

VIRTUAL CLINICS: Innovative Use of the Online Classroom

Overview

Development of a synchronous online classroom into a case-based, real-world learning environment involves blending the concepts of narrative pedagogy with digital storytelling. Presenting clinical stories with a variety of multimedia and requiring students to take on roles of patient, interviewer, examiner, family member, collaborator, and/or colleague, prepares nurse practitioner students to meet the complex health care needs of vulnerable populations in a changing health care system.

When a synchronous classroom is used as a virtual clinic, the patient presentation, assessment, and management occur in real time. Students use synchronous audio conferencing with linked visual displays to make complex decisions pertinent to presented cases. Teaching methods that use patient cases and storytelling can be implemented in the synchronous online format to foster interviewing skills, resourcefulness, diagnostic ability, and an advanced understanding of collaborative practice. Students are required to manage acute and chronic illnesses, address health disparities, and promote health and wellness in a culturally sensitive manner, and find this synchronous online experience to be empowering.

Implementation

Virtual clinic experiences are varied, depending on the student learning needs. Using digital storytelling to enhance narrative cases allows synchronous classrooms to be transformed into virtual urgent cares, specialty offices, primary care practices, and chronic treatment centers. Students “meet” patients and extended family members who present regularly to them, as well as handle urgent and emergent situations. Over the course of their graduate program, students increase their participation in the digital storytelling. The narrative pedagogy is expanded through blogs, case studies, and standardized patient exams.

WELCOME TO OUR VIRTUAL CLINICS! Clinic Hours: Every Wednesday evening

Cases of Individuals

Students meet one patient in the synchronous classroom. One student interviews the patient, and based on history and physical findings, groups work together to determine diagnoses and management. Each student group may be assigned part of the individual’s management, or may be assigned a challenge based on the diagnoses.

Cases of Families

Students meet family members in the virtual clinic. Advanced practice roles of assessment and treatment are shared. Groups incorporate family theory and cultural competence as part of primary care management.

Cases with Webcam Storytelling

Students are able to interview patients who they first met through storytelling. Webcam interviews can be live and recorded. Use of the webcam as part of the synchronous classroom allows the virtual clinic to “become real.”

Cases with Video Storytelling

Using online cases that are available from national evidence-based resources reinforces the importance of the nurse practitioner role. Poster example is “Susan with anemia” from the National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute.

Dermatology Clinic

Students consistently request dermatology practice; this clinic was developed in response. During the synchronous classroom, a lesion or rash is shown and one student is allowed to ask five questions about the patient presentation. After this limited assessment, students can choose to: Ask an expert (another student), Ask the audience (poll the class), or Ask for multiple choice in order to correctly diagnose the problem. Each student during the clinic is given an opportunity to determine “their final answer.”

Mental Health Clinic

For this clinic, half of the students are assigned to be patients and are sent cases prior to class. Students are then paired in breakout rooms and are given time to interview “patients” who are having complex mental health challenges. Oral student summary reports after the patient interviews challenge peers to determine the next steps of management.

Orthopedic Clinic

Some of the virtual clinics involve vignette case presentations to students, who are then asked a series of polling questions to determine their learning needs. Student discussion and feedback indicate that polling during the synchronous classroom provides students with a sense of mastery of especially difficult patient care topics.

Walk-In Clinic

One of the final clinics of the program is developed entirely by students. Students identify the most common symptoms that present to them as primary care providers, and develop differential tables and patient cases that relate to the symptom assigned. During the Walk-In Clinic class, students work in break out rooms to interview student-patients, and then present cases to the class in a one-minute format. The Walk-In clinic challenges family nurse practitioner students to consider care for individuals and families that vary in age, gender, cultural background, and health literacy.

The presenters acknowledge the support of the Division of Nursing Bureau of Health Professions (BHP), and the Health Resources Services Administration Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). Funding for this project was received through the grant titled: Nurse Practitioners Managing Co-occurring Mental and Physical Disorders. The content and conclusions presented are those of the authors and not the position, policy or endorsement of the Division of Nursing, BHP, DHHS or the US Government.

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