Institution of Drug Policy and Procedure

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Abstract

Nursing students entering into the clinical arena need to provide safe, competent care and exercise the mental acuity and critical thinking necessary to do so. Ferris State University has extensive verbiage speaking against drug use by the student population. Ferris State University’s School of Nursing honors and upholds the ethics of the profession of nursing. In order to support and enforce the guidelines of mental acuity as laid out by the Ferris State School of Nursing and to further the ethical considerations of nursing, Ferris State University School of Nursing must consider a comprehensive drug use policy.

Institution of Drug Policy and Procedure

The Ferris State University Student Nurse Handbook delineates many mental acuity traits that are defined as “necessary to practice safely and effectively” (Ferris State University Handbook for Student Nurses, 2013. p. 5-6) including emotional stability, analytical thinking, critical thinking, and communication skills. The ideal student nurse should arrive to clinical prepared intellectually and emotionally, clear minded, ready to assess, evaluate, and intervene in a culturally competent, compassionate manner. The student should be prepared to learn as well as teach, listen without prejudice, and to adapt to an ever-changing patient population and environment. The student must be able to discover and evaluate the many pieces of information surrounding the patients’ general health and specific health issues, and use the pieces to build a cohesive picture of the patient as an individual. These traits require focus, dedication, and developed critical thinking. The use of prescriptive narcotics or recreational drugs is not in alignment with the stated mental requirements of a nursing student. It is the purpose of this paper to present evidence of the need for a comprehensive drug policy within the School of Nursing.

**Existing Verbiage**

The Ferris State University Code of Student Community Standards states in section 26 (Ferris State University, n.d.):

Unauthorized Possession or Use of Illegal Drugs or Controlled Substances (real or implied)

The term “controlled substance” is defined by Michigan law, and includes, but is not limited to, substances such as marijuana, cocaine, narcotics, certain stimulants and depressants, and hallucinogens. The following actions are prohibited by Ferris State University:

* 1. Use or possession of any drug, controlled substance, or drug paraphernalia on or off University property or in the course of a University activity or student organization activity, contrary to law or without a valid and legal prescription for such drugs or controlled substances.
  2. Use of University facilities to manufacture, process, or distribute any drugs or controlled substance contrary to law.
  3. Sale, attempted sale, gift, transfer, or attempted transfer of drugs, controlled substances, or drug paraphernalia, whether or not such sale, gift, or transfer occurs on or off University property or in the course of a University activity or student organization activity.
  4. Possession, production, manufacture or use of any substance that is used as a drug on or off University property.
  5. Abuse or misuse of any prescription drug, the unauthorized possession of prescription medication or the sale or attempted sale of a prescription drug.
  6. Students may not be present in a room where illegal drugs or controlled substances are present or being used.
  7. The use, possession, or cultivation of marijuana for medical purposes is not allowed in any University housing or on any University property.

The Ferris State University School of Nursing Student Code of Conduct states in its opening paragraph (Ferris State University School of Nursing, 2012. para. 1).

The School of Nursing (SON) at Ferris State University upholds the University Code of Student Conduct and the American Nurses Association Code of Ethics. One of the values of the SON is *Ethical Community***,** which states, “The School of Nursing is committed to the development of a professional nurse who will practice within the Nursing Code of Ethics and whose practice is guided by the values of altruism, autonomy, human dignity, integrity and social justice”. Our goal is to graduate students who will practice with these inherent values, and to ensure the profession continues to be accountable to and trusted by the communities we serve.

**Research and Literature Review**

Over the course of 20 months, multiple reports of prescription and recreational drug use by the nursing student body have been brought to the attention of the clinical coordinator. In an effort to determine legal and just action in ensuring a drug free student body, the clinical coordinator has explored drug use policies and procedures practiced by clinical agencies, adjacent schools of nursing, and the school of pharmacy at Ferris State University. In private conversations with representatives of Northern Michigan College (Director of Nursing), Grand Valley State University (Clinical Coordinator), and Spectrum Butterworth (Education Coordinator), the clinical coordinator for Ferris State University has ascertained that drug screening is done in two of the three organizations based on observed behavioral changes, while the third organization performs random drug screening. In private conversations with faculty members of the School of Pharmacy at Ferris State University, the clinical coordinator understood that frequent random drug testing of pharmacy students is done.

Opioids and anxiolytics create cognitive impairment, sedation, and psychomotor impairment as well as physical symptoms including nausea, light headedness, and decreased blood pressure (O’Neill et al, 2000, Berde & Nurko, 2008, Zacny et al, 2005). In the case of medical marijuana, where no nursing organization has yet to take a definitive stance, the research shows critical thinking is impaired, hand-eye coordination is delayed, response times are delayed, memory and self-awareness is decreased , energy and productivity levels are diminished, and there is a risk of psychosis (Day, Metrik, Spillane, & Kahler, 2013, p. 173, Shrivastava, Johnston, & Tsuang, 2011. p. 187, Pierre, 2010. p. 599). These findings are in direct contradiction to the mental acuity traits delineated by the Student Nurse Handbook, and are counter-intuitive in a nursing student practicing in acute care or community settings.

**Advocate**

In 1997 Coleman et al (p. 28) estimated 10 per cent of nursing professionals had addictions and added that the beginnings of addiction for many began in nursing school. This information is corroborated and updated by the National Council of State Boards of Nursing in the 2011 publication of *Substance Use Disorder in Nursing* (p. 1-2) to estimates of six to eight percent to 10-15 percent of nurses experiencing drug use issues resulting in impaired performance. Cotter and Smith Glasgow (2012, p. 188) assert that failing to acknowledge and act appropriately to possible drug usage may be seen as professional negligence. It thereby becomes the duty of nursing faculty and staff to identify students at risk of impaired practice and intervene. Word of mouth reports of drug use are inadequate to create a milieu of personal and professional accountability. Standards must be upheld and students must identify with the standards in clear terms. Until the completion of the program, nursing students have not fully integrated the ethics of nursing into their professional being. A policy and procedure must be in place to ensure a drug free nursing student population. A clearly written statement prohibiting use of recreational drugs, prescriptive drugs during clinical time, and use of prescriptive drugs immediately prior to clinical time, arbitrarily suggested 8-12 hours based on half-lifes of oxycodone being 4 hours and marijuana being beyond 2 days (U.S. National Library of Medicine, 2009 and University of Washington, 2013) is necessary to delineate the restrictions. This statement needs to be supported by a drug testing policy and procedure to ensure a safe student nurse population entering the clinical and professional venues. It is the expectation of society that universities are accountable for the safe practice of their students, who will grow to be accountable in their own practice (Luhanga, Myrick, & Yonge, 2010. p. 266).

**Conclusion**

Nursing students are in a unique position among the academic community as they enter the acute care settings and community settings to experience and practice nursing skills, assessments, interventions, teaching, and role modeling. Nursing students, acting as ambassadors of Ferris State University, must be held to a higher standard than the general student body, not least because the actions of nursing students can significantly impact the health and well-being of individuals for which they provide care. While Ferris State University clearly prohibits use of recreational drugs, there is no clear wording as to actions to take, recourse, follow-up, or wording regulating the use of prescription drugs. The School of Nursing must lead the way with a clear policy and procedure on the use of drugs, drug testing, indications for testing, follow-up including counseling, and disciplinary measures if indicated. By instituting a clear understanding of drug use policy in the nursing student, Ferris State University can create generations of nurses who are aware of the risks of drug use, not only to the nursing profession but to the people for whom nurses care.

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