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Road Less Traveled: Stresses and Coping Strategies of Nursing Students

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Students entering nursing programs are expected to manage physical and mental stresses of challenging nursing curriculums to become competent and caring nurses. Research shows that nurses face higher levels of stress with adverse health outcomes when compared to other professionals. Stress in nursing has been linked to reduced job satisfaction, increased illness, and poor job performance.¹ Developing strong foundations to manage stress early in nursing education may prepare nurses to develop better coping mechanisms, which could aid them in developing healthy habits, decrease attrition rates, and reduce chances of developing stress related sequelae later in life.²⁻⁵ This paper provides suggestions for resources and coping mechanisms based on the perceived stressors that baccalaureate nursing students identified. Providing resources and coping mechanisms to help nursing students develop lifelong skills that can reduce the physical and emotional impact of stress later in life.⁶ To accomplish this goal, a group of nursing students developed *The Road Less Traveled*, a brochure that identifies common stressors among nursing students, coping strategies, and resources-- identified by and for nursing students.

As part of a community health course at a large Midwestern university, a student group surveyed their peers, all seniors in their last semester of a nursing program, to identify stressors they faced during their baccalaureate program. Common responses included lack of sleep, financial difficulties, lack of time to exercise and eat a balanced diet, difficulties managing multiple assignments, challenges completing assignments due to lack of direction or understanding, and lack of social support. Students were then asked to offer strategies and resources for coping with these problems. Responses included exercises classes offered in the school of nursing, additional and more targeted support from advising staff, communication among lead faculty to ensure even distribution of assignments across courses throughout the semester, and databases that included standard information such as medication descriptions to aid in clarifying clinical assignments.

The Road Less Traveled was then disseminated to first-year nursing students at the same school. The brochure highlighted the identified stressors and resources in a visual format along with contact phone numbers. Mentors identified in the brochure included faculty advisors assigned to students by the university, and the brochure encouraged relationship building with informal mentors, such as other faculty members with whom the student has made a connection. Student-identified interventions for minimizing and managing stress may be an effective way to prepare future nurses for success in baccalaureate nursing programs.

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