

Nursing Student Perceptions of Spirituality and Spiritual Care

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ABSTRACT

Background: Spirituality is a necessary component of life. Spiritual care includes the activities necessary to meet the spiritual needs of clients. Nursing students must receive appropriate training to develop their abilities to provide spiritual care.

Purpose: This study explored student nurse perceptions of spirituality and spiritual care and related factors.

Methods: We used a cross-sectional descriptive design and purposive sampling. Participants were senior nursing students of both genders from 22 schools. The Chinese version of a spirituality and spiritual scale was the research tool. A total of 239 participants returned the questionnaires, giving a response rate of 91.92%.

Results: Average participant age was 19.48 years; 45.61% reported no religion; 65.59% did not participate in religious activities; 94.56% reported having an interest in nursing; 52.72% were undecided about pursuing a nursing career; 3.35% did not want to be nurses; 46.44% had taken spirituality courses in school; 53.56% had taken spiritual care courses. Participants' overall perception of spirituality and spiritual care was "clear." This runs contrary to the idea that only religious people are spiritual and that nonreligious nurses may be less able to tend to the spiritual needs of their patients. Participants who had taken spirituality or spiritual care courses had an interest in nursing and were willing to become nurses had, on average, significantly better spirituality knowledge and spiritual care attitudes than other participants.

Conclusions/Implications for Practice: This study found that education, experience, career interest in nursing, and career choice affects nursing student perceptions of spirituality and spiritual care. We also found that this effect was independent of gender. Nursing students should be holistic care providers. Integrating spirituality and spiritual care into the standard nursing curriculum is recommended to improve nursing care quality.

KEY WORDS:

nursing student, spirituality, spiritual care, perception.

essential components of life and living can be expressed by exploring the meaning of life and purpose beyond physical limitations (Wu & Hsiao, 2009). Spirituality is derived from traditional cultures and religion and is learned from and integrated into education and personal life experience (Tu, 2008). Spirituality is reflected in individual attitudes and behavior in daily life. When a person faces a major setback or loss, spiritual expression becomes even more apparent.

Spiritual care involves activities that meet patient spiritual needs. Spirituality in most textbook addresses two different functions, namely, (a) supports the original religious and spiritual activities of the patient and (b) provides therapeutic use of self. The former includes encouraging patients to maintain their original religious/spiritual activities. The latter emphasizes the attitude of nurses, including companionship, listening, respect of and care for patients, and direct discussion of the meaning of life, purposes, hope, and values (Pesut, 2008).

Numerous previous studies have suggested that spirituality is the essence of human beings and plays a vital role in people's lives. As the healthcare system becomes increasingly complex, there is a professional requirement for nurses to enhance their competence in spiritual care delivery and assess and meet the spiritual needs of their patients. Studies in both western countries (Greenstreet, 1999) and East Asia (Chung, Wong, & Chan, 2007) agree about the importance of teaching spirituality to nurses. These studies suggest that patients want nurses to discuss spiritual matters with them. Nursing students' recognition of patients' spiritual care needs will improve overall nursing care quality. Research exploring nursing students' preparations and perceptions of education in this important area are rare. This study explores student nurse perceptions of spirituality and spiritual care and the influence of demographics on such perceptions.

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Introduction

The term "spirituality" traces its origins to the Latin word "spiritual," meaning "breath" and "to bring to life." The