

# Empathy in Nursing Students: the Impact of a Poverty Simulation

Kristen Hamblin kristenmella25@gmail.com mella25  
Gaye Ray M.S., FNP-C College of Nursing

## Project Purpose

The purpose of this project is to determine the impact of a poverty simulation on nursing students' empathy.

## Project Importance

Empathy is an essential characteristic in nursing. In fact, the skill of empathy, the ability to understand the feelings or situation of another, is of paramount importance to the nurse-patient relationship (McCarthy and Aquino-Russell, 2009). Additionally, empathetic interactions often lead to increased patient satisfaction, compliance, and overall quality of life (Hojat, 2007). Empathetic nurses are more able to identify patient needs and provide high quality care and service. Thus, as nursing students at Brigham Young University develop empathy, they will be more fully prepared to "go forth and serve" throughout their professional careers and personal lives.

Ward, Schaal, and Hojat (2012) define empathy as a cognitive attribute, rather than an emotional one. They define empathy as the ability to understand patients' experiences and perspectives, communicate this understanding, and the intention to then help others (Ward et al., 2012). They suggest that students can develop empathy through a cognitive process. Therefore, these processes could be incorporated into nursing curriculum.

Unfortunately, however, Ward et al. (2012) have shown that empathy in nursing students declines over time throughout nursing school with increased patient contact. To enhance the nurse-patient relationship and provide safe, quality care, nurses must not only provide competent health care but also increase in empathy for their patients. Furthermore, nurse educators should focus their efforts on methods to develop enduring empathy in nursing students.

One population that nurses may not understand is that of individuals living in poverty. A poverty simulation gives students the opportunity to briefly experience living in poverty. Menzel, Clark and Carlsberg (2010) demonstrated that nursing students show statistically significant improvement in understanding poverty after participating in a poverty simulation experience. The next step is to determine if this understanding leads to the development of empathy. In this project, I am assisting Professor Ray in her research pilot study examining the impact of a poverty simulation on nursing students' empathy. Our findings will impact how nurse educators develop empathy in nursing students.

## Project Profile Body

Expectation for this Project: Under the direction of Gaye Ray, I have been mentored in all phases of her research study. To date I have assisted in a literature review of poverty simulations and their impact on health care students. I co-produced the Internal Review Board (IRB) application, which was approved by the BYU IRB in April 2013. I will be assisting in data collection, data analysis, and co-author materials for presentations and publication. My mentor and I have met on a weekly basis since spring 2013. We worked together to attain IRB approval and are moving forward with this project. I am continually learning new information and enjoy being involved in the research process. I have additionally grown spiritually as I study and research the Christ-like attribute of empathy.

Research Plan: The Global and Public Health Nursing course has recently implemented The Missouri Community Action Poverty Simulation as part of its curriculum. The simulation takes place over three hours and involves up to 25 volunteers and 80 participants. During the simulation, each participant is given an identity as a member of a diversely configured family living in poverty. The participants are required to provide for the basic needs of the family during four 15-minute simulated weeks. We will study the change of empathy in nursing students before and after this simulation.

Methods: We will measure the participants' empathy before and after the poverty simulation using the Jefferson Scale of Physician Empathy adapted to health profession students (JSE-HPS version). We have identified the JSE-HPS from the literature as a Likert type self-report survey. The JSE-HPS has internal

consistency with a Cronbach's coefficient of 0.78. After data collection, we will submit the completed surveys to the Center for Research in Medical Education and Health Care who will calculate the descriptive statistics from the sample. Then, we will work with a nurse statistician to perform a paired t-test and identify the change, if any, in empathy. Finally, we will disseminate our findings to benefit nursing education.

### **Anticipated Academic Outcome**

Together with Professor Ray, I will create a poster or podium presentation for the Western Institute of Nursing Research Conference in April 2014 and the International Nursing Association for Clinical Simulation and Learning Conference in June 2014. Additionally, I will participate in the development of a publishable manuscript for a peer-reviewed journal such as the International Journal of Nursing Studies and Nursing Education Perspectives.

### **Qualifications**

I am qualified for this position for several reasons. As a nursing student I have completed Statistics (grade=A) and the Scholarly Inquiry of Nursing Research course (grade=A). My overall GPA is 3.9; I am dedicated to my work. Throughout my participation in this project and with close mentoring from Professor Ray, I have learned more about empathy and its essential role in the nursing field. As I have compared nurses with and without empathy throughout my personal experiences in nursing school, I have witnessed the profound effect empathy can have on nursing care. These personal experiences motivate me to learn more about empathy and discover ways to help nurse educators develop enduring empathy in nursing students.

Gaye Ray, M.S., FNP-C., has worked previously as the MRI Research and Clinical Nurse Practitioner at Emory University Hospital and Clinics in Atlanta, Georgia. She is well suited to mentor undergraduate nursing students as they engage in the scholarship of the discipline. She has received a Mentoring Environment Grant from Brigham Young University. Gaye holds a graduate certificate of public health from the University of Missouri and is interested in identifying effective techniques to enhance student nurse empathy and understanding of various populations to prepare them to meet the public health challenges of the 21st century.

### **Project Timetable**

April 2013-August 2013: Completed review of literature, obtained IRB approval, selected and purchased JSE-HPS surveys

September 2013-November 2013: Recruit participants, prepare and implement poverty simulation

December 2013- January 2014: Data collection (Pretest, Poverty Simulation experience, Post-Test.)

January-February 2014: Data Analysis

February 2014-March 2014: Create poster and/or podium presentation and manuscript

April 2014-June 2014: Dissemination of findings via presentations and manuscript preparation.

### **Scholarly Sources**

Hojat, M. (2007). *Empathy in patient care: Antecedents, development, measurement, and outcomes*. New York: Springer.

McCarthy, C., & Aquino-Russell, C. (2009). A comparison of two nursing theories in practice. *Nursing Science Quarterly*, 22, 34-40. Retrieved from <http://nsq.sagepub.com.erl.lib.byu.edu/content/22/1/34.full.pdf>

Menzel, N., Clark, M., & Darby-Carlberg, C. (2010). *Expanding baccalaureate nursing students' attitudes about poverty*. Presentation at the Western Institute of Nursing. Abstract retrieved from <http://hdl.handle.net/10755/157286>

Ward, J., Cody, J., Schaal, M., & Hojat, M. (2012, January-February). The empathy enigma: An empirical study of decline in empathy among undergraduate nursing students. *Journal of Professional Nursing*, 28(1), 34-40. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.profnurs.2011.10.007>