Just the Prescription! An innovative teaching project to translate and transform nursing students' knowledge and understanding of pharmacology

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Background and Aims

Engaging with bioscience subjects can be challenging for some nursing students because they lack confidence in their ability to study science. Consequently, many students and qualified nurses have difficulty understanding and applying the bioscience and pharmacology knowledge that should underpin their professional practice, to provide safe and effective patient care. Recent evidence highlights variation in the extent of bioscience teaching and assessment across undergraduate nursing curricula and in particular there is insufficient pharmacology taught within the curricula. To improve student engagement in bioscience subjects, nurse educators need to develop innovative and creative approaches to enhance the teaching and learning of these subjects. Given the links between art, science and nursing, this project aimed to explore the benefits and impact of engaging undergraduate nursing students in pharmacology through the artistic medium of felt.

Summary of work and outcomes

This project was funded by a School Teaching Innovation Award, and aimed to explore creative ways of engaging undergraduate nursing students in learning key principles that underpin pharmacology in nursing practice.

All year two undergraduate nursing students were given the opportunity to participate in a series of workshops designed to explore the key pharmacology concepts through felt. The project, named “Prescription”, was facilitated by lecturers in nurse education, in partnership with an artist from Arts Care, a unique arts and health charity in Northern Ireland.

An active and engaging information session, was held to introduce students to the project, trigger interest, and recruit participants to the workshops. Felting engages all the senses and involves manually teasing out individual wool fibres, which are reconstructed to form intricate designs, before being finally bonded together using warm soapy water. Evaluation was based on individual pre-and post-workshop knowledge questionnaires, participants’ self-reflections.

Discussion and conclusion

The creative process translated and transformed the students’ learning and understanding of key pharmacology principles, while creating striking, memorable art works which are currently touring as an exhibition, entitled “Prescription”, across health and social care trusts in Northern Ireland.

The project was underpinned by the principles of good practice in undergraduate education: staff-student engagement, cooperation among students, active learning, prompt feedback, time on task, high expectations and respect for diverse learning styles. Evaluation of the Prescription project is ongoing but analysis of initial student feedback revealed the project was associated with positive emotion, engagement, meaning, positive relationships, and accomplishment – elements which have been identified as contributing to overall well-being and improved student experience. This paper proposes that using innovative teaching methods for pharmacology can enable students on any bioscience programme to flourish as individuals, enhancing both knowledge and overall well-being.