WILL PARTICIPATION IN A WELLNESS FAIR CHANGE THE NURSING STUDENT’S PERCEPTION OF THE GERIATRIC POPULATION?

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Abstract Content Area: Innovations in Geriatric Nursing Education
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Abstract: As America ages, the need for trained nurses in the geriatric setting grows significantly. In the majority of nursing schools, a student’s initial interaction with the patient begins in the traditional nursing home setting. This setting often includes patients with considerable comorbidities such as alzheimers, PEG tubes, incontinence issues, dysphagic issues, etc. If the nursing student’s only perception of the geriatric population is based upon the nursing home setting, it is plausible to assume that his or her view of the geriatric population may be negatively skewed and may, in fact, push the student away from the field of gerontology. Therefore, it is important that nursing professors implement interventions that will educate students about the “well” geriatric population. This writer undertook research to determine if participation in a senior wellness fair would change nursing students’ perceptions of the geriatric population. Students were required to gather information and implement a presentation at a senior citizen center in the western New York area. Additionally, students were required to interact with the center’s population by participating in activities such as aerobics classes and blood pressure screenings. At the conclusion of the wellness fair, students were interviewed to determine if this intervention had changed their perception of the geriatric population. Initial interviews were conducted in an informal group setting and comments were overwhelmingly positive. Statements included: “I think this has to change your perception of the older adult”; “…this was a very positive experience”; “I’m so glad…to end our older adult rotation this way”; “this has totally changed how I see the older adult”. Subsequent interviews will be conducted in face to face format and via surveys to determine if participation in the wellness fair would impact either positively or negatively the students’ probability of entering the field of gerontology.

Keywords: Geriatric; nursing students; health fair; nursing education