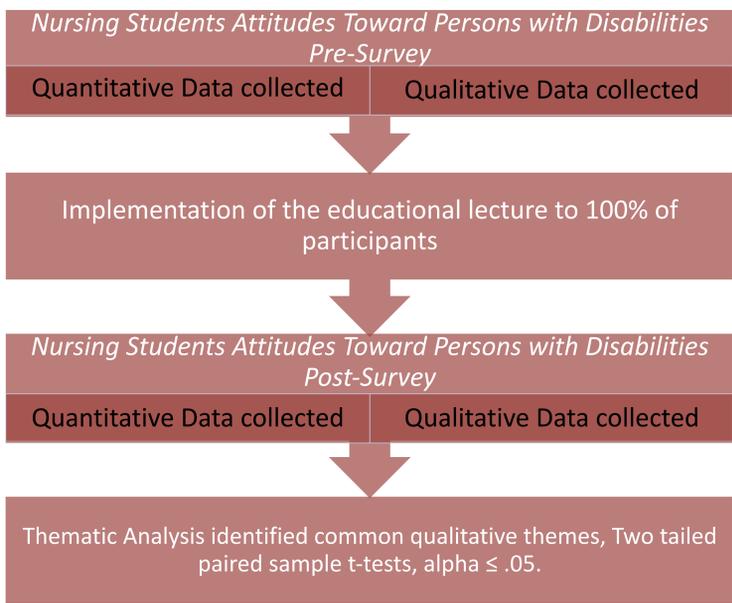
Figure 1. Nursing student providing care to a PWD while under the supervision of faculty in Duquesne University’s simulation lab.



SCAN ME



Take a picture to download a copy of the full survey and references.



RESULTS

Pre-course Themes
Lack of knowledge and experience caring for PWDs
Lack of general nursing knowledge and experience
Fear of causing harm
Communication concerns
Specific Discomforts: speech, spasticity, jerking, patient behaviors, woman in room, male-female interactions
Post-course Additional Themes
Fear of not meeting patient needs
Ensuring advocacy of the client

- Post-course survey themes showed an increase in nurse patient communication and comfort level
- A more positive impression of PWDs was reported after increased experience around PWDs
- 2/5 survey domains and 41% of survey items showed significant improvement:
 - Working with PWD’s in a clinical setting (p = .000)
 - Positive Impressions of self-concepts of PWD (p = .019)

Future Directions: Further research on specific educational interventions is needed. Educating nursing students on how to provide equitable, competent, evidence-based care to PWDs will help to decrease disparities in caring for PWD.



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