



“Skip the infection, get the injection”: A case study in emergency preparedness education



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ABSTRACT

The frequency of natural and manmade disasters along with increasing potential for public health emergencies emphasizes the need for emergency preparedness education. Because nurses are the largest group of health professionals to meet the needs of those affected by disasters and public health emergencies, schools of nursing need to prepare graduates who are knowledgeable about disaster and public health emergency management. The use of core competencies may be a means to ensure consistent application of best practices in disaster health care. The next step in competency development involves validation through evidence. Through documentation and dissemination of their experiences with emergency preparedness education, schools of nursing can provide supportive evidence to aid in competency development. The purpose of this paper is present a case study of an ongoing and evolving public health nursing education project consistent with disaster health care and emergency preparedness competencies.

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Introduction

The frequency of natural and manmade disasters along with increasing potential for public health emergencies emphasizes the need for emergency preparedness. A disaster may be described as a “destructive event that disrupts the normal functioning of the community” (Veenema and Wooley, 2013, p. 3) and can be caused by natural or environmental forces or by man-made forces including disease (Veenema and Wooley, 2013). Emergency preparedness has been described as “the comprehensive knowledge, skills, abilities, and actions needed to prepare for and respond to threatened, actual, or suspected chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear or explosive incidents, man-made incidents, natural disasters, or other related events” (Slepski, 2005, p. 426). Prior planning and coordination among knowledgeable health professionals are essential to effective disaster response, particularly for large-scale events, and require emergency preparedness education. Nurses comprise the largest group of health professionals to meet needs of those affected by disasters and public health emergencies, so it is crucial for schools of nursing to prepare graduates who are knowledgeable about disaster and public health emergency management. Curricula are crowded, however, and the

essential content for disaster nursing education has yet to be clearly delineated (Gebbie et al., 2012; Littleton–Kearney and Slepski, 2008). The use of core competencies has been suggested as a means to ensure consistent application of best practices in disaster health care and significant progress has been made in competency identification (Gebbie et al., 2012; Walsh et al., 2012; James et al., 2010; Jakeway et al., 2008). The next step in competency development involves validation through evidence and schools of nursing can provide supportive evidence through documentation and dissemination of their experiences with emergency preparedness education. The educational approach described in this paper was designed within a public health nursing framework; upon additional examination, the project is consistent with recently proposed, broad-based disaster medicine and emergency preparedness competencies (Walsh et al., 2012) and can lend support for their relevance to disaster health care. The purpose of this paper is to present a case study of an ongoing and evolving public health nursing education project that is consistent with disaster health care and public health preparedness competencies.

Literature review

Nursing students and emergency preparedness

For nurses to be proficient in providing care during disasters and public health emergencies, schools of nursing must include educational opportunities that introduce students to concepts of

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preparedness and disaster nursing. Despite crowded curricula, nurse educators can strategically develop emergency preparedness exercises for students that will help achieve competence in these areas, as well as evidence based practice, role socialization, and clinical reasoning. Ultimately, nursing students should be prepared to think about how they, as professional nurses, will one day fit into the larger community during a disaster event and how they can serve as valuable assets within that community.

Many schools of nursing participate in immunization clinics (Schutt and Parker 2006; Evenson et al., 2005; Kemsley and Riegle, 2004), conduct health fairs for the community (Adams and Canclini, 2008; Maltby, 2006), or teach disaster nursing through the use of drills and simulations (Kako et al., 2012; Warland et al., 2012; Hutchinson et al., 2011; Kaplan et al., 2011; Morrison and Catanzaro, 2010). Some schools develop elective disaster health care training courses, which may be nursing-specific or interprofessional. Nursing students from a variety of nursing programs in China participated in a pilot training program that included role play and skill training (Chan et al., 2010; Pang et al., 2009). In Toronto, Canada, five different educational institutions with nursing, medicine, paramedicine, police, media, and health administration programs offered a voluntary online training program culminating in a high-fidelity mass casualty simulation (Atack et al., 2009).

In yet another approach, other schools have gone so far as to incorporate disaster preparedness and response participation as part of ongoing serving learning. Nursing students from Purdue have partnered with family health clinics over a three year period to provide care to survivors of Hurricane Katrina (Richards et al., 2009). The University of South Carolina College of Nursing formed a Medical Reserve Corps in collaboration with the University's health services (Culley, 2010). The University of Texas School of Nursing formalized its disaster preparedness and response program by creating a Memorandum of Cooperation between the city of Austin and The University of Texas at Austin to provide trained volunteers to meet community health care needs during a disaster (Pattillo and O'Day, 2009). Regardless of the approach, it is crucial to align emergency preparedness education with appropriate competencies.

Competencies for emergency preparedness

As emergency preparedness planning has become a greater priority for communities, health care professionals have begun to identify core competencies essential to the delivery of care during disasters or public health emergencies (Gebbie et al., 2012; Walsh et al., 2012; Jakeway et al., 2008). Because various subsets of health professionals have differentiated skills essential for delivery of care during disaster events, it is important to identify competencies specific to these professionals (James et al., 2010). An example of this is a position paper in which the Association of State and Territorial Directors of Nursing (ASTDN) offers guidance in how the expertise public health nurses can contribute to community health and safety during disasters by describing how selected emergency preparedness competencies apply specifically to public health nurses (Jakeway et al., 2008).

Experts advocate for disaster medicine and public health preparedness becoming recognized as a "discipline for all health professionals" (James et al., 2010, p.102). Thus, broadly-based competencies applicable to a variety of health professionals have been proposed (Walsh et al., 2012). Not all nursing students will become public health nurses; however, all of them will be part of a profession that must respond to disasters. Therefore, even when the focus of a specific course or project is on the use of the public health framework and interventions, the emphasis for their future practice must be broad and should include awareness both of

discipline-specific and cross-professional competencies. The recently-proposed disaster medicine and public health preparedness competencies (Walsh et al., 2012) therefore have great potential to be helpful in planning for emergency preparedness education for nursing students.

Background

For several years, Texas Christian University held a seasonal influenza immunization clinic for students, staff, and faculty using an outside agency to contract nurses to administer vaccines. Inconvenient hours and long lines led to low vaccination rates and disgruntled participants. The University began to reconsider its approach and in 2007, a member of the public health nursing faculty was approached with the request that nursing students administer the vaccinations.

Although many nursing programs organize students to participate in an existing plan to deliver immunizations, the public health nursing faculty recognized a service learning opportunity that would enable senior level nursing students to plan, implement, and evaluate a significant public health project. Participation in this project allows students to develop expertise in public health nursing and practice leadership and management skills, simultaneously meeting the needs of the campus community for an effective, efficient vaccination clinic. The pilot clinic of Fall 2007 demonstrated to stakeholders that nursing students have the capacity to manage a large, campus-wide clinic. Since the initial pilot, the project has grown into an annual event led by public health nursing students that is attended by over 2500 students, faculty, and staff. As time has gone on, it has become apparent that in achieving the learning outcomes of the project, the nursing students have been able to meet several core competencies for disaster health care. Although the project is specifically designed with the use of nursing frameworks, its learning outcomes can also be shown to be consistent with core competencies that have been proposed for the growing field of disaster medicine and public health (Walsh et al., 2012).

Design

The project was developed as a service learning project capable of meeting both student educational needs and community (University) health needs. The purpose of the ongoing project is to

1. Develop expertise in public health nursing leadership and management skills consistent with disaster health care/public health core competencies
2. Plan a community-wide influenza educational outreach program and immunization clinic
3. Implement a community-wide influenza educational outreach program and immunization clinic
4. Evaluate a community-wide influenza educational outreach program and immunization clinic

Learning outcomes

In this service learning project, nursing students gain first-hand experience in how a goal from a national public health agenda can be facilitated through use of appropriate interventions and legal and ethical boundaries for professional practice. Specifically, the students refer to the immunization objective from *Healthy People 2020* (United States Department of Health and Human Services, 2013) and design interventions based on a public health intervention model within the boundaries of professional practice. The

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