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Student Nurse Internship Program- Cardiology Unit

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NURS 498VH Honors Education Thesis/Project

Review of Literature

Working on the Cardiology unit, most of the population was patients age 65 and older. Given that this was the key population recurring with cardiovascular problems and procedures, I decided to dig deeper and research seniors and healthcare compliance. This is something that sparked my interest from the start. I have always had a soft spot for the older population, because I have always felt like they deserved more. I feel like this age group can often be neglected in regards to healthcare whether it be people blaming things on “aging” or people just not having as much concern for this population as people do for babies, for example. As I became a regular tech on the floor, I got used to seeing familiar faces and being able to build relationships with these individuals. After building connections with the nurses and patients on the floor, I was able to notice a recurring trend with a majority of these patients. Many of the patients have been hospitalized on multiple occasions due to noncompliance with treatment whether that be medications, lifestyle changes, or procedures. After realizing how prevalent noncompliance was in the senior population, I just knew I wanted to learn more on the subject.

The geriatric population is more prone to various chronic and recurrent illnesses such as diabetes mellitus, hypertension, neurodegenerative, gastrointestinal, ocular, genitourinary, and respiratory disorders. As the elderly are prone to multiple comorbidities, they are at higher risk of polypharmacy which also places them at higher risk of not adhering to treatment regimen. Due to the poor compliance in this age accounts for medication wastage with increased cost of healthcare and substantial worsening of the disease with disability or death. Because of the chronic nature of most of these diseases, a majority of the disease processes require multiple drug therapy. This results in a complex medication regimen leading to increased cost of therapy, drug interactions, and forgetfulness. Most of the human and economic costs associated with non-adherence can be avoided by improving medication adherence. Seniors are the fastest growing segment of our society, the largest consumers of health care dollars, resources, and medications. Yet, over 55% of them do not properly take their medications. Studies indicate up to 30% of all hospital readmissions are due to medication non-adherence (Jin, Kim, Rhie, 2016).

In a study done by Shruthi, Jyothi, Pundarikaksha, Nagesh, and Tushar, they determined that level of compliance positively correlated with the educational status of the study subjects and their awareness about the diseases and prescribed medications. The overall level of compliance was higher in subjects living with spouse or families, subjects without any functional impairment, subjects who were regular for follow-up visits and also in subjects who did not experience adverse events (2016).

In the older population, noncompliance can be due to several different factors. It could be insufficient financial means, lack of social support and care, lack of transportation, lack of education and understanding, or lack of the means to support themselves. In the healthcare setting, it is easy to notice trends of reoccurrence among older adults whether it be exacerbation of the disease or worsening of the illness. One of the top reasons for older adults not sticking to their treatment is due to socioeconomic factors. The major socioeconomic factors are lack of caregiver or large caregiver burden. A lot of times, these older adults are brought into the hospital and they are either living alone or living with family but presenting as a major responsibility of the family. Today, it is very common for older adults to live by themselves because as our nation is living longer, people are wanting to remain independent as long as possible. Due to the fact of them living alone, this results in older adults being unable to keep up with disease treatment.

The problem doesn't only lie in the fact that Americans are living longer. They're also, generally speaking, more sick. The CDC recently noted that the number of individuals suffering from Alzheimer's would double by the year 2060, and the rise of chronic illness affects nearly half of all adults in the U.S. (Faulkner, 2018). This inevitably puts a strain on an already overburdened and understaffed healthcare system. Things being as they are, older adults are often the first victims of a healthcare system that is unprepared to undertake the number of patients it currently must care for. As it stands currently, the healthcare industry is going to have to make changes in order to properly care for the continually growing number of elderly patients.

One of the greatest achievements in the last century was the increase in average life expectancy, mainly due to advances in public health, technology and medicine. As nurses, it is so important that we promote prevention, education, proper treatment, as well as adherence to medical treatment. Medication

adherence is defined by the World Health Organization as “the degree to which the person’s behavior corresponds with the agreed recommendations from a health care provider” (Faulkner, 2018). Barriers to effective use of medications, for example, include poor provider-patient communication, inadequate knowledge about a drug and its use, not realizing the importance or need for treatment, fear of adverse effects of the drug, long term drug regimens, cost and access barriers, and complex medication schedules with numerous medications with varying dosing schedules (Jin, Kim, Rhie, 2016). Due to this research and pinpointing the areas to be improved, I think it is important as healthcare professionals to work towards advocating for the older adults regarding their health. Throughout nursing school, communication was the major skill that was drilled into our brain from the very first semester of nursing school. Long story short: communication is the key to our practice and the key to providing the best care possible to our patients. Allowing ourselves to take time with each patient, listening to them and teaching them are simple ways that we as nurses can better promote healthcare compliance in the elderly population.

Work Summary of Activities

The Student Nurse Internship Program was started as a way to allow nursing students to gain the skill set of patient care and communication while allowing us additional educational opportunities. The first 4 weeks of my internship were the orientation period in which 2 weeks we followed a nurse and then the other 2 weeks we followed a nursing assistant. These initial 4 weeks really gave us the opportunity to have educational opportunities by following the nurse, but also allowing us to work with another nursing assistant before working on our own. Through my internship at Washington Regional, I was responsible for taking and documenting vital signs, passing meal trays and recording intake and output, as well as attending to call lights which consisted of ambulating patients and assisting patients with activities of daily living such as toileting, bathing, and dressing.

My days consisted of a 7 am to 7 pm schedule and I worked three days a week over this past summer. My day would start by getting into work at 6:30. I always made sure to leave with plenty of time, because I would always think of the what if’s: what if I broke down on the side of the road? What if

there is a wreck on the way here? I have learned that having this mentality is a pretty good way to be especially as I am getting closer to starting my RN job. My first task of the day would be to pass trays starting about 7:30 and I would usually take around 30 minutes then I would usually start at 8:00 am getting patient vital signs due at 9:00am. Taking vitals really allowed me to get to know the patients, what they were hospitalized for, and be able to connect the dots. For example, if I was talking with a patient in for a CHF exacerbation, I was able to piece together why they presented with elevated blood pressure, increased respirations, increased pulse, and low oxygen saturation when measured with pulse oximetry. While taking vitals, I would often pick up meal trays simultaneously to try and make the most of my time. On the cardiovascular floor, intakes and outputs are high priority due to the importance of monitoring I&Os for cardiac procedures, heart function, as well as proper nutrition. I had the same schedule with lunch and then 1:00pm vitals and then dinner and 5:00 vitals. My daily schedule kept me on my feet pretty much all day and so I was really able to adapt to the lifestyle and workload that I will be faced with when I start my job in February. I was able to form connections with nurses, doctors, and nursing assistants which were instrumental in my development over the summer. I would recommend to any nursing student, honors or not, that taking part in this internship program is a decision you will not regret. By providing that hands-on experience and allowing us, as nursing students, to work on our skills and better ourselves, this experience is something I will always be thankful for.

Reflection

University of Arkansas nursing honors program requires that each student complete an internship, a research project, or a service-learning project as a part of meeting the Honors College curriculum. As a student of the program, I felt that doing an internship would be the most beneficial to me as I am within weeks of graduating and moving on into the working world. After spending lots of time on the cardiology floor at Washington Regional, I was able to see what an incredible work environment it was so I thought it would be the perfect internship to build my experience and nursing skills. Each and every one of the people I worked with contributed to my growth professionally and also as a person.

My internship experience has been very rewarding because I have acquired and learned skills that are going to benefit my future nursing career. It allowed me an experience beyond clinicals that helped shape me into the nurse I am going to be when I graduate from the University of Arkansas and enter the working world. Working as a student nurse intern on the floor, I was able to develop several important skills through my time spent with direct patient care, time management, and most especially prioritization and management of care. Over the summer, I was able to gain around 360 hours of clinical experience which allowed me to gain beneficial work experience to better grow myself in my skills and work ethic. The work itself was not easy and it taught me how to learn to adapt to the 12-hour work schedule and the hospital workflow.

When I started this internship, I noticed that the work community was something that really drew me to work on the floor. I noticed how well nurses on the floor and also interdisciplinary teams collaborated with each other. I feel like as a nursing student this was something that was super helpful to see. To see healthcare professionals working together as a team with a common goal: to make the best possible outcome for the patient. In seeing this type of dynamic within the hospital, I was able to see a prime example of how a floor should be run. I noticed how nurses would go out of their way, above and beyond, for their patients. I noticed how nursing assistants would form the best relationships with nurses, doctors, and other staff. The collaboration among disciplines was something that really put healthcare in the most positive light.

The internship was an invaluable learning experience for me because it gave me a huge amount of independence as well as responsibility. After my 2 weeks of orientation, I was responsible for 10-20 patients at a time, making sure they had their every need met throughout the day. I was responsible for showing up on time ready to work, and responsible for fulfilling the duties in my job description. I was able to push myself, work hard, and exceed my own goals for the summer. At the beginning of my internship, I made sure to set goals for myself. These goals were small, but they have deemed so beneficial to me in the long run.

Throughout my internship experience, I was pushed and challenged by other co-workers to really think things through and learn to analyze information. Critical thinking is a key skill that is mentioned

thousands of times throughout nursing school, because it is essentially what nursing school is preparing you to be able and do. Critical thinking is defined as “the objective analysis and evaluation of an issue in order to form a judgment.” In nursing school, we learn the concepts and textbook knowledge we need to be able to apply when we are faced with it in the clinical setting. Being exposed to so much during my time working as a nursing assistant, I was really able to be hands on and personal with patients. This allowed me to better grasp concepts and connect dots when needed. For me, the best way I learn is through hands on interaction. Being able to physically assess a situation is much more effective than showing me pictures in a book.

After being exposed to so much on the floor, I noticed myself utilizing my critical thinking skills more and more as time went on. As I was learning, I would begin to use the things I have assessed and evaluated and form my own judgments based on my knowledge from school and clinical exposure. I cannot begin to express how good it felt when I was able to really critically think for the first time. Throughout nursing school, we are placed in the mindset setting us up for being able to rationally think through things. I think that this is the most important thing I was able to grow personally over the summer. I was able to talk myself through things and give rationales for why I thought this was right or why I made this particular judgment. I feel like this is an essential skill to have when making decisions on care for a patient on the floor. Growth in this skill allows me to be the best possible nurse I can be for my patients while ensuring them I am equipped to make the best decisions for the best possible outcomes.

After finishing the internship, I feel like I am so much stronger as a nurse as well as having such a stronger skill set to take with me as I further my career. In February 2020, I will be starting a residency position at Arkansas Children’s Hospital in the Cardiovascular Intensive Care Unit. I could not be more excited to start my career as a nurse because it has been a dream of mine for as long as I can remember. I have this internship to thank for giving me the skill set to allow me to excel in my nursing career path. Having the exposure to caring for cardiac patients has allowed me to build upon my knowledge base so that I will be prepared to care for the kiddos. Working on the cardiology unit allowed me to realize that I do have a passion for cardiac and that it is an amazing floor to allow yourself to really grow as a nurse.

Working cardiology allows you to develop those skills that can be applied to any field you decide. I could not be more thankful for this experience and the many things I gained in the process.

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