

TNF's 2018 Scholarly Writing Contest Winner
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The Impact of Student-Run Clinics on the Development of Nurse Leaders

Defining characteristics of successful nurse leaders have been described as optimism, integrity and respect, knowledge and expertise, teamwork and communication, and mentoring and modelling. While daily clinical practice certainly affords opportunities to witness these traits in action, a unique application of nursing leadership skills is visible through the student-run clinic. More specifically, the nurse-midwifery students that volunteer to serve as coordinators of the Shade Tree Clinic Early Pregnancy Program (STEPP) have the opportunity to foster and grow nursing leadership skills while also providing needed care to a vulnerable population. This discussion will address future health care demands, principles of a student-run clinic, nurse-led clinics, specific information about STEPP and nursing leadership.

Changes in healthcare with the repeal of the individual health insurance mandate are likely to increase the number of uninsured patients in the United States by 4 million in 2019 and 13 million in 2027 (Congressional Budget Office). At the same time, the estimated demand for women's health care services nationally is projected to increase 6% by 2020, with a 4% increase in demand in Tennessee. Meanwhile, the number of rural counties in Tennessee with hospitals providing OB services decreased from 52.8% to 41.5% between 2004 and 2014. Against this backdrop, it is apparent that Tennessee women seeking health care will continue to face issues with access to care. Innovative and creative solutions are needed to bridge the gap between uninsured women seeking care and a limited number of providers for women's health services. Student-run clinics are one of the ways in which uninsured patients can receive needed health care services, including prenatal care.

Student-run clinics began to proliferate in the mid-1960s, primarily as student-initiated service projects to reach underserved populations. The number of student-run clinics continues to increase in the United States, with one study identifying 111 student-run clinics (Smith et al., 2014). Most student-run clinics are affiliated with schools of medicine, including those in Tennessee associated with East Tennessee State University, Meharry Medical College, University of Tennessee, and Vanderbilt University. While each clinic model may vary, commonalities include interdisciplinary teams, vertical mentoring and student administrative and leadership responsibilities.

Nationally, of the clinics surveyed, 36% of interdisciplinary teams included nurses and 25% included nursing students. Pharmacy, social work, dental and law students are also frequently represented within the student-run clinics with licensed professionals providing oversight. The vertical mentoring model pairs nursing and medical students in the preclinical stage of training with more advanced students. After conducting the patient history and assessment, the student team cooperatively develops a plan and then presents to a faculty

provider. As a student-run clinic, students also have administrative and leadership responsibilities. Students commonly are responsible for such tasks as patient scheduling, overseeing volunteers, allocation of resources, recruitment of volunteers and fundraising.

Proponents of student-run clinics point to the experiential and self-directed learning that students receive as valuable to their education and training. Students identified facilitated ownership, supported autonomy, managed expectations, and peer support as benefits of their participation. A survey of participants in the East Tennessee State University clinic found the majority of students positively viewed the experience of collaboration with non-physician health professionals. While information about patient outcomes is limited, the available evidence contradicts the criticism that student provided care may be substandard. The administrative experience that students gain from participating in student-led clinics includes exposure to health care systems issues that might otherwise not be part of traditional curriculum.

Nurse-led clinics can also be valuable tools for reaching vulnerable populations. One systematic review found that nurse-led clinics overall had a positive impact on patient's access to care, in addition to being rated positively for patient satisfaction. The inclusion of non-clinical content within nursing education to develop leadership and management skills is crucial to the success of nurse-led health care services.

There are currently few examples of nursing schools combining the model of nurse-led and student-led clinic. California State University San Marcos School of Nursing supports a total of four student-led clinics, involving both undergraduate and graduate nursing students ("Student Healthcare," n.d.). Faculty and students at the University of Syracuse School of Nursing developed a student-led clinic focusing on health care needs of homeless men.

The Shade Tree Clinic Early Pregnancy Program in Nashville, Tennessee is another specific example of a student-led clinic where nursing students gain experience with leadership roles. Established in 2009 to meet a need for prenatal care within the larger Shade Tree Clinic, nurse-midwifery students co-direct the program alongside medical students. STEPP is jointly supported by the Vanderbilt University Schools of Nursing and Medicine. Nurse-midwifery students are paired with medical students to provide direct patient care, typically with preclinical medical students joining last semester nurse-midwifery students or preclinical nurse-midwifery students partnering with third or fourth year medical students. This student balance provides ample opportunity for practicing collaborative and interprofessional relationships early in training and creates a foundation for mutual respect.

Additionally, the student nurse-midwives in the co-director position are responsible for community outreach to identify eligible patients, patient scheduling, coordination of care, preclinical conference with the student teams and faculty care provider, lab requisition,

referrals for continuation of care and assistance with application for public insurance. They draw upon communication, management, and resource allocation skills as well as learn to navigate the healthcare system from a new perspective alongside the patient. By serving in leadership roles alongside colleagues in a related but different profession, nurse-midwifery students exemplify the Core Competencies for Interprofessional Collaborative Practice.

The impact that leadership roles in a student-led clinic can have on nurses is far reaching. Not only can the experience be mutually beneficial for the students and the patients, but the development of nursing leadership skills starting early during nursing education can shape one's career trajectory. Nurse leaders continue to impact the healthcare system through application of evidence based practice and advocacy, skills which can be refined through participation in student-run clinics. Nurses have repeatedly demonstrated a willingness to help meet the increased demands for health care services and to provide care to vulnerable populations. Barriers exist to the widespread replication of the STEPP model; however, this student-run clinic can provide inspiration for the development of other creative health care models that can offer opportunities for fostering burgeoning leadership skills in nursing students.

References Available Upon Requests