



Coping Strategies for Student Nurses' Anxiety

By
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Anxiety—a feeling of dread or discomfort accompanied by an autonomic response—is a common feeling experienced by nursing students. In many cases, anxiety can be due to the fear of the unknown and with nursing school being a whole new world for nursing students, it can be frightening.



Easing

Apprehension

Coping Strategies for Student Nurses' Anxiety

As a recent nursing school graduate who has learned to overcome my anxieties, I have developed some coping strategies that have been successful for me.

Basic undergraduate nursing programs have two components, theory and clinical. Sharif and Masoumi (2005) maintain that clinical experience is one of the most anxiety-producing components of the nursing program; particularly in the student's first years. Having lived through the experience, I definitely concur. There are a number of common anxieties experienced in the clinical setting. These include: worrying about not having enough experience with patients, not communicating effectively, and making a medication error.

Anxiety About Learning Too Much Theory and Not Enough Clinical Application

Anxiety is commonly generated by the fact that there is more theory and less clinical application in the nursing program, which can often produce a lack of confidence. Do not worry; you will gain confidence with experience (Hoskins, 2008). Furthermore, it can be frustrating to have knowledge of the theory but not be able to hone the skill. This can be referred to as the theory-practice gap (Sharif &

Masoumi, 2005). Many clinical teachers will offer encouragement that will improve your skills over time; however, my advice to you would be to practice. As Hoskins states, experience is everything. Use your clinical and lab time to full advantage, seek out learning opportunities, and make yourself available to practice your skills.

Anxiety About Communicating Effectively

Students worry that they will look incompetent if they do not know the answer to their patient's questions. The fact of the matter is that you probably will never have all the answers. To improve communication (Kotecki 2002), students should ask the patient questions, explain the plan of care, and spend time listening to them. These suggestions will help you begin to develop effective communication, thereby decreasing this anxiety.



Anxiety About Making a Medication Error

Here is where your medication calculation quizzes come to your benefit. Practice, and study hard for these quizzes. The better you understand medication calculations in nursing school, the better you will understand them in your nursing career, thus preventing errors that are due to incorrect calculations (Pape, 2001).

It is imperative that you remember and utilize the five rights in medication use: right patient, right drug, right time, right dose, right route (Grissinger, 2002). One must develop strong competencies around medication administration and take the process seriously.

In addition to the clinical experience within the nursing program, the classroom experience generates its own anxieties about tests/exams, vast readings, and writing skills for reports and required papers.

Anxiety About Tests/Exams

Anxiety about nursing tests/exams can be particularly difficult due to the intense nature of the program and the extensive course content. Do not procrastinate. There is simply too much material to study. To be successful, you must study hard and look ahead; review sample questions that you believe may be on the exam and attend all class sessions. Be positive and visualize your success; and finally, relax during the test itself (Lethbridge College, 2007).

Many post-secondary institutions have learning and study resources available, including tutors and study groups that students can access on campus. Student support networks are also available at most schools to help with various problems including test anxiety. Use them to your advantage.

Anxiety About the Amount of Reading

I can tell you that I am quite the slow reader, and if I can do it, so can you. Attend your classroom lectures; many professors will give you a good summary of the important areas to cover. Use the professor's suggestions to your advantage and focus on the key items discussed in class. It is still important to cover the rest of the required readings; however, you can read any missed chapters in your downtime.

It is also very important to get organized at the beginning of the semester. Obtain a student organizer, write out the chapters you will read daily, and track your progress.

These suggestions will hopefully ease your anxiety, and ensure success in nursing school. Do not focus on your fear of failure. Focus on your goals and work hard to achieve them. Take the focus off your anxiety and set your sights on developing your strengths. Remember, you are not alone on this journey to become a nurse. You have friends, family, professors, and peers behind you and at your side who are more than willing to help you succeed. Trust them and remember that you were accepted into a competitive nursing program and that demonstrates that you are the capable of reaching your goal to become a registered nurse!

Anxiety About Reports and Required Papers

By the time you enter nursing school, you will have written a few papers and have a working knowledge of proper grammar and paper etiquette, which will help you with your nursing reports and papers. Of course, it would be of benefit to follow the guidelines and marking schemes set forth by your professors.

Post-secondary education papers are written at a scholarly level you must read, think, and write in certain ways. Scholarly papers should be written clearly and paragraphs should be focused and coherent. For first time writers, Gocsik suggests staying current on the classroom readings and proposes that writers familiarize themselves with their profession's lingo. Every discipline has its own jargon and you will need to know important terms and concepts. Finally, if you are still struggling with writing your nursing papers, your school may have an academic writing center where you can get help to develop scholarly writing. ∞

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