Beyond Hospital Doors: Exploring Service Learning and Professional Development through a Hospital-Based Community Outreach Program

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Purpose
Demonstrate commitment to the health of the community by developing a hospital-based community outreach program targeting agencies that serve vulnerable populations. Foster nurses’ understanding of the impact of mental illness beyond the hospital through participation in consumers’ lived experiences. Mentor and support nurses in the creation and dissemination of evidence-based psycho-educational classes and other volunteer activities.

Assess the needs of the community:
- 50% of homeless persons have a mental illness or co-occurring substance use disorder (Paquette, 2011)
- Nashville homeless population in 2013 was approximately 2,300 (MGNDC, 2013)
- Continued lack of adequate resources lead to consistent need

Enlist administrative support:
- Gain support by creating awareness of the benefits of employee volunteer activities, such as increases in employee morale, job satisfaction and decreases in turnover (Amendolair, 2012)
- Foster satisfaction and decreases in turnover (Amendolair, 2012)

Volunteering Promotes Altruism AND the Professional Development of Nurses

Assess the population that you have agreed to serve
Diagnose the educational needs of the population
Plan the group material using evidence based research
Implement your group material using evidence based therapeutic group techniques
Evaluate the group and the feedback you have received

Examples of class topics:
- Boundaries, Trust, Medication Education, Unmet Emotional Needs, Resilience, Positive Affirmations, Conflict Management, Motives & Consequences

Practice
Community Outreach provides nurses a lens through which to understand vulnerable individuals’ lived experiences in their own environments. It also demonstrates organizational commitment and caring connection with the community. Classes address the psychosocial toll of homelessness, trauma, addiction and other issues faced by those served. At a foot clinic, nurses teach foot care and illness prevention while forming connections through human touch during the humble experience of washing another’s feet. With a holistic approach, psychiatric nurses are uniquely skilled to promote the health of a community’s vulnerable populations.

Participation
Encouraging participation in community service not only impacts the professional development of the individual nurse but also broadens the organization’s community footprint.

Perspective
Presented is an organized way of establishing a hospital-based community outreach program. Involvement in community outreach programs provides opportunities to support growth of nursing core values of altruism, human dignity, and autonomy, while developing the role of the nurse as teacher.

Select References

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