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Case Report

Transitioning Nursing Students' Education from Traditional Classroom to Online Education during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Case Study Applied to the Meleis Trial

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Abstract

Theories can be used to determine the factors that affect a situation and the most appropriate ways to reach a goal. The coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic has deeply affected nursing education in which had considered a critical factor in the transition of teaching methods that is being and will be experienced. Transition is a process of changing from a known to an unknown state. Personal, community, and social factors can facilitate or prevent a transition. In this study, nursing education as well as nursing students and educators are at the center of these changes and transitions to online learning, which is an institutional (organizational) type of transition. Nursing students understand the level of awareness of an individual, responsibilities that they need to take, changes to be experienced, beginning and expected end time of the transition, critical turning points and important points, impact of the change on daily life, stages of the individual, and reactions during different stages of this process. This article discusses the transition process of a 21-year-old nursing student (initials: MN) from the traditional classroom to online education and the factors affecting this process.

Keywords: COVID-19, meleis theory, nursing education, nursing student, online education

Introduction

Theories and models allow one to predict the effects of variables on nursing and to systemize the knowledge and practices. The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic has deeply affected nursing education, and it has become a mandatory factor in the transition of teaching methods that is being and will be experienced. The term transition indicates a change from a known to an unknown state. In addition, individuals, families, groups, and communities experience unfamiliar emotions, environments, and doubts, all of which influence their health and well-being. Transitions are identified as changes in individuals' lives, environments, relations, and health that according to actions, meanings, nature, as well as conditions of the transition experience (Meleis, 2010). Meleis (2019) defined the transitions observed by nurses into 4 categories: health/illness, situational, institutional, and developmental transitions. Institutional (organizational) transitions are status changes that affect clients' and workers' lives and may be social, political, or economic aspects, such as a change in the educational system or the use of new technology throughout an organization.

As the profession of nursing continues to change and grow, the learning strategies in nursing education must be updated to prepare nursing students for today's healthcare challenges (Bodur & Kaya, 2017; Jones & Wolf, 2010). This can be done by allowing nursing programs to use online learning that considers one of the common teaching methods currently (Institute of Medicine, 2011). Online learning is defined as a type of distance learning that involves both synchronous and asynchronous activities but that lacks direct, face-to-face interactions between the educators and students and allows students to learn at their pace (Bergstrand & Savage, 2013). This study defines a framework to articulate the elements of a transition as a core concept of nursing, identifies and analyzes the relationship between these elements, and discusses the transition process for a 21-year-old nursing student (initials: MN) from the traditional classroom to online education and the factors affecting this process.

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Case Presentation

Descriptive Features and Story

In this study, the experiences, feelings and thoughts, and expectations of a 21-year-old nursing student during the COVID-19 pandemic were presented. Written informed consent was obtained from the student. The student, with initials MN, is a 21-year-old woman from Palestine who is studying nursing. In 2016, she traveled alone to Cyprus/Turkey to study nursing. She said, "In the beginning, I was afraid and anxious to travel alone to a different country, but I wanted to learn and live this experience." In 2020, she was an undergraduate student in her fourth year (the last year) of the nursing program and was living with her Turkish friend. In March, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, she said, "All of my life changed. Most of the vital institutions, such as universities, restaurants, and airports, were closed. My friend traveled to see her family before the airport closed, and I stayed alone in my house. In addition, since the universities closed, my studies transitioned from the traditional classroom to online courses. This was a first for me. I asked how I would study, understand the material, and take the exams. I didn't know the virtual technology." In this situation, she stated that she had to take responsibility for her situation and that these new responsibilities challenged her.

Conceptual Framework of Transition Theory and the Case Report

There are several important attributes for transition that involve awareness, engagement, change, and difference, flow time, as well as critical milestones and events (Meleis, 2010). The transition experienced by the nursing student MN was examined in a conceptual framework.

Awareness

Awareness is what is already known compared with what is expected about a set of responses and perceptions of individuals undergoing transition experiences (i.e., perception, knowledge, and recognition) (Meleis, 2010). According to MN, she was aware of the travel to study and to experience living outside her city but was not aware of the transitions she experienced after the COVID-19 pandemic changed her educational system from traditional classroom to online education.

Taking Responsibility: Engagement is another feature of transition that indicates the stage of association of an individual with the process intrinsic to transition (Meleis, 2010). MN's responsibility for her transition, which was the decision to travel, is higher than usual because she decided to study outside her city, obtain different experiences, and be more independent. The level of knowledge and responsibility taken during the transition in terms of traveling alone and independence were low at the beginning, but then she knew what she should do and how, by staying with a Turkish friend who spoke a different language and was from a different culture. However, MN did not know what to do when the pandemic began and it stopped all aspects of life; universities and airports were closed, her friend traveled to meet her family, and MN remained alone at home and received her education through online classes.

The American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN), the National League for Nursing (NLN), and the American Nurses Association (ANA) are nursing organizations that recommended various structures for all levels of nursing education during the pandemic to be able to make decisions and efforts to retain the quality of nursing education programs (American Association of Colleges of Nursing, 2020; American Nurses Association, 2015; Institute of Medicine, 2011; National League for Nursing, 2016; World Health Organization, 2020).

Change and Difference

These are essential attributes of transition, which include individual experiences in identities, relations, capabilities, roles, and behaviors. All transitions involve changes of different dimensions such as time, importance, nature, standards, as well as personal, familial, and societal expectations (Meleis, 2010). In this case, as the nursing profession continues to grow and develop, nursing students and educators should be prepared to face the current healthcare challenges (Jones & Wolf, 2010).

Nursing education is at the center of these changes and transitions. Factors such as where and with whom individuals learn and how this information or knowledge is kept and accessed have changed. There are also critical factors that affect learning today, including (1) the proliferation of the Internet; (2) the use of Web 2.0 tools; (3) the emergence of a new kind of student, known as generation Y or the millennials, and generation Z, who think and learn differently than prior generations; and (4) the implementation of a variety of new teaching methods. In addition, these genera-

tions are defined as detectable groups that not only share birth years but also significant life events that are essential to their development, which are shaped by technology, family influences, global events, and communication (Lipscomb, 2010).

Time Flow

All transitions are characterized by movement over time and flowing. There can be multiple, single, simultaneous, sequential, related, and unrelated transitions (Meleis, 2010). Although MN's transition to travel and study was sequential, multiple, and related, her transition to online education was synchronized with conditions of COVID-19. It was considered that there were proceeding processes in assessing MN's transition experiences. The transition to online education must begin with educators being moderators in the online environment through planning and organizing course materials, ensuring high-quality instruction, providing social interaction opportunities, and creating a timeline (Wicks, 2009).

Critical Milestones and Events

These are essential markers such as birth, death, or diagnosis of an illness, which determine suitable interventions. Critical points can be different for each individual, reflecting the different nature and characteristics of change, and they can be associated with increased awareness of differences and active engagement with the transition experience (Meleis, 2010, 2019).

MN stated that the COVID-19 pandemic changed her life events. However, according to our evaluations during the interviews, the problems experienced during the transition to studying in a different country were probably preventive factors for the transition to online education.

Discussion

Transition Conditions

Facilitators and Inhibitors

These are defined as personal, societal, and environmental conditions that facilitate or obstruct the progress to achieve a healthy transition (Meleis, 2010).

Personal Characteristics

These include knowledge, attitudes, values, cultural beliefs, level of preparedness, and socioeconomic status (Meleis, 2010). Because some Arabic cultures prevent girls from traveling alone without their family, MN had negative implications at the beginning of the transition, but she tried to adapt and be independent. She planned to stay with a friend, experience different languages and cultures, gain knowledge and experience, be more active, and take responsibility for her decisions. In the second part of her experience, the COVID-19 pandemic changed her life; her friend returned to her family, her university closed, and she experienced another transition from classroom education to online education for which she did not have adequate technical knowledge or knowledge of how to adapt, meet her educators and fellow students, or how to study.

Community and Social Features

Community transition in the living environment can be facilitating or complicating. There are challenges in online nursing education from the perspective of the student, and these challenges are focused on the ability to provide real-world nursing situations in a virtual environment (Smith et al., 2009). MN stated that she was afraid that she would not obtain adequate information and that she would have difficulty with online technology, other students, and educators.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Theories form an essential framework to understand the complex conditions and enhance the process of nursing education to achieve unique experiences of students. The theory of transition seems to be a suitable tool for nursing students to understand the transitions experienced during nursing education. It also has the potential to help nursing educators and students to recognize appropriate strategies and practices needed to provide adequate support and assistance. Transitioning to online education generates a deep understanding of experiences and support nursing students and educators as well as reveals gaps between educators, students, and faculty regarding their needs, practices, and beliefs regarding online education. Therefore, the opportunity to examine the actual experiences of students who have transitioned from conventional classroom instruction to online learning may help other stakeholders to consider this method of instruction. In addition, nursing educators need to develop educational approaches and curricula that prepare future student nurses to overcome the current healthcare challenges.

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