An Attempt to Unlock Critical Thinking: Nursing Escape Room for BSN Students

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Background

Student engagement in the learning experience has long been a goal of nursing educators. This escape room activity was developed in response to observations as well as student feedback that students were struggling to translate classroom theory into clinical practice. This is especially true in mental health nursing where students can have limited clinical experiences due to safety concerns on the unit. A recent study completed on the use of a nursing simulation escape rooms for BSN students suggests that "the use of an escape room can impart experiential learning with critical skills needed to work as an effective member of a team." (Valdes, McKay, & Sanko, 2021) This activity offers BSN students a unique opportunity to apply theoretical knowledge to real-life scenarios, foster critical thinking, collaborate, and apply clinical skills in a secure setting.

Anticipated Learning Outcomes

1. **Clinical Assessment**:
   Outcome: Improve mental health assessment skills by participating in a simulated scenario.
2. **Interdisciplinary Collaboration**:
   Outcome: Enhance teamwork and communication with peers to solve mental health challenges.
3. **Critical Thinking**:
   Outcome: Develop problem-solving abilities to address complex mental health crises and puzzles.
4. **Crisis Management**:
   Outcome: Acquire and apply crisis intervention skills for safely managing mental health crises.
5. **Inclusivity**
   Outcome: Reduce stigma related to care of the patient with mental illness

Activity Outline

The escape room learning experience was a timed activity that simulated a situation in which the student nurses would be caring for a patient with Bipolar disorder. They were divided into groups of four to five and given a debriefing prior to entering the room. There were a series of seven tasks that had to be completed before they could 'break-out' of the room. The tasks included:
- **Display of basic knowledge of the condition**
- **Patient assessment**
- **Medication management**
- **Medication administration**
- **Patient intervention**
- **Care planning prioritization**
- **Safety risk evaluation**

The activity took an average of 30 minutes from pre-brief to de-brief. Each group was given feedback on performance post-activity. They also provided a self-reflection on the activity.

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Student Responses

- "Loved how the escape room was reality-based and had a lot of questions that required us to utilize our critical thinking skills in a quick manner."

- "The escape room was a unique way to practice the information, so it helped me reinforce the topics I knew and highlight the ones I wasn't so strong on"

- "The sequential process necessary for getting out of the room was very similar to a real-life situation with a bipolar patient. The chaotic nature of an escape room is very similar to the care of mental health patients as well"

- "I really liked how the escape room followed the nursing process and it took you through every step from initial assessment to drug administration for implementation."

Conclusion and Future Considerations

- This activity was implemented in Fall 2023 and has run 2 semesters. Student feedback has been overwhelmingly positive as it relates to the activity and the development of critical thinking and patient care management skills.

- Current plans include the implementation of another escape room SIM on eating disorders based on student feedback as well as the use of an evaluation tool to measure outcomes.

References

Valdes, B., Mckay, M., & Sanko, J. S. (2021). The Impact of an Escape Room Simulation to Improve Nursing Teamwork, Leadership and Communication Skills: A Pilot Project. *Simulation & Gaming*, *52*(1), 54-61. https://doi.org/10.1177/1046878120972738