

### *SC and WNMH Collaborate for Competency*

By Jane Schlickau

**R**ural hospitals, due to decreasing numbers of patient days, are challenged to keep nursing staff competent in evidence-based skills which ensure quality outcomes. Part of the education process for nursing staff at William Newton Memorial Hospital (WNMH) in Winfield, Kansas comes in the form of an annual competency fair. Senior nursing students at Southwestern College (SC) have implemented the competency fair in collaboration with WNMH nurse managers over the past four years.

The competency fairs began when WNMH nurse managers, in an effort to create optimal learning experiences for their staff, desired emphasis on evidence-based-practice in order to improve patient outcomes. Nurse Managers have many roles within the hospital, and updating procedures to reflect evidence basis is one way in which the nursing students can assist. The hospital educator, also torn between several roles can only provide so much education for the nursing staff. Everyone is short of time. Because a long collaborative relationship exists between the SC baccalaureate nursing program and WNMH, the foundation for the project is in place. Senior nursing students in their Nursing Leadership and Management course work with nurse managers

as part of their clinical requirements to learn about and practice management concepts. Adding the Competency Fair to practicum expectations is a way to encourage collaboration between nurse manager and student as well as between both facilities to promote learning.

#### **Focus on Evidence Based Practice**

The goal of evidence based practice (EBP) is to use the highest quality of knowledge in the provision of health care to generate the greatest impact on the health status of patients (Melnyk & Fineout-Overholt, 2005). According to Valente, barriers to using evidence-based practice include lack of time apply research into practice. Olade (2003), in a convenience sample of nurses working in rural areas, found barriers to research utilization included lack of time, lack of knowledge, lack of support by nursing administrators, and lack of knowledgeable research consultants or knowledgeable research nurses in nursing. Lack of time among WNMH nurses is evident, and many lack knowledge of research, but nurse managers support and promote research use and research nurses are available at the local college.

#### **Planning and Implementation**

Planning for the annual competency fair occurs on several levels. The Nurse Managers and Professor of the Nursing Leadership and Management course plan which competencies to focus upon. The Professor and the students plan the theme and decorations. Then, each student plans his or her competency presentation in collaboration with an individual Nurse Manager. One of the goals of the annual competency fair at WNMH is to present current evidence to the nursing staff.

The first question is, “which competencies need to be included”? Assessment of hospital patient outcomes drives the choices. “High-risk/high-frequency” and “high-risk/low-frequency” procedures are always included. New or “hot” topics from accreditation and practice literature are added each year.

In the spring semester, as part of

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the Nursing Leadership and Management course, class time is taken for the group to decide on a theme to make the competency fair a fun event. Decorations and food are planned to complement the theme. For instance, for “Team Competency”, each student wore their favorite team logo shirt. Another theme was entitled “Builders Building Competencies”, based on the Southwestern College Moundbuilder sports teams. Toy construction trucks and tools were used as decorations. For the “Competency Luau”, Hawaiian shirts and luau decorations were used. For the “Competency Casino”, students dressed as casino dealers. A food table was set up in the waiting area for staff to eat on a come and go basis. Food provided by the hospital food service department addressed the themes. Examples included little smokies, fruit kebobs, mini hamburgers and hot dogs, cupcakes, popcorn, and punch. This year, in 2011, “Kick-Start your Competency” features a biker theme.

Each student signs up to develop a presentation focusing on one of the competencies. Then, as part of each student’s practicum for the course, the students collaborate with their nurse manager about what should be

presented. WNMH strives to keep nursing staff current in ever-changing clinical skills. Having the senior nursing students implement competency training for the nursing staff seemed to combine the goals and objectives of both the management course and the nursing staff.

The annual competency fair is held on two different days (one day shift and one evening shift) in April of each year. The event is held on a 12 bed nursing unit which is not currently in use. Students utilize each of the empty patient rooms and the hallway for presentations which allow staff to attend before or after their shifts, thus getting completely away from the patient area. All nursing staff members (full-time, part-time, and contingency nurses and nurse’s aides) are required to go through and check off on each competency. It takes about two hours for each one to go through the 10 to 20 stations. Some 100 nurses and nurse’s aides take part in groups of six to ten. The evidence based competency topics include: infection control, chest tubes, skin care, patient/staff safety, central lines, pain, blood administration, standardized emergency response, emergent patient care, perioperative care, pediatric safety

measures, insulin protocols, customer service and discharge planning. Each student prepares a literature review of the current evidence related to their topic. They then develop a professional poster which depicts the topic. A quiz is given to then validate the learning of each staff person.

## Evaluation

After each presentation, the staff person rates the student presenter on a scale of 1 to 3. Most were rated at a 3. Comments for staff included: Great job, done well and finished very quickly, creative introduction, very concise and informative, did very well, cute idea – glitter on hands to signify germs, fun, great presentation, very visual, good reminders and great presentation. Students became experts in their individual competencies and expressed that they feel much more comfortable in giving presentations. They may use this fun way of teaching and learning in their future careers.

### References

- Melynck, B., & Fineout-Overholt, E. (2005). Evidence-based practice in nursing and health care. Philadelphia: Lippincott, Williams & Wilkins.
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