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High tech cheating

Mary G. Harper *

*University of Central Florida, Orlando, Florida Hospital Memorial System, Ormond Beach, FL,
1832 South Central Avenue, Flagler Beach, FL 32136, USA*

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Summary The use of technology has enhanced the convenience, flexibility, and efficiency of both preparatory and continuing education. Unfortunately, academic dishonesty, including plagiarism, has shown a positive correlation with the increased use of technology in education. A review of the literature related to unintended outcomes of the use of technology in nursing education and continuing education was conducted to determine the ethical implications for the nursing profession. Although nursing research dealing with academic and professional misconduct is sparse, evidence suggests that academic dishonesty is a predictor of workplace dishonesty. Given this correlation between unethical classroom behavior and unethical clinical behavior, efforts to staunch academic dishonesty may help allay professional misconduct. A combination of high tech and low tech methods may be used to minimize unethical behaviors among students and practicing professional nurses in order to maintain the integrity of the profession.

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Introduction

The use of technology abounds in generic nursing programs as well as in staff development and continuing education. For example, simulation, web-based and web-enhanced classes, use of Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs), Computer Assisted Instruction (CAI), video, and webcasting are some technological innovations that may be used in the

community college or university setting (Jeffries, 2005). In addition, teleconferencing, videoconferencing, computer conferencing, web-based training, and use of organizational intranets are a few alternatives for staff development and/or continuing education program delivery (Buhmann, 2001). Furthermore, manufacturers have produced computer simulators that allow for certification in Advanced Cardiac Life Support (ACLS) and Basic Life Support (BLS) without attending a live class. The advantages of the utilization of technology for education, such as convenience, flexibility, efficiency,

* Tel.: +1 386 615 4270; fax: +1 386 676 6115.
E-mail address: Mharper14@cfl.rr.com.

immediate feedback, and electronic completion tracking are widely recognized (Brownsen, 2005; Smith, 2002). The outcomes of web-based, web-enhanced, and computer assisted education have been positive in acquisition of new knowledge and participant satisfaction (Bata-Jones and Avery, 2004; Buckley, 2003; Cobb, 2004). However, unintended outcomes, such as plagiarism and other types of academic dishonesty, may have also resulted from the proliferation of technology and warrant investigation by the profession.

The purpose of this paper is to provide a review of the literature related to unintended outcomes of the use of technology in nursing education and continuing education in order to determine the ethical implications for the nursing profession. In addition, methods to minimize the unintended outcomes of the use of educational technology in both the academic and clinical setting will be explored along with implications for nursing research.

Academic dishonesty

Cheating is defined as "breaking the rules to get ahead academically, professionally, or financially" (Callahan, 2004). The prevalence of cheating has burgeoned over the past few decades. Research indicates that from 40% to 80% of college students have cheated at least once (Brown, 2002; Callahan, 2004; Chaput de Saintonge and Palovic, 2004; Dawkins, 2004; McCabe et al., 2001; Underwood and Szabo, 2003). In a survey of 253 baccalaureate and associate degree nursing students, Brown (2002) found that from 61% to 94% of the students had seen their peers cheat while 8–39% reported that they had cheated themselves. The increased prevalence of academic misconduct is commonly attributed to technology which has facilitated cheating (Chaput de Saintonge and Palovic, 2004; Kennedy et al., 2000; Smith et al., 2005; Szabo and Underwood, 2004).

Use of technology

A quick perusal of popular magazines and newspapers readily provides information on both the prevalence and use of technology for academic dishonesty (Heyman et al., 2005; Walker, 2004). New methods of using technology to cheat are discovered daily as evidenced by the recent Texas Instrument recall of a calculator after a sixth grader learned to manipulate the calculator to convert decimals into fractions (Sampson, 2005). An example of a high tech cheating device is the "KeyKat-

cher", a small device that records keystrokes on a personal computer (KeyKatcher: The Easiest Way to Monitor Your PC). It may be used to obtain an instructor's computer password in order to access his/her files (Heyman et al., 2005). The KeyKatcher is available online for \$69. Other examples of high tech cheating devices include PDAs which may be used to store notes for quizzes (Read, 2004) and cell phones, which are readily available and may be used for text messaging and calculations. Camera phones are used to take photographs of notes for reference during tests or to photograph tests to give to other students. Cell phones may also be used to access the internet to obtain answers to questions. The advent of wireless internet technology has provided further opportunities for accessing the internet to search for answers (Walker, 2004).

Plagiarism

While accessing the internet to search for answers to test questions may be commonplace, perhaps the most alarming trend in internet use is plagiarism, the failure to reference another's work (Tanner, 2004). Cyberplagiarism is a relatively new term that refers to use of information obtained from the World Wide Web (WWW) without proper citation (Eysenbach, 2000). The cut and paste function of computers turns copying a vast amount of information into a few keystrokes, making plagiarism easier than ever (Smith et al., 2005; Szabo and Underwood, 2004; Underwood and Szabo, 2003). A device called the Super Pen Professional that resembles an oversized pen advertises that it can scan and "store up to 1000 pages of information and transfer to a PC or PDA" (SkyMall, 2003). While it is conceivable that an author may inadvertently fail to cite properly, the opposite extreme of cyberplagiarism is the downloading of entire papers from the internet, either for free or for a nominal fee (Smith et al., 2005; Tanner, 2004). A Google search of "term paper" yields 44,400,000 results, the first page of which contains 16 different sites from which to purchase term papers. Some even advertise being non-plagiarized.

In an investigation of student attitudes toward using the internet for plagiarism, Szabo and Underwood (2004) found that 20% of the 291 university students surveyed in the United Kingdom (UK) would "definitely resort to plagiarism to escape failing a module" (p. 188). Another 34% signified they would "probably" plagiarize, leaving less than half of the students who would accept failing. In fact, nearly one-third of the respondents acknowledged having plagiarized from the internet. The investigators posit that accessibility of

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