Project Summary

Does simulation of sensory and cognitive impairment in nurse education influence student nurses' clinical practice?

Abigail Tracey, Dr Leah Macaden, Professor Annetta Smith and Ronie Walters

The aim of this project was to evaluate the effect of simulated learning on pre-registration nursing students' knowledge and confidence in caring for older adults with sensory and or cognitive impairment.

An innovative simulation workshop on sensory and cognitive impairment in older adults has been part of the undergraduate nursing curriculum at UHI since 2017. The simulation is designed to allow students to experience aspects of sensory and cognitive impairment that they may encounter in clinical practice.

All current students on the undergraduate nursing programme were invited to participate in an online survey. Data was gathered via Likert scales to capture influence and relevance of the pedagogy on students' knowledge and confidence in caring for older adults with sensory and cognitive impairment. Free text responses gave students opportunity to describe their application of knowledge to practice.

Students (n=95) from all three cohorts responded to the survey and had a wide range of practice learning experience. Despite this variation, 87.4% of students indicated they had cared for a patient with sensory impairment and 98.9% indicated they had cared for someone with cognitive impairment. Students reported that the simulation facilitated new insights into sensory and cognitive impairments. The simulation was also reported by students to be highly critical to their learning on the subject. The influence of simulation was assessed across the cohorts and no difference was found between groups with regards knowledge and understanding gained. However more experienced students perceived the simulation as more critical to learning than 1st year students. This could possibly suggest that the simulation training has sustained impact on student nursing practice up to two years post simulation experience.

Thematic analysis of the free text responses revealed three broad themes:

Knowledge and understanding

Students reported increased knowledge and understanding on sensory and cognitive impairments having participated in the simulation. This included understanding of the difficulties and challenges

encountered by older people living with these impairments, and knowledge of how to help and support people with these challenges.

Experiential insight

Experiential insight was gained because of first-hand experience of impairments within the simulation. Sub-themes fell within two broad categories: cognitive empathy and affective empathy.

Learning for practice

Students provided evidence that the simulation had influenced their clinical practice in two main ways – increased confidence in their ability to help and support people and influence on their professional values.

Findings from this project suggest that simulation of sensory and cognitive impairment can be effective at providing knowledge, understanding and insight, and that this learning is influential on core nursing values. Students reported increased knowledge of different impairments, valued the simulation as a part of their learning and developed transferrable skills and values to support patients in clinical practice.

This research has been accepted to the programme of the Nurse Education Today 2021 conference (Bath, September 2021). A related paper has been submitted for publication in Nurse Education in Practice journal.