Increase of Empathy in the Care Provided by Nurses to Patients with Substance Use Disorders

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Abstract

**Background and Purpose:** Patients struggling with substance use disorders (SUD) are not any different from patients battling cancer or diabetes, yet there is a lack of empathy from nurses when caring for these vulnerable patients. Empathetic care provided by nurses to patients struggling with SUD increases adherence to treatment regimens and it is a booster for successful treatment completion. The show of empathy by nurses during care delivery increases patient’s devotion to treatment, trust with the caregiver, enhances quality of life and decrease mortality. The purpose of this quality improvement project was to provide education to nurses about SUD and empathy and provide them empathy training to help increase their empathy during care delivery.

**Methods:** This pilot study utilized a pre and post assessment survey design. Nurses working full-time at an addiction treatment center were recruited for this project. The intervention was a 12-week in-person educational sessions. The Drug and Drug Problems Perception Questionnaire (DDPPQ) was used to assess the nurse’s knowledge on SUD and the Jefferson Scale of Empathy (JSE), which is used worldwide to measure healthcare professionals’ level of empathy was used.

**Results:** 9 nurses were recruited for the project from an addiction treatment facility. All the participants completed the assessments pre and post intervention. There was an increase in the participants post assessment (mean) scores compared to the pre assessment (mean) scores.

**Conclusions:** Nurses need re-education and trainings periodically to improve their knowledge, skills, and care delivery. One of the trainings include empathy. Empathy can be taught and should be as it is effective and crucial to quality nursing care delivery.

**Implications:** Empathy trainings should be provided to nurses and other healthcare professionals. This training positively impacts our patient’s treatment and lives and decreases job dissatisfaction in nurses and other healthcare professionals.

**Keywords:** nurses, nursing, empathy, substance use disorder, health care.