

Clinical Experience of Family Nurse Practitioner Students during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Issue of Concern

- Family Nurse Practitioner (FNP) students must be prepared with medical knowledge and a specialized skill set to provide an accurate diagnosis and appropriate plan of care across the life span for the patient population.
- Face to face clinical experiences provide hands on practice for assessment skills and procedures as well as patient interaction for enhancement of interpersonal communication skills.
- According to the 2016 Criteria for Evaluation of Nurse Practitioner Programs, "the NP program/track has a minimum of 500 supervised direct patient care clinical hours overall. Clinical hours are distributed to support competency development that represents population needs."



Background

- On March 11, 2020, the United States Department of Health and Human Services declared a public health emergency due to the COVID-19 virus (2020). As information of the virus became forth coming, the nation began to shut down in order to preserve life and wellbeing of the population. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, FNP programs around the country made changes to their programs in order to meet the educational needs of their students. Even with these changes, FNP students from West Texas A&M University (WTAMU) were challenged throughout their course work during the COVID-19 pandemic.



Theoretical Framework

- From Novice to Expert: Excellence and Power in Clinical Nursing Practice**
 - Expert nurses develop skills and understanding of patient care over time through a proper educational background as well as a multitude of experiences
 - Robust framework that explains experiences including interaction with patients is needed to gain skills and decision-making abilities to become a confident FNP



Purpose

- The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of FNP students participating in clinical during the COVID-19 pandemic, specifically during the timeframe of January, 2020 through December, 2021.
- There are limited studies on the clinical experiences and struggles of nurse practitioner students during the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to shortage of information on this topic, this study explored the lived experience of FNP students completing their program.



Methods

Qualitative descriptive study to determine the lived experience of FNP students completing their education. Institutional Review Board approval was sought and obtained from WTAMU. Semi-structured interviews were conducted during November and December of 2021.

Semi-structured Interview Questions:

- How do you feel your clinical experience was impacted due to COVID-19?
- Did you see COVID-19 patients during your clinical experience?
- Did you have difficulty finding clinical experiences due to COVID-19?
- What would you change about your clinical experience?
- Is there anything else you would like to share about your clinical experience during the COVID-19 pandemic?



Results

Three main themes were identified:

Anxiety and stress

- Fear, worry, increased stress related to inability to attend in-person clinical experience due to clinic closures and industry pandemic guideline changes
- Worry that missed clinical opportunities would negatively affect transition from student role to provider role
- Financial stress from furloughs and shutdowns in current employment site

Hindrance of knowledge base

- Inconsistencies among clinics and clinical sites
- Best practice standards during pandemic were unknown

Personal growth

- Overall sense of appreciation in being able to have the varied ways to interact with patients
- Improved communication with patients and families, and preceptors
- Improved assessment skills and the feeling of improved "control in the midst of stress."



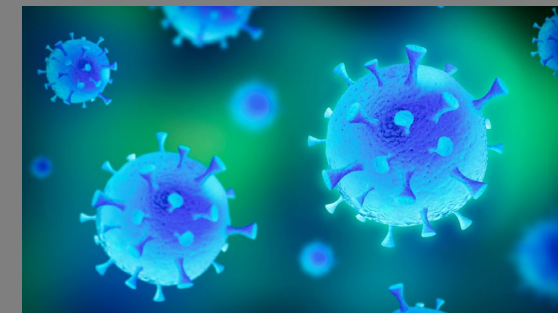
Conclusion

- From an educational perspective, FNP students perceived their clinical experiences during COVID-19 pandemic as a learning opportunity
- FNP students demonstrated the ability to grow, change and persevere to complete the program and graduate from WTAMU
- FNP faculty have planned to include telehealth experiences within clinical simulation experiences during the program



Recommendations

- Communicate with each student on a regular basis to monitor their stress level during each clinical rotation.
- Acknowledge and understand the student may have increased stress and anxiety during clinical experiences.
- Obtain alternative clinical sites and delivery methods such as online activities, case studies, and telehealth Objective Standardized Clinical Exams (OSCE), and student presentations.
- Communication with personnel at clinical sites, including preceptors should be maintained through phone calls, emails and zoom.
- Find alternative delivery platforms for administering and monitoring exams and conducting class meetings – such as telehealth format for conducting OSCEs.
- Stress interprofessional collaborative practice and interprofessional communication



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