

Title: Exploring opportunities in rural, primary care nursing: The student nurse perspective.

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Abstract

Background: The demand for primary care services is outpacing the number of primary care providers in practice. This gap in primary care is currently projected to increase significantly within the next decade. due to fewer expected entrants and greater projected retirements of primary care providers. As the complexity of primary care needs grows, so does the strain on the already limited physicians, PAs, and NPs.

Local Problem: The enhanced primary care RN role is a progressive role that optimizes the role of the RN within an interprofessional care team. Page County is a health professional shortage area, and until 2019 did not have RNs working in primary care settings.

Purpose: One solution to this deficit is to enhance the role of Registered Nurses (RNs) and include primary care education into the curriculum for students. Case management, management of chronic disease patients, medicine reconciliation, and wellness checkups would be some of the many responsibilities included in the expanded role, that are within the RN scope of practice. RNs in primary care would develop a more upstream approach to healthcare by focusing on education and prevention, as well as disease management. Enhancing the role of the RN not only alleviates the demands on primary care physicians, PAs, and NPs, but it also makes healthcare more accessible to patients leading to better health outcomes and reducing costly hospitalizations. Integrating primary care education into the curriculum for student nurses would allow students to develop the knowledge and skills needed to meet the growing demands of primary care. This project aims to describe an innovation in nursing education and the outcomes of student engagement in the UPCARE program.

Methods: The Undergraduate Primary Care and Rural Education (UPCARE) Project at James Madison University's School of Nursing is a federally funded program through the US Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resource Service Administration. This program focuses on giving student nurses the opportunity to immerse themselves in rural primary care community-based healthcare settings within Page County, Virginia.

Interventions: Student nurses in this program work side by side with RNs on rural health, primary care, and community health assessment and interventions covering concepts such as chronic illness management, mental health services, and substance abuse interventions. Scholars also participate in a variety of enriching clinical and co-curricular learning activities.

Results: There are 39 student scholars currently participating in the UPCARE project. Students work in collaboration with RN preceptors to provide primary care services such as follow-up appointments after hospitalization, health maintenance, chronic illness management, health promotion and education. The preliminary impact of the UPCARE project is demonstrated under quarterly evaluation; first-year revenue of analysis revealed over \$78,000 of new income for services generated by the enhanced primary care RNs. Through this collaboration, student scholars participating in UPCARE are able to help improve patient outcomes while gaining valuable experiences and education.