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How did the COVID-19 pandemic affect undergraduate nursing students? A mixed-method analysis.

Abstract:

Problem Statement: Nursing education in the United States (US) is based on a combination of didactic and clinical experiences. Even before the pandemic, the US were facing a potential nursing shortage. Due to the pandemic, universities were forced to transition their students to involuntary online education and curtail or cancel in person clinical experiences. This added additional stressors to undergraduate nursing students and affected their education. This study assessed how undergraduate nursing students in five universities throughout the US perceived how COVID-19 and the changes to their education affected their readiness to enter the nursing workforce upon graduation. We also assessed whether students contemplated withdrawing from nursing school, potentially worsening the already existing nursing shortage.

Conclusion: Out of 772 students included in the quantitative analysis, 540 provided qualitative comments. Two-third of the respondents reported that the pandemic strengthened their desire to become a nurse, while 11% considered withdrawing from nursing school for various reasons with only a minute proportion of respondents (~1%) not wanting to become nurses any longer. The qualitative analysis identified three themes in how the pandemic affected the students: (1) Effect on psychosocial wellbeing, (2) Adjustment to online learning, and (3) Challenges to obtaining clinical experiences and developing nursing skills.

Significance: US nursing students in five universities across the country are eager to join the nursing workforce despite the added challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. Adding new nurses to the existing workforce will help alleviate the potentially looming nursing shortage. However, the pandemic also emphasized flaws in the nursing education system's emergency preparedness. Canceling clinical experiences threatened students' skill development and graduation. Further, students did not perceive simulation an adequate replacement for clinical experiences. Therefore, schools of nursing need to explore ways to provide in-person clinical experiences during time of interrupted learning.

Biography

Alexandra Michel is a post-doctoral research fellow at the University of Hawaii at Manoa. She received her Bachelor's and Master's Degree of Science in Nursing from Wayne State University, Detroit, MI and her Doctorate of Philosophy Degree from the University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus, Aurora, CO. She holds a Post-Master's Certificate in Nursing Education. She has over 15 years of clinical experience caring for women and neonates in diverse settings as Registered Nurse and Certified Nurse-Midwife. She has also served as course and clinical faculty to numerous graduate nursing students.

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