

An Intervention to Promote Civility Among Nursing Students

Incivility impacts nurses and nursing students, and can negatively influence patient care and the quality of nursing education. The Institute of Medicine (IOM), The Joint Commission (for Accreditation of Hospitals), and the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) have recommended implementation of strategies to manage incivility and build social capital. The purpose of this exploratory, mixed-methods study, funded by Illinois State University's Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Award, was to test an intervention to build social capital and civility in the Mennonite College of Nursing student community. Ninety-one nursing students completed questionnaires as to their satisfaction with peers in regards to civility, 25 completed the Ways of Coping Questionnaire and participated in interviews, and 10 participated in the intervention, a journal club focused on civility in nursing.

Student leaders participated in a monthly Journal Club. This intervention was designed to build social capital by raising students' awareness of civility, collaboration, and collegiality. The one hour meetings involved discussion of an article students selected from the nursing literature. Faculty researchers then led students in activities designed to encourage civility. For example, one session involved an exploration of competitive behaviors, which divide students, compared to supportive actions that unite them. In another session, students practiced a stress management strategy that employed relaxation breathing techniques and empathetic listening skills. Participants were also charged with modeling these behaviors as they interacted with other students and faculty. Finally, they kept on-line journals noting their development in the understanding of civility.

This study provided insight into student nurses' perceptions of civility as a concept which encompasses *respect, equality, caring, building relationships, and working together*. Participants described witnessing acts of incivility directed from student to student and from student to faculty. Interestingly, they did not mention episodes of incivility directed from faculty

to students. Participation in the journal club intervention changed students' attitudes and behavior. Changes were reflected in the interviews, journaling, and WCQ responses. Students were more aware of the importance of civility and the negative effects of incivility, and more likely to accept others without judging them. They also reported that they were more likely to refuse to take part in uncivil behavior, were more helpful to others, and had a desire to serve as a role model for civility. Journal club participation also increased the range and frequency of coping behaviors used. Exposing students to scenarios and experiential activities allowed them the opportunity to practice using other coping methods. It is likely that these experiences enabled them to draw from a wider repertoire of behaviors when confronted with uncivil behavior.

This study provided insight into student nurses' perceptions of civility, and participation in the intervention changed students' attitudes and behavior regarding civility. The researchers recommend expansion of this study to further test the impact of civility focused journal clubs. These results support the implementation of the study with a larger sample. Given the strong recommendations for change endorsed by the IOM, the Joint Commission, and the AACN, colleges of nursing should ensure that civility education is introduced early in the course of study and incorporated throughout the curriculum. Clinical evaluation tools should include civil behavior as an expectation. Future research should include expansion of the proposed journal club model with a larger sample size and testing of new methods for promoting civility, such as in-class education, course assignments, and special presentations for students and faculty. Research recommendations include defining uncivil behaviors, developing policies, setting expectations, and devising consequences for these behaviors.

The findings of this study have been disseminated in paper and poster presentations. A paper presentation was made in January, 2010 at ISU's Teaching Learning Symposium, Normal, Illinois. Poster presentations were made and in March, 2010 at Mennonite College of Nursing's PhD Research Colloquium, and in April, 2010 at the Midwest Nursing Research

Conference in Kansas City, Missouri. An article describing the findings, *An Intervention to Promote Civility Among Nursing Students* by Sheryl Jenkins, PhD, ACNP, Cindy Kerber, PhD, CNS, and Wendy Woith, PhD, RN, was submitted to *Nursing Education Perspectives*, a peer reviewed journal for nurse educators in July, 2010. Explicit acknowledgement of funding by ISU's Scholarship of Teaching Learning Grant has been made in all posters, presentations and publications related to this project.