Abstract:

Purpose and Background: Based on changes in health care delivery that demand greater integration of nursing specialties across the continuum of care, a new baccalaureate nursing curriculum was created with concurrent acute care, mental health, and community health nursing content. The purpose of this research was to explore the perspectives of junior student nurses about acute care nursing, community health nursing and mental health nursing at the beginning and end of baccalaureate nursing courses that integrate these nursing specialties.

Theoretical Framework: Qualitative inquiry based in the theoretical approach of constructivism served as a foundation for this research. After nurse educators become aware of the meaning and value that beginning students have about nursing roles, and how this changes during nursing courses, then nurse educators can role model and further define the complementarity of various nursing specialties during the remaining years of the educational program.

Methods: An anonymous, qualitative survey conducted at the beginning and end of the junior year of a new baccalaureate nursing curriculum. Participants were asked to write descriptions of acute care nursing, community health nursing and mental health nursing, and to draw a sketch of relationships among these specialties. Two researchers conducted individual survey review for themes prior to collaboration for the final analysis.

Results: Subjects included student nurses in a new junior level baccalaureate curriculum: Pre-survey n = 50, Post-survey n = 41. Pre-surveys demonstrated a literal interpretation of acute care, community, and mental health nursing according to location; an emphasis on the value of acute care nursing; and images of nurses with hats and patients lying in bed. Post-surveys suggested that students developed greater understanding of nursing roles and interventions, and a sense of equality among these nursing specialties. Post-surveys included drawings of patients standing, equal in size to nurses, and no patients in beds.

Conclusions: Nurse Educators need to address students’ misconceptions about nurses and nursing specialties in order to promote professionalism and collegiality among future nurses.