End of life care simulation: experiences of a rural Australian university

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Aims: To provide undergraduate nursing students with experiential learning experiences in end of life care. To promote undergraduate nursing students competence in providing end of life care.

Background: Providing end of life care is a challenging and anxiety provoking prospect for many undergraduate nursing students and many nursing students report feelings of lack of preparedness and competence in providing quality end of life care (Leighton & Dubas 2009). It is therefore imperative that undergraduate nursing students are prepared through exposure to simulated clinical end of life care situations that enable the student to effectively communicate and care for dying patients and their families. This preparation is all the more necessary when this care is delivered within rural and remote contexts where students are often isolated or unsupported in the role of providing end of life care to patients (Killam & Carter 2010).

However, challenges in nursing education continue due to limited availability of clinical practical placements for students, where it is widely acknowledged that the most valuable learning experiences are obtained within an experiential learning environment. There is sufficient evidence to suggest that experiential learning methods can positively affect nursing students’ attitudes toward death, dying and end of life care (Hurtig & Stewin 1990; Mallory 2003). In response to the limited access to clinical placements nursing faculty are increasingly utilising various methods of simulation in a number of clinical scenarios. Recent advances in simulation techniques enable advanced simulation scenarios such as cessation of life to be conducted within a safe and supportive clinical setting. It has been
suggested that patient simulators can ‘provide an effective bridge between the
unknown of caring for a dying person and developing the skills necessary to
facilitate a meaningful death experience for patients and families’ (Smith-Stoner
2009, p. 115).

**Methods:** An Australian rural university team of nursing educators will
undertake simulated end of life care training with a large group of third year
undergraduate nursing students during an intensive residential school in
March 2011. Students will be required to perform end of life care using a high
fidelity mannequin and work within a challenging end of life scenario including
communicating with the patient and family members.

**Results:** Feedback will be elicited from students following simulation sessions
in the form of formal debriefing and written evaluations. It is expected
that these simulated end of life care sessions will provide valuable learning
experiences within a safe and non-threatening environment among peers.

**Conclusions:** The authors are unable to present data on results of the project
at the time of abstract submission due to the project being undertaken during
intensive residential school during March 2011. It is expected the project and
evaluations will be completed and collated in May 2011.

**References:**
setting: a review of the literature’, Rural and Remote Health, Accessed on 3rd February 2011 from
http://www.rrh.org.au


Smith-Stoner, M. 2009, ‘Using High-Fidelity Simulation to Educate Nursing Students About End of Life Care’, Nursing Education Perspectives, 30 (2), 115-120.