

Nurturing Future Nurses to Provide Sustainable Quality Gerontological Care through Primary Health Care Practicum

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Background

With the ageing population, there is an increasing demand for gerontological care in the community. Primary Health Care (PHC) serves as gate keeping in enduring active ageing of older people. PHC practicum does not only increase the confidence of nursing students in communication and delivering culturally appropriate interventions, it also develops their empathy towards the care recipients (Bennett, Jones, Brown, & Barlow, 2013). To nurture future nurses to take the challenges and sustain the quality care in gerontological nursing, PHC practicum has been developed since 2017 in our School and is held annually. In terms of community services, the aim of the PHC is to promote healthy lifestyle in the community-dwelling older people of Hong Kong. In terms of students' learning, the teaching team intends to develop students' nursing skills and promote their awareness of the gerontological community care.

Objectives

This study aimed to evaluate nursing students' awareness of the health issues of the community-dwelling older people, identify their perceived challenges in PHC, and explore their learning experience in the PHC practicum.

Methods

This study adopted a qualitative approach and the design of the PHC practicum is shown in Figure 1. As the practicum in 2018 is still in progress, only the data collected using semi-structured focus group interviews in 2017 were analyzed in this paper. 11 nursing students were recruited in the PHC practicum last year. Among them, 10 consented to join this study. The data were analyzed using simple content analysis.

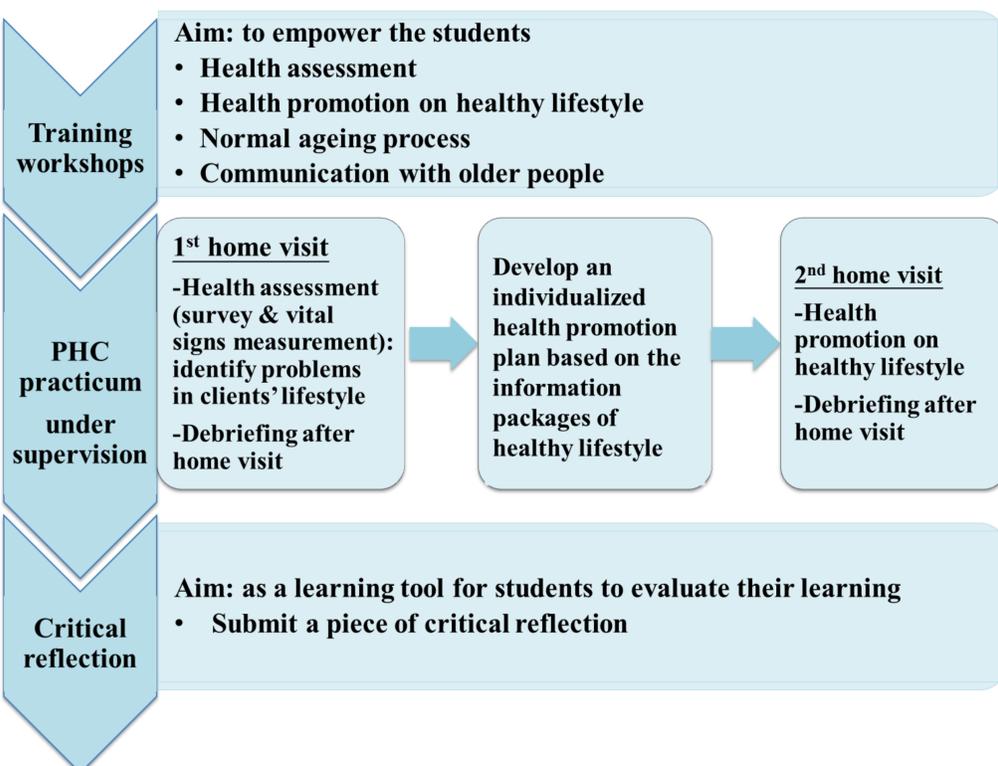


Figure 1. PHC practicum

Results

Six themes were derived from the data analysis, which are presented in Table 1. Students also gave suggestions how to improve the PHC practicum, such as, extending service to frail older people, including more physical measurement, increasing the number of time of visits for outcome evaluation, and setting up more information packages.

Table 1. Results of the data analysis

| Themes | Codes |
|--|---|
| Increased awareness of the needs of older people | 1. Becoming aware that chronic diseases are common 2. Pursuit of healthy lifestyle by most older people 3. Including other physical measurement in assessment |
| Learning substantial challenges in PHC | 1. Inadequate knowledge 2. Difficult to change the habit of older people 3. External determinants of lifestyle |
| Identifying effective interpersonal and communication skills | 1. Sharing instead of teaching 2. Adopting older people's language 3. Building up rapport |
| Assessment skills development | 1. Observation skills being important 2. Strengthening the questioning skills |
| Grasping strategies to promote healthy lifestyle | 1. Merging health promotion activities into daily life 2. Involving family members 3. Identifying the motivation for change |
| Developing the attributes of a nurse | 1. Increased self-confidence 2. Strengthened self-discipline 3. Increased sense of responsibility 4. Development of empathy towards older people |

Discussion

Literature suggested that PHC facilitated skills development in nursing students by consolidating learnt skills and acquiring new skills (McKenna, Parry, Kirby, Gilbert, & Griffiths, 2014). Students in this study consolidated their skills learnt in the training workshops, such as questioning skills. They also mastered new skills and strategies to promote healthy lifestyle. For example, sharing instead of teaching was useful in communicating with older people. This study further found that students had developed the attributes of a nurse in the practicum. It provides insights about the future improvement of the practicum in gerontological settings.

Conclusion

This PHC practicum provided nursing students a positive learning experience in communication, assessment and health promotion skills. It promoted their awareness of the need of older people in the community. It helped nursing students to develop new skills and nurture them with helping hands and heart in sustaining quality gerontological care.

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