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UNIVERSITY OF PORTLAND SCHOOL OF NURSING

STRATEGIES FOR STRENGTHENING ETHICS EDUCATION IN A DOCTOR OF NURSING PRACTICE PROGRAM

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Background

Today's nurse practitioners are confronted with increasing ethical dilemmas as they take on larger, more complex patient loads in contemporary practice. Being able to identify ethically challenging situations is step one in determining comprehensive resolutions within an ethical decision-making framework.

Purpose

Strengthening nurse practitioner students' ethical decision-making ability is paramount to guiding their future practice. Since its inception, ethics has been a curricular thread and an outcome measure for program competencies in a Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) program at a Pacific Northwest University. However, graduates have indicated difficulty identifying and addressing ethical dilemmas.

Dundon-Berchtold Fellowships

An endowed institute for applied ethics that provides fellowships for faculty-student pairs to explore moral education and development. The School of Nursing had two faculty-student teams to receive fellowships: 2014-2015, and 2015-2016 to enhance the application of ethical theories and frameworks in healthcare decision making for Doctor of Nursing Practice students.

Method

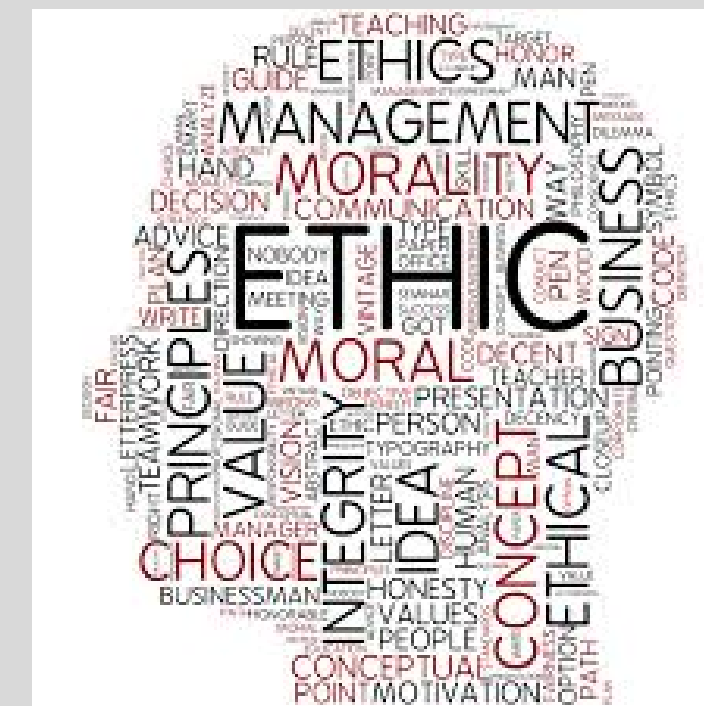
1st team:

- Presented case studies derived from the literature illustrating ethical dilemmas to students in their didactic-only portion of the program.

2nd team:

- Surveyed students regarding identification and definition of, and barriers to ethical dilemmas.
- 3 case studies were developed from survey data and presented back to the students for validation

- A survey was administered afterwards regarding the effectiveness of case studies as a teaching strategy for sorting out ethical dilemmas.



Case Study

You are a nurse practitioner student working with a family nurse practitioner (FNP) at an urban family practice. Today you are seeing E.L., a 15 y.o. Caucasian female, for a well child exam. E.L. is accompanied by her mother, J.L. During the visit you obtain a detailed history and perform a physical exam. While reviewing immunizations and other preventative care for E.L. you find that E.L. has not been vaccinated for HPV. You ask E.L. and her mother if E.L. has had a HPV vaccine in the past. J.L. replies, "My daughter doesn't need that HPV vaccine because she isn't sexually active. I don't believe in those types of vaccines because it encourages our youth to sleep around." After J.L.'s response you notice E.L. shifting uncomfortably.

E.L. stays in the exam room with you while her mother reluctantly waits in the lobby. You learn, while alone with E.L., that she is sexually active. She tells you that she wants the HPV vaccine but she doesn't want her mother to know. As a student you take this information to your preceptor. The FNP preceptor tells you that she doesn't feel comfortable vaccinating E.L. behind her mother's back because J.L. is also a patient of the practice. Your preceptor is worried that if the mother finds out that it would jeopardize the provider-patient relationship with J.L.

Outcomes

1st team:

- Students did not recognize the situations as dilemmas.

2nd team:

- Students agreed the crafted case exemplars were realistic ethical dilemmas.
- Majority (62%) had experienced ethical dilemmas. Ethical dilemmas were defined as: issues of morality, situations requiring an ethical analysis, situations without a clear right and wrong choice, situations where any given choice violates an ethical principle, and "being stuck between a rock and a hard place."
- Identified barriers to speaking up about ethical dilemmas included not wanting to upset a preceptor/superior, lack of experience, and not wanting to disclose private information. The response rate was limited yet consistent.

Conclusion

Students in their clinical rotations seem to be better primed to identify ethical challenging situations than students in their didactic-only portion of their programs despite previous experience as registered nurses.

Once immersed in clinical rotations, students were able to recognize that not all situations had a clear and singular solution.

It is possible that students in the didactic portion of their programs do not have the skills necessary to identify and voice concerns regarding ethical dilemmas. Understanding ethical frameworks and the process required for critical decision making allows for the highest provision of patient care. Identifying the appropriate place in DNP programs to introduce and discuss ethical dilemmas is paramount in developing effective and relevant DNP curriculums.



Implications for Educators

Incorporate ethical education into clinical educations to capitalize on students' readiness.

Involve students in identifying their own barriers to speaking up.