The Effects of Nursing School on Students and Their Likelihood of Seeking Help

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Introduction

Nursing school, being very vigorous can lead to increased levels of anxiety and depression. Students see first hand the toll this increased stress can take on their peers. The purpose of the study was to evaluate the effects of nursing school on student’s mental health and their likelihood of seeking help from mental health services. Evaluation of several research articles about similar issues prompted the research within the Anderson College of Nursing at the University of North Alabama. Students in the nursing program were asked to complete an anonymous online survey that addressed feelings towards nursing school and their willingness to discuss their feelings with a mental health professional. The aim of the study is to encourage nursing students to utilize the resources available to them to alleviate future and current anxiety. Hopefully, the study will expose the reality of anxiety and depression in nursing school and the results may promote change within the Anderson College of Nursing to help alleviate, assess, and refer for help when needed.

Methodology

- International Review Board approval was obtained to conduct an anonymous survey within at the University of North Alabama Anderson College of Nursing.
- The survey consisted of 10 questions that evaluated the degree of anxiety and depression experienced by students within the nursing program (in levels 1-4) as well as identified the contributing factors to this anxiety and depression and students willingness to discuss feelings of anxiety or depression with mental health professionals.
- After giving informed consent, students were asked to identify by gender, level in program, and if they were a traditional or non-traditional student.
- Anxiety and Depression were ranked on a scale of 1-10 with 1 being none and 10 being the greatest amount of anxiety/depression.
- Students were asked at what they experienced the greatest amount of anxiety and what the main contributor to their anxiety/depression is.
- We included an additional question asking if they had sought help and if so, by whom; if students had not sought help, we asked why.
- Participants were then asked if they would utilize any resources available to them to help with anxiety or depression.
- The results were studied and our recommendations were made based on the results and a literature review of similar studies.

Results

- Out of our 69 participants 28 ranked their anxiety as a 6 or higher on a scale of 0-10.
- The main stress inducing time was identified as “before a test” with 24% of students choosing this response. “Before a test” was followed by “test day” with 21% and “check offs” with 19%.
- 20% students answered that “fear” was the main contributor to their anxiety and depression.
- “Time management” and “lack of sleep” were also identified as main contributor to anxiety levels.
- 95% of students state that they have sought help, the majority of help coming from friends at 26% and family at 25%.
- Students identified that their reasoning for not seeking help is “lack of time” and “discomfort associated with seeking help.
- Lastly, 97% of students surveyed answered that they would/might would seek help if resources were available to them.

Conclusion

Nursing school can provoke large amounts of stress which can lead to increased anxiety and depression among students. Test days described as both before and after a test scored the highest as the most stressful time for students. Lack of time and discomfort with seeking help were also stated as reasons for not seeking help, with the majority of students saying that they would seek help if resources were available. Due to these responses we recommend a deeper emphasis on mental health and stress management as implementation in the nursing program, thus possibly reducing the amount of reported anxiety and depression experienced by nursing students.

Recommendations

- Deeper research into the mental health of the students in nursing school and students’ coping mechanisms needs to be conducted to further evaluate potential methods of addressing this issue.
- Education needs to be provided to all instructors about the resources the University of North Alabama provides for stress management such as time management and note taking workshops at the Student Success Center.
- Instructors need to be comfortable discussing the benefits of Student Counseling Services on campus.
- Pre-Nursing students need to be aware of all that is expected of them when they enter the program and students in the program need to be aware of what is expected of them in each clinical rotation or weekly assignments.
- We believe it would benefit students if a module on self-care was taught in the beginning levels of nursing school that specifically address these issues and possible stress management systems, time-management skills, and a discussion about the benefits of talking to a mental health professional regularly.