

24th World Nursing and Healthcare Conference

September 13-15, 2018 | Copenhagen, Denmark

Using experiential learning theory to deliver a short course on facilitating conversations around end-of-life care

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Nurses play a critical role in assisting persons of all ages and their families in making treatment decisions consistent with their preferences for end-of-life care. However, there is a gap in nursing education to prepare clinicians in this area. The purpose of this poster presentation is to describe the strategies we used to apply experiential learning theory to deliver a short hybrid (traditional class room and Internet based) course on facilitating conversations around end-of-life care. Course content was separated into segments (reflections, end-of-life communication, culture, and community resources) and directed by faculty with expertise in end-of-life care. The following concepts from Kolb Experiential Learning model provided structure for delivering course content: (1) a concrete experience, such as a video or case study that allowed the learner to become involved in a concrete experience; (2) reflective observation, which enabled the learner to consider the concrete experience from different perspectives, such as the family or clinician; (3) abstract conceptualization, which was the theoretical content drawn from a variety of sources, including ELNEC (End of life Nursing Education Consortium) modules and assigned readings; and (4) active experimentation, which was the application of the content through course assignments, which included written responses to discussion questions, a book/movie review, and implementation of an educational community activity. We have shown how to present this content in a way that maximizes time for students and faculty by using available resources, expertise of faculty, and limiting the amount of time required for face-to-face on campus meetings.

Biography

Karen Kavanaugh is a Senior Nurse Scientist at Children's Hospital of Wisconsin (USA) and Professor Emerita at the University of Illinois at Chicago (USA). She has more than 30 years of teaching experience in undergraduate and graduate nursing programs. She was the Project Director for a government funded training grant to prepare advanced practice palliative care nurses. As Director, she developed a hybrid course on dying, loss, and grief, which is described in Nurse Educator. Her contributions to improving perinatal palliative and end-of-life care have had a broad impact nationally through her scholarship, leadership in national initiatives, and mentoring of clinicians and researchers.

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