Dental Hygiene and Nursing Students: Opportunities to Influence In-patient Oral Health Outcomes

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Background

• Dedicated Education Units (hospital units committed to student learning) offer opportunities for interactions patient populations to deliver care and develop collaborative practice skills.

• Studies report nursing and auxiliary staff have motivation to deliver oral care but do not routinely provide it.

• Consequences of inadequate oral health are documented (systemic links between oral health and systemic diseases: aspiration pneumonia, diabetes, heart disease).

• Improvements in oral health lead to improved overall health outcomes and cost savings.

• Nursing and Dental Hygiene Programs include curricular competencies directly related to Healthy People 2020 goals and Interprofessional Education.

Conceptual Framework

• A Healthcare Community of Practice is a group of health care workers sharing a common domain of interest who collaborate to enhance the practice, further professional expertise, and augment institutional knowledge.

Method

• After a TeamSTEPPS™ introduction, nursing students were paired with dental hygiene students on the DEUs.

• A report of the patients’ status was followed by the pair:
  • Developing an oral health assessment plan
  • Completing the Oral Health Assessment Tool™ (OHAT)
  • Providing oral hygiene care
  • Delivering dental education
  • Recommending dental products
  • Initiating appropriate referrals

• Evaluation included: OHAT findings, student reflections, and Interprofessional Collaborative Competency Attainment Survey™ (ICCAS)

Student Outcomes

Reflection survey themes:
• Understanding of the roles of each profession
• Appreciation of interprofessional collaboration
• Acquisition of oral health skills for acute care patients
• Awareness of viable dental hygienist workforce options in hospital settings

Unit Outcomes

Oral Health Assessment Tool™ findings:
• Student identification of Xerostomia and Candidiasis, other lesions
• Recommendation of appropriate dental products
• Establish location of “Dental Home”

Implications for Practice

• The nursing and dental hygiene IPE provided opportunities to partner with DEU staff improving nursing care, patient outcomes, and student learning.

References

ADHA White Paper Highlights Changes Occurring in Dental Hygiene Education. Dent Today. 2015 Dec; 34(12): 40, 44