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**Strategies for Improving NCLEX® Pass Rates:
A Summary of Nursing Education Program Findings and Interventions as Reported to the
Arizona, California and Massachusetts Boards of Nursing**

Factors potentially contributing to pass rate decline

Academic preparation of students entering nursing education program

- Students not prepared academically for rigors of nursing program
- Student performance in sciences and clinical nursing courses
- Low reading comprehension skills in spite of passing college level English courses
- Multiple repetitions/withdrawals allowed for prerequisite sciences and nursing courses
- GPA required for admission to nursing (related to science performance)
- Adequacy of high school preparation in basic math, sciences and English
- Deficiencies in developmental skills, such as reading and math, necessitating intensive academic support which student may not take advantage of because of their employment or child care responsibilities
- Cut-off scores on standardized admission assessments used for selection of students

Academic “rigor” of nursing education program

- Extra credit offered for projects
- Rounding up on grades
- Few objective tests
- Test questions constructed at lower cognitive level (many questions at knowledge and comprehension level rather than analysis and application)
- Students not expected to read materials
- Overly detailed study guides to teacher made exams encouraged students to study only for exam
- Grade inflation within nursing and in prerequisite sciences
- Absence of cumulative exams at end-of-course
- Multiple repetitions/withdrawals allowed for prerequisite sciences and nursing courses

Nursing student issues

- Employment 20 hours or more/week
- Family responsibilities in addition to nursing studies
- Primary language not English
- Delay of more than 3 (CA) – 5 (AZ) months in writing NCLEX after graduation (not quantified by MA but several programs report delay linked to success)
- Values of Generation “X” and the Millennial

Nursing curriculum

- Curricular changes made without NCLEX content mapping (content inadvertently dropped)

Faculty knowledge of current NCLEX test plan

- Unaware of NCLEX validity and practice-relatedness
- Unaware of NCLEX content

Nursing Education Program and Faculty Specific Interventions

Nursing program

- Raise cut score on admission testing
- Raise pass grade required for progression
- Eliminate grade inflation, rounding up, “fluff” projects for extra credit, points for attendance
- Review academic requirements of prerequisite science courses to eliminate grade inflation, rounding up, “fluff” projects for extra credit, points for attendance
- Incorporate assessment of English proficiency if English is second language, reading level and reading comprehension as part of pre-nursing assessment or counseling newly admitted students to nursing major
- Require prerequisite course for admission to nursing major be completed within five years prior to admission to nursing major
- Limit number of times prerequisite science and clinical nurse courses can be retaken
- Use standardized tests throughout program (some recommend this should be part of course grade)
- Add comprehensive content/synthesis course during last semester to review content, apply critical thinking skills
- Develop early intervention programs for “at-risk” students (NCLEX success program begins first day of program)
- Offer financial help in form of scholarships; partnering with health care employers to offer externships, tutoring and mentoring
- Support to unsuccessful candidates (participation in NCLEX review; access to computer lab; tutoring)

Nursing faculty – theory and clinical

- Become familiar with NCLEX validity and practice-relatedness; include in orientation of new faculty
- Use NCLEX Detailed Test Plan to validate curriculum; use as reference in curriculum development, revision, maintenance (conduct content mapping/comparative analysis of curriculum with Detailed Test Plan)
- Participate in item-writing workshops

References

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