

Utilization of nursing home residents for development of assessment skills



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Abstract

Acquiring strong assessment skills is imperative for nursing students in order to enhance their learning experiences and future nursing practice. Nursing homes offer a quality clinical experience exposing students to residents experiencing multiple chronic diseases with various levels of physical and cognitive functioning in a slower paced environment. Students' perceptions validated that the nursing home setting provided an effective clinical environment for the development of assessment skills.

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this article is to discuss how nursing homes can provide meaningful learning opportunities for the nursing student who is developing assessment skills. Assessment is the cornerstone of nursing practice that impacts clinical decision making and nursing interventions. A survey, completed by newly graduated nurses about their most recent work day, identified performing a focused assessment as the third most frequent activity completed (National Council of State Boards of Nursing, 2012). Acquiring strong assessment skills is imperative for nursing students in order to enhance their learning experiences and future nursing practice.

Introduction to assessment skills typically occurs in the classroom and laboratory settings. Clinical experiences offer students an opportunity to develop their assessment skills. Exposing students to individuals across the lifespan with varying degrees of health and wellness through diverse clinical

experiences assists students to refine their assessment skills. However, securing clinical opportunities for prelicensed nursing students has become increasingly difficult for nursing programs across the United States.

Utilization of clinical placement outside of the acute care settings has become essential for most nursing programs. Nursing homes offer a quality clinical experience for nursing students. Students are exposed to residents experiencing multiple chronic diseases with various levels of physical and cognitive functioning in a slower paced environment. It also provides repeated exposure to residents over a period of time.

In 2011, there were 15,683 nursing homes in the United States with 1,388,000 certified Medicare and/or Medicaid beds occupied (Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, 2012). The majority (78.3%) of the residents experienced one or more impairments related to their activities of daily living. Moderate to severe cognitive impairment was noted in 64.8% of the residents. The National Nursing Home Survey 2004 noted that circulatory system diseases were the leading primary diagnoses among residents at admission followed by mental disorders then nervous system disorders (Jones, Dwyer, Bercovitz, & Strahan, 2009).

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The purpose of utilizing the nursing home setting for clinical is to provide the beginning student with the opportunity to acquire hands-on experience and competence in the skills taught during lecture and practiced in the campus laboratory. It is the belief of the faculty that the nursing home setting provides an environment that is conducive to accomplishing the clinical objectives. It provides a setting that allows beginning students to work with a focused population that has various and often complex conditions. These opportunities expose students to multiple experiences that allow them to develop and strengthen their assessment skills.

2. Literature Review

Physical assessment skills are essential in nursing practice. The [American Nurses Association \(2010\)](#) has identified assessment as a practice standard for nursing. Nursing literature related to teaching physical assessment skills in the clinical setting for undergraduate students is limited.

[Giddens and Eddy \(2009\)](#) conducted research to determine how assessment content was being taught among undergraduate programs. Students conducting assessments on one another in the laboratory setting was reported by all the respondents, making it the most common teaching approach utilized. Other approaches included computer simulation and manikins.

A study was conducted to investigate the health assessment teaching modalities of high-fidelity simulation, simulated patients, and community volunteers on self-efficacy and student satisfaction ([Luctkar-Flude, Wilson-Keates, & Larocque, 2012](#)). The results demonstrated that each of the learning modalities assisted students in being somewhat confident with their assessment skills. In addition, the students reported satisfaction with all three learning modalities. Another study found that utilization of standardized patients in the laboratory setting instead of a peer, assisted students to score significantly better on an objective structured clinical examination that evaluated health history taking skills, infection control measures, and physical assessment competencies ([Bornais, Raiger, Krahn, & El-Marsi, 2012](#)).

Nursing homes can be an option to teach physical assessment skills. A survey of 53 nursing schools identified learning nursing skills as an advantage for utilizing nursing homes for clinical placement ([Chen, Brown, Groves, & Spezia, 2007](#)). The nursing skills identified as being best taught in the nursing home environment included comprehensive physical assessment and assessment of signs and symptoms of common geriatric illnesses.

[Mullenbach and Burggraf \(2012\)](#) noted a significant improvement in student perception of being prepared to perform a history/assessment in the nursing home setting after a nursing home clinical experience. They also noted positive student comments in their personal journal entries related to increased opportunities to interact with residents and practice skills such as physical assessments.

3. Background

The teaching and implementation of assessment skills were taught in a nursing foundations and assessment course. This course was a requirement for the associate degree nursing students in their first semester of the program. One third of the course content focused on assessment. The course content was delivered utilizing the classroom, laboratory, and clinical settings.

The faculty strategized how to coordinate the class, campus laboratory, and clinical experience to provide the novice, first semester, associate degree nurse with a meaningful learning experience. The goal by the end of the semester was to have each student possess the skills to obtain a health history, perform a basic head-to-toe assessment and document his or her findings accurately on one resident in the nursing home facility.

The clinical hours for the course were divided equally between campus laboratory and the clinical facility. The campus laboratory hours were taught in the nursing laboratory on the university campus. The clinical hours were completed in a nursing home facility. The clinical/laboratory schedule was developed so that the information and skills that were presented and practiced in campus laboratory in one week could be implemented in the clinical setting the following week. Therefore, the campus laboratory alternated with the clinical experience each week throughout the semester.

Assessment content was initially presented to students in the classroom setting. The content was revisited in the campus laboratory setting where students were able to practice their assessment skills related to the content presented in the classroom. Students attended clinical at the nursing home where they were able to implement the assessment skills learned in the classroom and laboratory setting on residents at the facilities.

Content delivery began with therapeutic communication, how to conduct an interview and obtain a health history, progressing through assessment of each body system, and finishing with putting it all together in a head-to-toe assessment. During campus laboratory, videos and/or laboratory instructor demonstrations were utilized to assist students in acquiring assessment skills. The students had an opportunity to practice the skills on a peer and document the findings on a health assessment form that was reviewed by the clinical instructor. Students were required to change partners throughout the laboratory experience to increase the variation in their experiences. In addition, they performed assessments on high-fidelity and low-fidelity simulators that were programmed with normal and abnormal assessment sounds.

In the nursing home setting, the students were required to apply what they had learned in the previous campus laboratory while assessing their assigned resident. The nursing home facilities provided residents who were mainly older adults with multiple chronic diseases, cognitive and physical impairments, and sensory alterations. Students were assigned a different

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