

HIV and mindfulness: Nursing students service learning

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It is hypothesized that level of empathy for persons living with HIV and AIDS (PLHA) among health care workers is positive. However, providing direct care may present an enduring stigma surrounding bias associated with sexual orientation, promiscuity, and drug use of patients with HIV/AIDS. South Africa has initiated a rapid expansion of its AIDS programs. The purpose of this pilot study is to assess nursing student's compassion towards themselves and compassion towards others after completing a service learning course for HIV/AIDS patients in South Africa. During the service learning experience all students were taught mindfulness meditation skills. Through mindfulness meditation, self reflection skills were developed which may have increased the student's ability to focus awareness on to their own reactions in this patient population and culture and promote compassionate care of this vulnerable population.

The mindfulness course, taught to nursing students in the South Africa service learning experience, was based awareness, acceptance and action model (AAAM) devised by Rutledge, Whyte and Abell (2005) for the HIV/AIDS population. Meditation skills included; mindful awareness of stigma which may facilitate greater empathy and prevent barriers to health care; mindful acceptance of the possible consequences of maintaining this bias and the negative impact it could have on patients; and mindful action which may enable nursing students to act intentionally to prevent prejudice in their care of the HIV/AIDS patients. Through this program, students identified their fears, concerns and bias as they confront health and cultural differences of the South African people.

This was a mixed design quasi experimental descriptive study which will describe the relationship between student's compassion for HIV patients and compassion towards themselves after taking the mindfulness class. The mindfulness course took place during over three weeks while nursing students were participating in a study abroad service learning trip to South Africa with a state university. There were 5 classes on mindfulness lasting 1.5 hours each. Students were taught how to practice mindfulness meditation practices during each class and were assigned a 20 minute meditation daily as homework (during the three weeks). They also had a mindfulness CD given to them (created by the PI) to assist in their daily practice. Course objectives focused on three areas of mindfulness awareness and acceptance and action. Direct supervised work with HIV patients included 4 service learning days in schools and orphanages. Students kept a daily journal about the mindfulness class and the application of mindfulness to their nursing care with HIV patients. These journals were maintained by the students to foster self reflection.

Three months after return to the university, students who participated in the study abroad course (experimental group) were contacted and given the opportunity to participate in this study. Eight out of 11 students in the experimental group chose to participate. They will be given two questionnaires which measure the level of compassion towards themselves and others after this service learning experience; a measure of mindfulness. A qualitative question was also given to students who choose to participate in the study. The question of reflection will be, "What qualities and/or skills have you learned during your nursing courses which are influential to your nursing care now?"

A control group was obtained from the senior nursing class. The control groups were 5 students who were signed up to go on the South Africa trip for 2014. The control groups were given the same instruments and the same qualitative question. The sample experimental and control included 10 women and 2 men with a mean age of 23.5 yrs. All were Caucasian and all but one student attended the same state university. One student accompanied us as a practicum student from a private university in Pennsylvania. Results were: CAMS-R did not differ between the two groups. Compassion towards myself measure, approached as difference between the two groups ($t=***$, $D.F=1$, $p=.058$). Compassion towards others did not meet the assumption of equal variance and the non-parametric test equivalent of the t-test (Mann Whitney Rank Sign test) was used to evaluate median differences which of compassion towards the self, a 5.79 and 14.25 comparing the control and experimental groups p value of .051 was obtained between these two groups. The model in which compassion for others was associated with experimental condition and a subject level of mindfulness was not significant or approaching significant ≥ 0.1 .

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