

Villanova University College of Nursing: Standardized Patients with Disabilities Program

Description of Program Innovation: Villanova University College of Nursing's innovative Standardized Patients with Disabilities Program (SPWD Program) has improved the health care of people with disability by ensuring that its graduates are prepared to provide quality nursing care to this underserved population across the life span. Despite the large and growing population of persons with disability—60 million in the U.S. and 1 billion globally—research studies conducted by Villanova College of Nursing faculty have revealed that disability is not integrated in most nursing programs in the U.S., that most textbooks identified as primary teaching materials in nursing programs across the country are woefully inadequate in addressing disability, and that people with disabilities receive compromised care from nursing staff when hospitalized. The SPWD Program was established to ensure that students 1) gain experience in communicating appropriately with people with disability, 2) become comfortable in interacting with patients with disability, and 3) are prepared to provide comprehensive, sensitive and appropriate nursing care to this population across settings wherever nurses encounter them. These settings include but are not limited to acute and long-term care, residential settings, home care, outpatient clinics, nursing centers, group homes, and community and school settings. The educational aim of the SPWD Program is to address the lack of attention to disability in nursing education by introducing disability concepts and exposing students to individuals with disabilities in a learning environment. This is accomplished by integrating standardized patients with disabilities throughout the curriculum through simulation-based experiences.

Standardized patients with disability undergo training for their roles and provide verbal feedback to the students about their performance, as do faculty members. As a result, nursing students learn about disability from the experts: those people who live on a day-to-day basis with an actual disability. The inclusion of people with disability as standardized patients brings authenticity and real-life experiences to the learning environment that cannot be duplicated or faked by actors pretending to have a disability.

The SPWD Program was created by a team of Villanova faculty members and simulation center staff to integrate disability *without* disrupting existing curricula. This encouraged other faculty to embrace the program and its goals without interfering with other essential course content and without increasing their academic workload. Creative teaching strategies using videos and scenarios with standardized patients with disability were developed and implemented starting with undergraduate students' first semester and extending through their home health care experiences in the last semester of the program. Students in the nurse practitioner program also interact with standardized patients with disability in the simulation environment to ensure that they are able to communicate effectively with them and are skilled in addressing the interaction of disability with their patients' primary health care issues and their management by modifying care as needed to accommodate their disability.

In addition to interacting directly with individuals with disability in the simulation setting, students engage in classroom learning experiences that address care of patients with disability. For example, first semester freshmen participate in a classroom exercise focuses on communication with patients with disability. SPWD Program faculty created a series of videos with a 25-year-old young woman with a spinal cord injury from the age of 5 to demonstrate

effective and appropriate communication strategies, ineffective and inappropriate ways of communicating, and an overview of her previous health-care related experiences. Faculty members guide students through the experience and conduct debriefing to ensure that they achieve the goals of recognizing and developing appropriate communication skills. Students also participate in classroom discussions of the health care needs of women with disability related to pregnancy and childbearing, followed by students' interaction in a maternity simulation with a woman with disability resulting from a stroke at age 20 years or a congenital condition resulting in absence of one leg and hip. Other scenarios include patients and family members in home care settings whose care must be modified to optimize their health and well-being.

The SPWD Program has resulted in improved communication skills and comfort and skill levels of nursing students in providing care to persons with a variety of disabilities. Evaluation has demonstrated that students achieved the desired outcomes of the program: they have increased their acumen in assessing the impact of disability on other health issues of patients with disability in clinical and classroom settings and the effect of other health issues in turn on their disability. They have also demonstrated positive attitudes and appropriate communication skills in interacting with patients with disability in simulation and clinical settings.

Summary of the Program. The Standardized Patients with Disabilities Program (SPWD) was developed to improve health and well-being of people with disability by introducing standardized patients with actual disability in Villanova University College of Nursing's curricula. Undergraduate students interact with individuals with disability in classroom and simulation settings and are guided by faculty to develop appropriate skills to communicate effectively with them. Specific innovative teaching strategies are used to enable students to address patients' health care needs within the context of the presence of a disability. They learn the importance of directly assessing the impact of disability on patients' ability to obtain health care, communicate with their health care providers, and obtain and follow up with treatment recommendations. Innovative teaching strategies that have been used effectively with College of Nursing students are undergoing revision and expansion to become the major components of the first national nursing effort to disseminate information about caring for people with disabilities

Award Criteria

Program Serves as a Catalyst For Change Within The Curriculum And/Or Educational Mission of the Institution: The SPWD Program has served as a stimulus to inclusion of disability content and standardized patients throughout the curricula of the College of Nursing as well as nursing programs elsewhere through multiple presentations and publications. Villanova students and faculty have reported a greater awareness of issues that affect this population. In clinical settings, students have demonstrated heightened awareness and insight about barriers to health care experienced by this population and sensitivity to their health issues. The SPWD Program is very consistent with the mission of Villanova University's College of Nursing: to assist individuals, families and communities in a diverse society to maintain, restore, and promote health through direct care and by shaping health policy. The SPWD Program has advanced this mission by enhancing the curriculum to educate students about the health care needs and barriers experienced by persons with disability. It is also consistent with multiple international and national calls (e.g., Surgeon General's Office, International Council of Nurses) for health professions to do a better job in preparing their students to provide quality care to persons with disability by removing structural and attitudinal barriers to health care access.

The College of Nursing educates students for service to a diverse society, which includes all

sectors and strata of the population and in all settings where health care is delivered. The curriculum reflects integration of spiritual health as well as that of mind and body. Curricula of the undergraduate and graduate programs reflect the integration of these elements and their application in clinical practice and concern for others regardless of race, ethnicity or religion. These values are clearly demonstrated through the SPWD Program and its focus on improving health care for an underserved and often vulnerable population.

Potential for Replication/Dissemination: Efforts have been undertaken to replicate and disseminate Villanova's SPWD Program nationwide. In addition to giving multiple presentations at conferences and in schools of nursing about Villanova's SPWD Program, faculty are developing additional specific teaching strategies, unfolding case studies and scenarios that will be integral to the first national nursing effort to develop teaching materials for use by faculty across the country to integrate disability in their own nursing programs. Villanova faculty will also evaluate faculty members' use of the materials and the effect of that integration on the ability of their nursing students to provide care to people with disabilities. Worth noting are the very positive experiences of those with disabilities who have participated in Villanova's SPWD Program; they have authored and published an article about the value of the program to them and to students, further disseminating information about the program. Nursing faculty from other schools of nursing have reported that they knew little about the topic of disability prior to participation in conferences and presentations given by SPWD Program faculty; they have indicated that resources, such as those being developed for use nationally, would be extremely helpful to enable them to address disability in their own nursing programs.

Involvement of Teams of Faculty: A core group of faculty of the College of Nursing and the simulation center staff have been involved in the project from its inception and have become "champions" in the effort to improve the health, well-being and care of people with disability. As other faculty have observed the standardized patients in action and participated in classroom aspects of the program, they have identified other areas in the curriculum in which disability can be integrated to enhance students' learning. SPWD Program faculty have conducted research studies related to the program, published and presented widely to increase the reach of the program. Inglis Foundation, devoted to expansion of the opportunities and well-being of people with disability, awarded the College of Nursing a 2015 Inglis Award for Continuing Excellence for its contributions and efforts to improve health care for people with disabilities, the second Inglis Award received by the College of Nursing.

Advancement of Professional Nursing Education. The SPWD Program has advanced the goals of professional nursing education through its efforts to improve the health, well-being, and care of people with disability who comprise an underserved and often vulnerable population that experiences disparities in health care. They often receive less health care and care of lower quality than their non-disabled counterparts. Well-documented negative attitudes of health care providers, including nurses, toward individuals with disabilities play a major role in the poor health care they receive. The SPWD Program and its developmental work on the materials to be disseminated nationally will position professional nursing education as a leader among health professions education in improving the health status and health care of persons with disabilities.

Institutional Category: Private School without Academic Health Center