

3-28-2024

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Recommended Citation

Skinner, Cheryl and Driscoll, Lauren (2024) "Education and Simulation Outcomes of Death and Dying Perceptions of RT Students," *Innovations in Health Sciences Education Journal*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 4 , Article 15. Available at: <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.32873/unmc.dc.ihsej.0052>

This original report is available in Innovations in Health Sciences Education Research Journal:
<https://digitalcommons.unmc.edu/ihsej/vol1/iss4/15>

Education and Simulation Outcomes of Death and Dying Perceptions of RT Students

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<https://doi.org/10.32873/unmc.dc.ihsej.0052><https://digitalcommons.unmc.edu/ihsej/>

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Poster presented at the 2024 Spotlight on Scholarship at the University of Nebraska Medical Center, Omaha, Nebraska.

Abstract

Background: Respiratory therapy (RT) students are not equally exposed to death and dying experiences through their clinical coursework. The primary aim of this study was to determine if an education and simulation intervention positively affected attitudes of RT students toward death and dying. Methods: This IRB exempt, observational study was conducted with senior RT students ($n = 38$) in the last semester of a bachelor's RT program in 2019, 2021, and 2022. The intervention included expert lectures, panel discussions, coursework, and a simulation. Demographic data included sex, age range, highest degree held, previous education on death and dying, and previous experience with terminally ill persons. Attitudes toward death and dying were assessed pre and post interventions, using the FATCOD B instrument which evaluates positive and negative attitudes towards death and dying. The 30 questions were scored on a 5-point Likert scale with anchors strongly agree and strongly disagree and a maximum score of 150. FATCOD B has a Pearson's coefficient of 0.9269 for reliability and an interrater agreement of 1.00 for validity. Descriptive statistics were computed for demographic variables and the paired samples t-test compared mean values for pre and post test scores ($\alpha = 0.05$). Results: There was a significant difference in the overall positive attitudes ($M = 7.16$; $SD = 5.77$); $P < .001$. FATCOD B largest change in positive attitude was: I would be uncomfortable talking about impending death with the dying person (26.3%). The smallest change in positive attitude was: Caregivers should permit dying persons to have flexible visiting schedules (0.1%). Conclusions: Education and simulation training had an impact on senior RT students' positive attitudes towards death and dying. This study supports the need for death and dying education within RT education programs to prepare them for a career as a respiratory therapist.

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