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Weight Stigma & Communication Skills: Experiential Learning to Reduce Bias

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PURPOSE

The purpose of this research is to determine if simulation improves communication skills and/or reduces explicit bias towards patients with obesity. **In what ways do nursing students' perceptions change after working with an overweight patient in simulation?**



BACKGROUND

- Research has shown that healthcare providers including doctors, nurses, and student nurses have bias towards patients with obesity.
- Weight bias in healthcare has a negative effect on patient outcomes
- Research involving medical students and standardized patients with obesity was associated with **decreased stereotyping** and **increased empathy** towards patients with obesity.

RATIONAL

Healthcare providers have bias towards patients with obesity

- Attributed to:
- delayed care
 - decreased trust in HCPs
 - poor communication with people who have obesity.

Weight stigma leads to poor health outcomes

METHOD

- Pre/Post survey to **Fat Phobia Scale**, **Beliefs About Obese Persons Scale** and **qualitative data** in 1st semester, $n=68$ and 2nd semester, $n=68$ nursing students.
- **LEARN model of communication** applied in didactic coursework for 1st semester students only.
- Both groups of students participated in a **simulation experience** with a patient with obesity.

L.E.A.R.N. MODEL

Communication model that focuses on active **listening**, **explaining**, **acknowledging**, making a **recommendation** and **negotiating**. 1st semester students watched a short demonstration video of this model as applied in a healthcare setting. Emphasis was placed on this model in didactic courses.

SIMULATION WITH CARLY

Carly sought care 3 days prior for respiratory issues and fatigue. Her doctor gave her an **unsolicited referral for bariatric surgery**. Carley works hard on body positivity and was angry. Her symptoms are now worse. Carly is fearful she will be dismissed again.



ANALYSIS

- **Beliefs About Obese Persons Scale** post respondents were **less likely to agree** that obesity results from lack of love or attention, from overeating, from not exercising, from eating more than non-obese people, or from poor eating habits.
- **Fat Phobia Scale** analysis revealed positive trends for the opposing adjectives on will power, self-control, endurance, strength and shapeliness.
- **Qualitative data:** Pre-Survey themes included **treat the person with obesity no differently** than they would anyone else and **educate the patient** about the effects of obesity. *Post-Survey* themes included Importance of providing care based on **patient-centered priorities**, **listening** and **making adaptations**.

IMPLICATIONS

Weight bias in healthcare has been well documented to be a barrier to providing quality healthcare. **Teaching** students effective communication strategies and offering the opportunity to practice in simulation **may facilitate a better understanding of patient perspectives and reduce bias.**

