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Presenteeism among Nursing Students in Three Countries

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Background: Presenteeism, the act of going to work while sick, is associated in nursing with increases in medication errors, patient falls and lower self-reported quality of care with costs exceeding those of absenteeism. Presenteeism is well documented in nurses who work in hospitals around the globe but little is understood about presenteeism among nursing students.

Objectives: This mixed methods study described presenteeism in lecture and clinical experiences among nursing students from Honolulu, Tokyo and Seoul (N = 390).

Settings: A multi-city study conducted in the United States, Japan and South Korea.

Participants: Undergraduate nursing students enrolled in Bachelor of Nursing programs.

Method: A self-administered survey containing demographic characteristics, questions related to presenteeism and space for open ended responses was used.

Results: While nearly all student respondents believed going to class and clinical experiences put their classmates and patients at risk, the overall presenteeism rate was 85.5% for class and 69.5% for clinical experiences. There were significant differences between universities for reasons for presenteeism, however, the predominant reasons for class or clinical presenteeism were: No opportunity to make up work, missed content and fear of exam or course failure. The data indicated that there was less presenteeism for clinical experiences than for lecture classes suggesting that clinical absences carry a greater consequence.

Conclusion: Nursing students in three culturally different cities report going to class and clinical experiences while sick despite recognizing the safety risk. Nursing students need to learn responsible health and safety practices during their education in preparation for employment and professional practice. Nursing programs need to scrutinize policies related to absences to ensure that presenteeism is not promoted and provide alternative learning experiences for students who miss class or clinical experiences.

Biography

Dr. Critz and Dr. Feagai are professors of nursing at Hawaii Pacific University in both the undergraduate and graduate departments. Dr. Critz, a pediatric nurse practitioner also maintains a private practice in developmental pediatrics. Dr. Feagai also practices as a Family Nurse Practitioner in a private urgent care clinic. They share a research interest in nursing student education.

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