

Integrating Concepts of Mental Health and Maternal/Newborn Nursing into a Single Course

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Citation: Fouche-Camargo JS (2019) Integrating Concepts of Mental Health and Maternal/Newborn Nursing into a Single Course *J Nurs Healthcare Manage* 2: 203

In a concept-based curriculum, nursing courses focus on major concepts and use exemplars to help students achieve a deeper understanding. Coupling this type of curriculum with a scrambled classroom further allows students to integrate information into knowledge. In a traditional pre-licensure baccalaureate nursing program in northeast Georgia, the third semester of study includes a class that integrates multiple concepts that are traditionally taught in two separate courses: maternal/newborn and psychiatric/mental health. By using concepts instead of content in silos, students are exposed to the information, but in an integrated and intentional format. The entire nursing program follows a scrambled classroom model and employs various active learning strategies to help students achieve concept mastery.

At the start of the semester, students often express confusion in how one course can teach them about maternal/newborn nursing and psychiatric/mental health nursing in an integrated fashion. To achieve this, we use a couple of unfolding case studies that last throughout the semester. The first case study begins with a young immigrant that has recently relocated to northeast Georgia. Shortly after her arrival, she is involved in a motor vehicle collision and sustains a broken humerus. Following surgical repair of the fracture, she is prescribed an oral opioid analgesic by her surgeon. The students discover that ineffective teaching has led the client to believe she was to take the medication every 4 hours around the clock, and not as a PRN medication. After a couple of refills, the surgeon's office no longer authorizes refills. The young client soon finds her-self dependent on the opioid and begins to demonstrate addictive behaviors including illegally purchasing the medication off the street. A couple of months into her addiction, she becomes pregnant. At this point in the case study, students are asked to reflect on their feelings about pregnant women who are addicted to substances. Many students' reflections include statements saying the woman just needs to stop the substance. Others mention that child protection services needs to be involved. We explore the concept of addiction and how it alters brain chemistry and the dangers associated with acute withdrawal. We also explore the stigmatization of pregnant women who are addicted to substances and how that actually contributes to these women not seeking substance abuse treatment, thereby perpetuating the problem. As we follow this client throughout her pregnancy and addiction, the students learn concepts related to prenatal care, labor and birth, addiction, and cultural diversity. The case concludes at the end of semester with the birth of the child who has neonatal abstinence syndrome.

A similar case study is employed where we follow another pregnant teenager through a difficult pregnancy. In the postpartum period, she develops postpartum depression and eventually postpartum psychosis. In this innovative case study, students continue to apply the concepts related to reproduction and birth, but also integrate the concepts of mood and psychosis.

It is possible to include maternal/newborn and psychiatric/mental health nursing concepts into an integrated concept-based course. The students consistently perform between the 85th and 99th percentile on national standardized exams for maternal/newborn and mental health. The students also demonstrate professional growth in understanding how caring and empathy is best exemplified once personal feelings related to addiction and mental health are reflected upon and recognized. Utilizing integrated and innovative case studies in a concept-based curriculum can and does lead to content mastery.