The United States is experiencing a significant rise in the number of older adults and the demand for palliative end-of-life (EOL) care.¹ To meet this rising demand, the Institute of Medicine (IOM) has called for enhanced competence of the interprofessional palliative care team.² Research indicates that most new graduate nurses have not received adequate education or experience in EOL care and view caring for dying patients as a source of anxiety.³

Background

At Creighton University, BSN students are provided EOL content through traditional lecture. Exposure to EOL care in a clinical setting, however, varies based on random assignment of students to clinical sites and community health settings, resulting in varied exposure and opportunity to care for dying patients. In order to provide a consistent EOL experience to students, Creighton University’s College of Nursing (CUCON) partnered with the university theatre department and local chaplains to implement realistic EOL simulations to enhance competence and self-efficacy in the delivery of palliative EOL care among senior-level undergraduate nursing students. Preparation of BSN students through a combination of structured palliative care education and simulation is a potential approach to ensure that BSN graduates are meeting the established essentials, and are competent, and able to cope when caring for the dying patient.⁴ Anecdotally, researchers have suggested that the use of live actors and role-play may be more effective in increasing student knowledge and self-efficacy.⁵,⁶ Research is needed to determine the effect of EOL simulations on student self-efficacy and self-awareness in caring for dying patients.

Methods

This interdisciplinary pilot project was designed using mixed methods (quantitative pre-test/post-test quasi-experimental and qualitative descriptive design) to assess the effects of enhanced realism in an EOL theatre simulation on nursing students’ (n=73) self-efficacy and self-awareness.

The Frommelt Attitudes Toward Care of the Dying, Form B (FATCOD-B) scale, a validated 30-item Likert-scale tool for college-level students, was utilized to measure one aspect of students’ self-awareness (attitudes toward caring for dying patients). Respondents’ level of agreement with each item was tallied for overall scores ranging from 30-150. Higher scores indicate more positive attitudes in caring for dying patients. The instrument had adequate internal consistency reliability (α=0.84 for all 30 items). Student self-efficacy was also measured at pre-test by several researcher-developed survey questions and repeated at post-test.

- **RQ:** What impact does enhanced realism and participation in an EOL theatre simulation have on nursing students’ self-awareness and self-efficacy?
- **H₁:** Nursing students will report increased self-efficacy and self-awareness from pre- to post-simulation.

Results

- **Self-Awareness:** A paired samples t-test revealed a statistically significant increase (p<0.05) in the overall FATCOD-B scores from pre-test to post-test (from 121 [SD=9.3] to 126.5 [SD=9]).
- **Self-Efficacy:** Students reported statistically significant increases (median) in their understanding of palliative care and confidence in their ability to communicate with and deliver care to dying patients and their family members.

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- **Qualitative Findings:** Content analysis of open ended responses by students post-simulation indicated several positive themes including:
  1. Student satisfaction with the learning experience,
  2. Importance of fidelity in EOL simulations, and
  3. Preparedness to communicate and deliver EOL care.

Conclusion

The interdisciplinary CUCON-theatre EOL simulation positively influenced student self-efficacy and self-awareness in caring for dying patients. Future research is needed to understand the relationship between student knowledge, self-awareness, and the delivery of high quality palliative nursing care.