Advanced Education Nursing in Rural Communities


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INTRODUCTION:

Through support from the Department of Health and Human Services, Health Professions Grant Program, the goal of this project was to develop and implement an advanced education nursing program in rural communities. A specific focus of this program was the development of an online graduate program for rural nurses. The program was designed to provide quality education and support for nurses in rural locations, with the ultimate goal of improving health care access and outcomes. The program was developed in collaboration with local health care providers and rural nurses to ensure relevance and appropriateness to the needs of rural communities.

Health Disparities and Chronic Diseases

Health disparities are evident in rural areas, characterized by high rates of chronic diseases such as heart disease and cancer. These disparities are often attributed to factors such as limited access to health care services, lower rates of preventive care, and higher prevalence of risk factors within rural populations. In Pennsylvania, for example, African Americans constitute about 10% of the state's population, yet they are disproportionately affected by chronic diseases such as heart disease and cancer.

WORKPLAN: METHODOLOGY

The mechanisms in place to ensure the delivery of quality education and support to rural nurses included the development of a comprehensive curriculum, the use of innovative educational technologies, and the establishment of partnerships with local health care providers.

Nursing Workforce

Pennsylvania is the third largest state in terms of population and the majority of nurses work in urban areas, where most hospitals and clinics are located. This state has the second largest number of registered nurses in the nation. In 2005, 15,200 RNs were employed in the 22 counties targeted in the project. This number is expected to increase by 2010. Despite the challenges, Pennsylvania contains a number of medium-sized cities with high populations, such as Scranton and Wilkes-Barre in the northeast, Allentown in the eastern central, Erie in the northwest, and the cities of Harrisburg and Philadelphia in the southeast. These cities serve as a valuable resource for recruiting and retaining nurses.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT & RATIONALE:

Target Population

The target population for this project included nurses working in rural communities in Pennsylvania, with a focus on the 22 counties identified as rural. These counties were selected based on the availability of rural nursing positions and the prevalence of chronic diseases. The project aimed to address the needs of rural nurses by providing them with access to advanced education and support.

Health Disparities and National Health 2010 Targets

In 2005, 25 of the 63 million residents of Pennsylvania, 15 million were without health insurance. African Americans and Hispanics comprised nearly 40% of the uninsured population. Chronic diseases, such as heart disease, diabetes, and cancer, constitute a significant health care burden in Pennsylvania. The state's overall health care workforce is expected to increase by 2010. Although U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics projects an 11% decrease in the state's population between 10 and 21 years of age, the number of nurses working in the state is expected to increase by 20 percent. This increase is driven by the state's aging population and the demand for quality health care services.

Electronic Distance Learning Methodologies

Overview

Electronic distance education is an efficient and effective means of delivering quality education and support to rural nurses. This methodology involves the use of innovative educational technologies, such as webcasts and video conferencing, to facilitate the delivery of content and support to rural nurses. The webcast program is designed to provide an interactive and engaging learning experience, with the ability to meet the needs of rural nurses and improve health care access and outcomes.

PRELIMINARY FORMATIVE & SUMMATIVE EVALUATION

A variety of approaches were utilized to evaluate the effectiveness of the webcast program, including pre- and post-tests, surveys, and focus groups. These evaluations were conducted to assess the impact of the program on rural nurses' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors, as well as the program's ability to improve health care access and outcomes.

Preliminary Formative Evaluation

The preliminary formative evaluation results revealed high student and faculty satisfaction. At the beginning of the semester, midterm, and end of the semester, faculty and student evaluations were conducted to assess the program's effectiveness. The results indicated that the webcast program was well-received by both faculty and students, with high levels of satisfaction reported.

Students on the Urban Campus

Students on the urban campus were asked to respond to the following questions: Was the webcast an effective alternative to the classroom experience? Did you experience any technical problems during the webcast course? Was the programming and audio of the webcast clear and easy to understand? Was the professor easy to follow? Was the webcast an effective delivery method? Did you experience any technical problems during the webcast course?

Students on the Rural Campus

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End of Semester

Students on the Urban Campus

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