

THE EXPERIENCES OF THE STUDENT-VOLUNTEERS OF THE COLLEGE OF NURSING IN RESPONDING TO THE HEALTH NEEDS OF MOTHERS

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ABSTRACT

This article reports the work experience of students of the College of Nursing with the mothers in promoting primary health care. Participating in the service-learning program as volunteers and supervised by resource persons from the college, the students pursued a health education program with mothers regarding dengue fever prevention, reproductive health particularly on family planning, skills training on herbal medicine making, and management of common home emergencies. They also engaged in actual provision of health services. As reflected in their journals, the students did not only improve their skills but they also learned to value community work. Specifically, they learned the values of teamwork, application and learning new principles and strategies, enhancement of personal skills and attitudes, and developed the desire to further improve their professional knowledge and skills. The internal motivation to share and contribute in community development was a factor that facilitated learning.

Introduction

Meeting the health needs of individuals, families, groups, and communities is an integral part of development efforts. Health needs may vary from direct service provision, information and education, to skills training in the management of health problems. The results of the baseline survey revealed the need for priority intervention in the area of health information/programs which would benefit specific groups in considering the leading causes of morbidity and mortality in the barangay. Thus, the College of Nursing was one of the academic disciplines identified to address this need. A project proposal for the health component entitled, Strengthening Primary Health Care as an Approach to Attaining Health was submitted to the service-learning program coordinator.

Among the organized groups in the barangay, the mothers' association was identified as the target group for the service-learning project of the College of Nursing. This decision was based on the premise that among Filipino families, mothers assume the role as care providers of sick family members as well as primary decision-makers in many aspects of family health. It was likewise important to have an organized group to facilitate the entry of the students of the College of Nursing for the provision of actual health service to the community.

Activities

Preparation. During this period, a group of student volunteers was gathered and given an orientation to the program. In coordination with the social work interns, an initial meeting with the mothers' association was made. As soon as the schedule of the the first activity was set, the students carried out the necessary preparations.

Provision of Specific Interventions. The following activities were planned with the mothers and implemented by the students and resource persons. These include health education on dengue fever and responsible parenthood focusing on reproductive health particularly family planning, health clinic (actual provision of health services), skills training on herbal medicine making, and management of common home emergencies. All sessions were done on Saturday afternoons. The Social Work students living in the community facilitated the scheduling of these activities within the available time of the mothers and the students.

Processing of Student Experiences. This activity enabled the students to verbally give their feedback after each activity. Besides the verbal feedback, students were also required to submit their personal reflections through the learning feedback diary guided by the following questions listed below. Processing of the verbal and written feedback is part of the monitoring of the service-learning program.

1. What did you feel about the activity?
2. What learnings or insights did you gain?
3. What factors facilitated or hindered your learning?
4. What are your recommendations to improve learning

Problems and Mitigations

The team was challenged by the demands of the regular course requirements while also meeting the expectations as student-volunteers. It was then important to schedule all activities and meet regularly as a team to discuss the plan of activities and delegate responsibilities.

Among the initial problems the team confronted was the inavailability of adequate space. In this community the barangay hall was small and often congested. But since this was the more accessible and acceptable venue for the mothers, the team made the necessary modifications to meet the space requirements for each activity. For this reason, some of the activities were held either on the barangay hall grounds or at the day care center. Another venue was used for the herbal medicine making. To ensure an environment conducive for learning, the team recommended a bigger venue for the succeeding activities.

Although the students expected more participants, they wanted the mothers to take the initiative of sharing with other mothers what they have learned in every session. Because they were not able to hold one particular session meant to create rapport with the mothers owing to time constraints, the students made an effort to establish a good working relationship with the mothers in every activity. Other than these concerns, the team did not encounter further difficulty.

Accomplishments

Orientation of Student-Volunteers. Considering the needs of the target group, it was decided that Level IV or senior students will be tapped to participate in the project. At this level, students have already gained the necessary knowledge, skills, and

attitudes for community work. Furthermore, since community health nursing experience was not part of the students' course offerings for the second semester, it had to be undertaken on a voluntary basis and not as part of a course requirement.

The College of Nursing Level IV Presiding Officer announced the invitation for student-volunteers to the project. Although there was an overwhelming response from the students at the start, after learning of the expectations of the program, only 11 students committed themselves to the project after learning of the expectations.

An orientation to the service-learning program and the proposed project was then conducted for the student-volunteers. At this session, they were informed that they would be working with students of the other participating academic units who have their own projects in the same community and that they will be reinforcing each other's work. In the same meeting, the schedule of activities, the submission of learning feedback diary, and other expectations were once more clarified. The forming of team and the assignment of duties (i.e., team leader, assistant team leader, and committees for program, documentation, food, physical set-up, and transportation) followed this. The assignments were considered necessary to facilitate the accomplishment of the planned activities.

Since the students were off for the Christmas break, the project coordinator scheduled an initial meeting with the mothers' association to establish rapport and to set the dates for the information, education, and communication (IEC) sessions. During this meeting, the mothers expressed their concern regarding the availability of specific health services from the barangay health center and requested for clarification. The coordinator addressed these concerns after clarifications were made with the Integrated Provincial Health Office. Upon the resumption of the classes, the team was activated for the first activity.

Part of the preparatory activity was to make a courtesy call to the barangay captain. This was accomplished after the first

session with the mothers. During the informal meeting with the barangay captain, the students introduced themselves and shared their planned activities.

Health Education Sessions. Two health education sessions were conducted on separate dates. The first topic was on dengue fever, focusing on what the condition is, the causative factor, predisposing factors, symptoms, management, and prevention. The discussion was facilitated by the students utilizing various teaching-learning strategies such as the use of visual aids, role play, and socialized discussion. Through these strategies, the mothers were motivated to actively participate in the discussion. The coordinator came in at various points in the discussion to supplement the information given by the students. Other than the main teaching activity, the students also included a program with forms of socialization designed to establish rapport with the mothers. This activity was accomplished in two hours.

The second topic was on responsible parenthood with a focus on reproductive health and family planning. A resource person from the College of Nursing facilitated the discussion. The students once again prepared a program for this activity. As a strategy used for this session, the resource person and the coordinator used small group activities facilitated by the students and followed by group sharing to ensure the involvement of the students as well as the active participation of the mothers. Using the mothers' own knowledge and practices on the concepts as starting point, misconceptions were corrected and desired behaviors were reinforced. The discussion generated much interest as evidenced by the kind of questions the mothers raised. The entire session consumed three hours. At the close of the session, the mothers suggested the possibility of undergoing pelvic and breast examinations. The resource person conducted this.

Conduct of Health Clinic. As requested by the mothers, a health clinic was conducted for the purpose of providing reproductive health checkup and counseling. Assisted by the students, the resource person performed the pelvic and breast

examination. Mothers who needed follow-up visits were referred to the Reproductive Health Training Center of the College of Nursing. The students also provided related services including blood pressure check, urinalysis to test for sugar and albumin, shiatsu or acupressure, and a demonstration on how to do breast self-examination. These were performed under the supervision of the coordinator. The students also took the opportunity to give incidental health teachings when deemed necessary. At this activity, many mothers came and all were given specific services within three and half-hours.

Skills Training on Herbal Medicine Preparation. The last activity was a skills training on herbal medicine preparation and the management of common home emergencies as suggested by the mothers. The students facilitated both topics. Given the limited time available for this activity, only one herbal medicine preparation (i.e., *lagundi* syrup) was demonstrated and small groupings followed by group sharing were used as a strategy for the topic on common emergencies. During the discussion of the latter, representatives from the youth organization were involved.

A herbal medicine, *lagundi* is indicated for cough accompanied by asthma, colds, and fever. Since *lagundi* trees (Chaste tree, *Vitex negundo L.*) abound in the barangay, mothers can easily avail of the raw material. Furthermore, the technology requirement for the preparation of *lagundi* syrup is relatively inexpensive and simple. The mothers expressed satisfaction with the finished product and considered the possibility of producing the herbal medicine for the consumption of families in the barangay.

The common home emergencies discussed by small groups included convulsions or seizures, open and closed wounds, choking, and poisoning. A demonstration of appropriate interventions such as wound dressing, bandaging, application of splints, and heimlich maneuver was shown and a discussion of steps to manage these conditions followed. A group representative demonstrated or shared the steps in the management of the common emergencies to the rest of the participants. Under the

supervision of the student facilitators, a return-demonstration was performed by the participants. The strategy allowed the students to validate their learning. Because these skills were considered important, formal skills training in first aid and emergency care was scheduled to be conducted specifically for the members of the barangay disaster coordinating council.

Processing the Experiences of Students

Except for the first activity, the sharing of students' experiences for the remaining activities was carried out during the regular meeting time with the students (a week after an activity) in the College of Nursing. This was done as a modification of the original plan because the sessions with the mothers usually ended late in the afternoon and the team had to travel back to Dumaguete. For the first activity, feedback was elicited right after the session. Feeling a general sense of satisfaction with what they had accomplished, the students were most especially pleased with what they perceived as the mothers' eagerness to learn.

During the regular meetings at the college, the students reflected on their past accomplishments and identified areas for improvement. They stressed the importance of teamwork in which each member strove to meet assigned tasks and showed willingness to accept new responsibilities. The faculty coordinator used this time to validate their reflections as written in the learning feedback diary. The students varied in their ability to express in writing their feelings, insights, and learnings and only a few were able to express in-depth insights pertinent to service-learning. Thus it was necessary to provide them the opportunity to verbalize what they could not express in writing.

Although there were no negative experiences, the students shared their thoughts about how they coped with the challenges posed in every activity. From these moments of sharing, it was clear that their academic lever as senior students (thus, more mature and

experienced) was a positive factor which enabled them to provide effective services while learning at the same time.

Experiences and Reflections of Students

These were the themes of the students' written and verbal reflections on their experiences as volunteers of the service-learning program handled by the College of Nursing.

Value of Teamwork. Other than merely accomplishing assigned tasks, the students learned to value each other through respect and understanding each other's ideas and feelings, and to appreciate the skills/talents of other members of the team. The students also appreciated the community organizing efforts of the Social Work students and the contributions of those in other allied health disciplines working in the community.

Application and Learning New Principles and Strategies. Principles of teaching and strategies in health education were applied and observed from the resource person. These were impressed on the students as factors which influence positive learning. Related principles in development work were identified such as starting from where the people are and what the people know and utilizing existing community resources.

Enhancement of Personal Skills and Attitudes. These include skills such as communication using the local dialect, ability to interact with other people, and ability to maximize limited time and resources. The students also developed attitudes such as respect for the beliefs of others, appreciation of other people's perspectives or attitudes towards an issue, the importance of providing privacy and maintaining confidentiality.

Opportunity to Further their Professional Knowledge and Skills. The various activities allowed the students to review the topics considered valuable for their future professional practice. As they reported, they gained deeper knowledge and competence with each activity accomplished.

Value of Community Service. Seeing the enthusiasm of

the participants and their eagerness to learn confirmed the assumption that people yearn for learning in order to know better ways of doing things, in this case those that contribute to health promotion. This is possible when there is a conscious effort by others to creatively share what they know. This is the difference between services given as a course requirement and services given voluntarily.

The internal motivation to share and contribute to community development was considered a factor which facilitated learning. For example, one student, given a choice to go out on a weekend trip, opted to remain and join the team for a scheduled activity since she considered her participation more important than her personal plans. Other factors which facilitated the students' involvement in the service-learning program were the mothers' cooperation and perceived unity in all the activities they handled.

PERIODICAL SERVICE