Enhancing Nursing Student Confidence Through Simulated Basic Skills Training
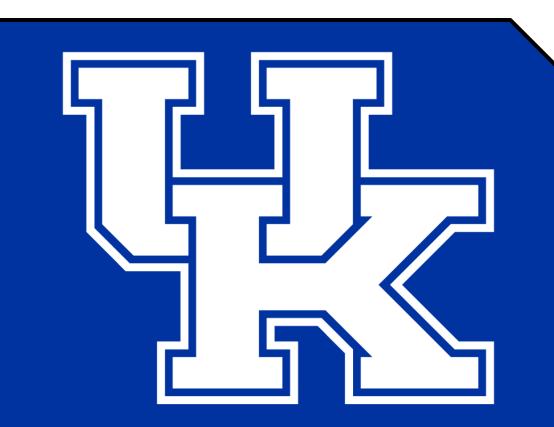
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Introduction

Nursing school can be intimidating for students, particularly those with limited patient care experience. Many programs require students to complete Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) training before beginning their nursing education; however, CNA training is often the only hands-on patient experience students have prior to clinical rotations. According to Stombaugh & Judd (2013), "Nursing programs cannot assume that students are prepared in these basic skills based on a nursing assistant certification" (p. 165). To address this gap, a simulated learning experience was developed using the NLN Jeffries Simulation Theory to provide a structured, patient-centered environment for students to review and practice fundamental nursing skills safely.

Key Findings

- High Satisfaction with CNA Boot Camp
  - 83% of students strongly agreed that the boot camp enhanced their learning beyond the CNA course.
- Confidence Boost in Clinical Skills
  - Confidence in using a gait belt increased from 40% low (1-2) to 75% high (4-5).
  - Confidence in changing sheets on an occupied bed increased to 100% at level 5.
  - Confidence in taking manual vital signs improved, with 75% rating it at level 5 after training.
  - Confidence in transferring patients with multiple therapy lines increased to 100% at level 5.
- Debriefing Facilitated Self-Reflection
  - 60% strongly agreed that simulation debriefing helped them evaluate their performance.
- Most Valuable Skills Reinforced
  - 100% found positioning a patient to offload coccyx and heels useful.
  - 80% reinforced skills in catheter management and manual vital signs.
  - 60% improved confidence in bed-making and patient transfers with lines.

Methods

This project utilized a simulation-based learning experience to reinforce foundational nursing skills for students entering a second-degree accelerated Bachelor of Science in Nursing (ABSN) program. The simulation was designed using the NLN Jeffries Simulation Theory, providing a structured and student-centered learning environment.

Participants:
- Pre-licensure ABSN students in their first semester.
- Varied backgrounds: Some with prior patient care experience (e.g., CNA), others with only classroom-based training.

Simulation Design:
- Students participated in a realistic patient care scenario featuring a 75-year-old female patient requiring admission and essential nursing interventions. Students were responsible for:
  - Introducing themselves and engaging in therapeutic communication.
  - Identifying and manipulating hospital equipment (flowmeter, suction, bed controls).
  - Performing manual vital signs collection and applying a pulse oximeter.
  - Assisting with hygiene care, including changing soiled linens and repositioning to offload pressure points.
  - Ensuring patient safety while managing an IV, oxygen, and an indwelling urinary catheter.
  - Transferring the patient safely while considering body mechanics and injury prevention.

Data Collection & Evaluation:
- Confidence surveys were conducted before and after the simulation to assess student self-efficacy.
- Qualitative feedback was collected during debriefing to evaluate perceived learning and areas for improvement.
- Observational assessment of skill performance during the simulation.

Results

- Overall CNA Course Rating
  - Participants rated their CNA course with an average score around 8-9 out of 10, indicating strong satisfaction.
- Impact of the Optional CNA Boot Camp
  - 83% of respondents strongly agreed and 17% somewhat agreed that the CNA boot camp enhanced their knowledge beyond the CNA course.
  - The majority rated the boot camp's contribution to their learning as a 5/5.
- Simulation and Self-Reflection
  - 60% of students strongly agreed, and 20% somewhat agreed that debriefing sessions allowed them to self-reflect on their performance in simulation.
- Confidence Before and After the Boot Camp
  The boot camp significantly improved student confidence in key nursing skills:
  - Using a Gait Belt to Transfer a Patient:
    - Before: 40% rated confidence low (1-2)
    - After: 75% rated confidence high (4-5)
  - Changing Sheets on an Occupied Bed:
    - Before: Confidence was moderate (4)
    - After: 100% rated confidence at 5
  - Taking Manual Vital Signs:
    - Before: Confidence moderate (4)
    - After: 75% rated confidence high (5)
  - Transferring a Patient with Multiple Therapy Lines:
    - Before: Confidence spread across 1-3
    - After: 100% rated confidence at 5
- Most Helpful Skills Reinforced in Simulation
  - 100% of students found "Positioning a patient to offload coccyx and heels" useful.
  - Other highly rated skills included:
    - 80% found "Emptying an indwelling catheter" and "Taking manual vital signs" helpful.
    - 60% benefited from "Changing soiled bed linens in an occupied bed" and "Transferring a patient with multiple line management."
- Qualitative Feedback
  - "I wanted to let you know I absolutely loved the bootcamp! It was so helpful with getting oriented to the clinical setting and helped me feel a lot more comfortable with skills I hadn't practiced yet (like using a gait belt)."

The optional CNA boot camp offered by the College of Nursing added to my toolkit of knowledge provided by my CNA course: 6

I feel more confident going into the first day of clinical: 5

Conclusions

The CNA Boot Camp significantly enhanced students' confidence and competence in essential nursing skills, bridging the gap between coursework and clinical practice. Survey results showed marked improvements in confidence across key skills, with 75–100% of participants reporting higher self-assurance after the boot camp. Additionally, debriefing sessions were valuable for self-reflection, and hands-on practice reinforced critical techniques such as patient transfers, vital sign measurement, and line management. These findings highlight the effectiveness of immersive, skills-based training in preparing nursing students for real-world clinical experiences.

References

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Acknowledgments