DELIRIUM IN OLDER ADULTS: DEVELOPMENT OF AN UNFOLDING CASE

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Delirium is a global cerebral disorder involving disturbances of consciousness, changes in cognition, and reduced ability to focus. Symptoms develop over a short time period and the severity of the symptoms can fluctuate. Such acute confusion can be a symptom of virtually any serious disorder. It occurs in approximately 10% of hospitalized patients. Yet, healthcare personnel do not consistently recognize the symptoms of delirium. It is imperative that nurses are able to identify and manage delirium in their older patients to prevent the negative sequelae to the patient, family and the health care system.

In response to nurses’ need for more information about the detection and treatment of delirium, as part of a federally funded program, (HRSA D62 HP01913), an unfolding scripted case was developed and implemented in continuing education workshops for nurse educators, registered nurses, licensed practical nurses, and nursing assistants. Participants in the workshops assumed the various roles in the script and acted out an unfolding scenario in which the nurse identifies symptoms of delirium and implements nursing interventions to manage the patient with acute confusion. During 27 workshops, 482 nurses and nursing assistants participated in this simulation, and more than 90% rated it as “excellent” or “very good” in each of the areas evaluated.

The unfolding, scripted case study is a unique teaching method that allows learners to evaluate a situation as it unfoldes, reflect on the potential problems and solutions, and practice assessment and communication skills. It encourages sharing of previous experience among participants. A template for developing case simulations will be described, using the development of the delirium case as an example. The process includes the initial identification of learning issues and objectives, the summary and outline of the case, the unfolding of the story and the debriefing. The review and revision process will also be outlined, including the adaptations made for nursing assistants and the teaching strategies developed over four years of workshop presentations. Nurse educators will benefit from this demonstration of the development of an innovative, active learning strategy to improve care of older adults.

Keywords: delirium, older adults, unfolding case, simulation development