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Social Media and Population Health Virtual Exchange for Senior Nursing Students: An International Collaboration

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Abstract. The authors have all engaged in using social media with students as a means for collaboration across national and international boundaries for various educational purposes. Following the explosion of big data in health the authors are now moving this concept forward within undergraduate and postgraduate nursing curricula for the development of population health virtual exchanges. Nursing has a global presence and yet it appears as though students have little knowledge of the health and social care needs and provision outside their local environment. This development will allow for explorative exchange amongst students in three countries, enhancing their understanding of their own and the selected international population health needs and solutions through asking and responding to questions amongst the learning community involved. The connection of the students will be recorded for their use in reflection; of particular interest will be the use of information included by the students to answer questions about their locality.

Keywords. Virtual electives, big data, population health, information resourcing, education

1. Introduction

The move towards more citizen engagement with technology shows no sign of slowing down. The internet of things [1], big data [2] and social media [3] are three examples of information and communications technology regularly used across all age ranges of people, with nursing students being no different. Undergraduate students starting their course at the time of NI2016 will register as nurses in 2019 or 2020 and become practitioners in a world reliant upon managing, recording and using information to support care. This project is designed to help prepare nurses for their professional career in a global environment where collaboration will be valuable to resolve population health issues.

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2. Methods

The project is planned to run for three months. Ten undergraduate nursing students in New Zealand will be joined by 10 students from the United States and 20 students from the United Kingdom through a closed Facebook site where they will be directed towards exploring the similarities and differences of public/population health across the three countries involved. For example 'What is the impact of wearable devices?' or 'What happens if there is a chickenpox outbreak in your community?' or 'What does the health community look like in your country?' The students will drive the content on the site through questions and answers linked to their course work. In addition, they will be supported by Faculty and encouraged to use a diverse range of media and sources of information to gain a comprehensive appreciation of different population needs and outcomes.   At the conclusion of the project assessment of the metrics/analytics of the site and Faculty led focus groups with the students involved will take place and the results made available to each participating University along with dissemination of the findings.

3. Results

The preliminary findings of the project will be included in the poster presentation as the first release of results to the nursing informatics community. Additionally the experience of faculty will be shared, in terms of practical considerations for others considering a virtual student exchange.

4. Discussion

The ever increasing cost of health care provision for public, personal and privately funded health care requires us all to find new ways of working. As educators we are able to help students to understand how population health is assessed, delivered and managed through this explorative study using social media so that they can take such knowledge forward in their careers. Should our expectations be met with the project then we propose to expand the number of students taking part both in terms of the participating Universities and new institutions wishing to join this exciting venture.

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