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Sink or Swim: Bridging the Gap Between the Flags

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Slide 1

Good morning Ladies and Gentlemen. It is such an honour to be able to present this paper to you and a huge thank you to the ACORN conference committee for giving me this opportunity.

My talk today is titled “Sink or Swim...?” Bridging the gap... between the flags. The focus of this presentation is on the nursing undergraduate curriculum at Notre Dame University and its contribution towards the recruitment of perioperative nurses in the nursing workforce. I will display aspects of the undergraduate curriculum that supports student nurses therefore preventing them from *floundering in the breakers* ‘sinking’ in the **Deep blue ocean of perioperative nursing.**

Slide 2

In keeping with the theme of the conference, I’ve structured this talk into the analogy of FLAGS when at the beach

F for -ind the red and yellow flags and swim between them

L- ook at the safety signs

A- sk a lifeguard for advice

G- et a friend to swim with you

S- tick your hand in the air and shout for help if in difficulty

Slide 3

Really, ACORN can be depicted **as the red and yellow flags in the beach**

An abstract from the ACORN's submission that was recently produced, stated that, nursing specialities such as critical care, emergency and the perioperative workforce have suffered significantly from the transition of undergraduate nursing training from the hospital sector to the university sector.

Currently very few universities encourage or negotiate for the perioperative experience even though this issue has been raised at every undergraduate curriculum review opportunity.

Workforce and recruitment levels fall below those retiring and concerns for the future perioperative workforce have reached critical levels.

Slide 4

For those of you whom are not familiar with Notre Dame University, I will give you a brief introduction. This private university has three campuses, One in the historic port city of Fremantle, another one in the beautiful coastal town of Broome in the North-West of Western Australia and a new campus in Sydney which officially opened in 2006.

Both Fremantle and Sydney campuses are located in historic precincts and feature beautifully restored buildings with leafy courtyard settings that students enjoy.

Slide 5

In terms of **“looking out for the signs” at the beach**, The three-year Bachelor of Nursing at Notre Dame offers a formal curriculum which contains all of the subjects required for nursing accreditation in Western Australia, while placing strong emphasis on clinical and hospital experience. The course is highly practical where students undertake around thirteen weeks of clinical practice each year in a variety of health care settings, and are mentored by experienced registered nurses.

Slide 6

As seen in this current course outline, The perioperative unit embedded within the program is named Perioperative Nursing Care with the code NS204 undertaken in the 2nd year of the 3 year nursing program. This unit is run over a period of 8 weeks consisting of 2 hour lectures and 1 hour laboratory sessions per week. Students are required to attend all lectures and laboratory sessions.

A unique part of the unit is the inclusion of a clinical workshop day organised between UNDA and two major hospitals in metropolitan Western Australia namely St John of God Hospital in Subiaco and Fremantle Hospital. Students are required to attend this clinical workshop day which runs for 3 hours.

The perioperative program as seen here gives students a broad overview of the specialty covering subjects from history and layout of the operating room such as temperature, humidity, laminar flow, anaesthetics, sterilization and recovery room nursing to name a few.

Slide 9

The practical component of the perioperative course are the 1 hour laboratory session during the semester where students practice skills such as instrumentation, draping, surgical prepping, recovery room handover to ward nurse and the technique of scrubbing, gowning and gloving. Here are some photos of these sessions. All skills and techniques covered in the program are in accordance with the ACORN standards. There are a maximum 20 students in each laboratory sessions and in keeping with small class sizes which is known to be a better learning environment.

Slide 19

Coordinating of the clinical workshop day with the major hospitals has to be performed well in advance. It was decided by both hospitals that it is more feasible to conduct the clinical workshop day on weekends as during the week is inappropriate for a total of 200 students to go through the department. The groups are led by tutors from the School of Nursing. Here students have the opportunity to **“ASK A LIFEGUARD for advice”**. **But unfotunaltely for them, their tutors don’t actually look like David Hasselhoff.**

Slide 20

The 3 hour session at the hospital consists of 20 students in each group. This is an informal session where students are introduced to the perioperative environment in a relaxed way and can ask the tutor questions and browse the department in groups. There were total of 2 groups in a day, 1 in morning and 1 in the afternoon for both Saturday and

Sunday. The program is structured the same for the morning and afternoon sessions and for both hospitals.

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We also included an assessment as part of this workshop. Students are assessed on the skills of scrubbing, gowning and gloving and this constitutes part of the total assessment mark for the unit. Here, **“Getting a friend to swim with you”** is achievable as students are assessed in pairs. The students are taught the skill at the laboratory sessions in university and being assessed on the skill in a real-life setting of an operating theatre scrub room. The aim also is that they are able to prepare their gown and gloves on a trolley and at the end clean up the mess which I am sure many of you agree that it’s a good idea to get them started with ‘good’ habits.

Slide 25

Clinical practicum like most universities is done at the end of the 8 week semester after examination and assessments. Students are allocated to various perioperative environments throughout Western Australia, and interstate or overseas if that can be organised. Through a mentorship model, students are preceptored by a registered nurse throughout their practical experience in the perioperative department commonly lasting around 3 to 4 weeks continuous. Students are of course encouraged to **“Stick your hand in the air and shout for help if in difficulty”**.

Slide 31

A review of the clinical workshop day and the effectiveness of the NS204 unit was implemented. Survey method using specifically tailored questions were distributed to the students on two occasions: post clinical workshop day on the weekend and post clinical practicum.

Overall, this review indicated a positive evaluation of the teaching strategies and preparation for the operating theatre experience, supporting the continuation of the way the perioperative unit is currently conducted.

And as you can see from this table, majority of the students wither agree or strongly agree with the organising of the program. We also added this question at the end f the survey 'I am interested in pursuing a career in perioperative nursing' and interestingly 70% said yes.

Slide 34

To gauge the effectiveness of the course, I thought that I would give you some testimonials from the students. Here are some of the comments from the Survey Post-weekend Workshop and before their practical Experience:

"I found the unit very interesting and informative. On a whole I enjoyed it very much."

"That was an excellent experience! It allows us the student to see and experienced the actual OR settings."

"Although I had a Sunday morning session, a couple of hours out of the day was not horrific!Very good experience prior to the commencement of prac – as it provided us with exposure to un-familiar surroundings."

“It was a great experience. I can now relate to the theory...it all makes more sense now. Nothing needs to be changed it was all enlightful. And most of all it was fun ☺ Great idea, it took the pressure off the actual test because we were in the right environment...much better than scrubbing in our classrooms ☺”

Slide 35

Comments from Survey Post Clinical Experience or post practicum are:

“Going on prac is always nerve-wracking, but having learnt some theoretical knowledge in the field prior to going on prac made a big difference to my level of confidence and thus allowed me to take in much more information than if we hadn’t had NS204 as a unit.”

“I felt that the course gave us an edge because we already knew quite a lot before we started prac which really shocked (pleasantly) some of my preceptors. Personally the course gave me extra confidence when ‘entering’ the theatre environment. That is because theatre is SO very different to ward nursing... (A good different but).”

“This was a great unit which gave us great insight into the role of the perioperative nurse. OR nursing is completely different from nursing in the wards and through this experience I believe we were given the opportunity to get a better understanding of: 1. what we may like to pursue after graduation, 2. what actually occurs in theatre which will ultimately benefit us even if we never work in a theatre environment.”

And here’s my favourite

“I found this unit very interesting and enjoyable. This unit allowed me to discover my love for perioperative nursing.”

Slide 36

It has been shown here in this presentation how universities can incorporate a perioperative unit such as this one at Notre Dame to bridge the gap between theory and practice and exposing undergraduate nursing students to the specialty. If the aim of learning good life-saving skills is to gain confidence to get beyond the breakers, then similarly, this unique perioperative unit we believe equips young nurses with the break-through confidence. Thank you!