

วิถีทางสร้างสุขสำหรับนักเรียนพยาบาล

Pathways to Happiness for Nursing Students

บทความวิชาการ

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บทคัดย่อ

ความสุขเป็นประสบการณ์แห่งความรื่นเริง เต็มไปด้วยอารมณ์ที่น่ายินดี และเป็นความรู้สึกที่บุคคลรับรู้ว่าชีวิตของตนเองเป็นชีวิตที่ดี น่าพึงพอใจ มีคุณค่าและมีความหมาย ความสุขจึงเป็นสิ่งที่มนุษย์ทุกคนปรารถนา แต่ในสังคมที่เปลี่ยนแปลงไป มีความเร่งรีบแข่งขัน และเป็นยุคแห่งวัตถุนิยม ปัจจัยเหล่านี้อาจส่งผลให้ความสุขของคนในสังคมลดลงได้ ในบทความนี้มุ่งเน้นเกี่ยวกับกลยุทธ์ในการเพิ่มความสุขให้กับนักเรียนพยาบาลโดยรวบรวมจากวรรณกรรมที่เกี่ยวข้อง เนื่องจากนักเรียนพยาบาลเป็นกลุ่มที่มีความเครียดเนื่องมาจากการที่ต้องปรับตัวกับสิ่งแวดล้อมใหม่ การใช้ชีวิตภายใต้กฎระเบียบในหอพัก การดำรงชีวิตกับบุคคลที่มีความแตกต่างหลากหลาย วิชาเรียนที่มีความซับซ้อน การมอบหมายงานที่จำนวนมาก และการฝึกปฏิบัติงานที่เกี่ยวข้องกับความเจ็บป่วยและความสูญเสีย อีกทั้งผู้เขียนเป็นอาจารย์พยาบาลและเป็นอาจารย์ที่ปรึกษาของนักเรียนพยาบาล จึงมีความสนใจที่จะศึกษาและเขียนเกี่ยวกับประเด็นนี้ เนื่องจากการยอมรับกันอย่างแพร่หลายว่า ความสุขนั้นนอกจากจะก่อให้เกิดผลดีต่อด้านร่างกาย จิตใจ อารมณ์แล้ว ยังนำไปสู่การประสบความสำเร็จ ทั้งในด้านการเรียน การงาน และความสัมพันธ์ที่ดีต่อผู้อื่น คุณภาพชีวิตที่ดีขึ้น และการประสบความสำเร็จในชีวิตด้านอื่น ๆ อีกด้วย ซึ่งสอดคล้องกับคุณลักษณะบัณฑิตที่พึงประสงค์ที่ต้องการให้เป็นทั้งคนดี คนเก่ง และสามารถดำรงชีวิตในสังคมได้อย่างมีความสุข

คำสำคัญ : สุขภาวะ ความสุข วิถีทางสร้างสุข นักเรียนพยาบาล

Abstract

Happiness is the experience of joy, pleasant emotions and the sense of meaningful and worthwhile life. Thus, it is a life goal which all human desire to have. However, the changing and highly competitive world and the era of materialism may push people away from real happiness. In this article, our focus is on strategies for increasing happiness informed by the literature for nursing students because they have been found to be at risk of stress and unpleasant emotions due to several reasons such as changing environment, and nursing practice with sickness, sadness and loss of the patients and their families. The author, as nursing instructors and nursing students' advisors, were interested in reviewing literature related to happiness to identify strategies or activities to promote happiness among nursing students because happiness could ultimately contribute to

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greater learning and relationship outcomes, better quality of life and even more achievement in their life in the future. This is also in accordance with the desired characteristics of future graduated nurses: nice, excellent in both professional knowledge and life skills and capable to live happily in the changing society.

KeyWords: Well-being, Happiness, Pathways to Happiness, Nursing Students Background

Background

According to the literature, happiness is an attribute of well-being and these two terms are sometimes used interchangeably and that this article will use them interchangeably. Happiness is considered a major life goal of all human being. Nursing students are at risk of stress and unpleasant emotions for several reasons such as changing environment, dealing with complicated theoretical subjects and nursing practice which involves with illness, sadness and loss of the patients and their families they care for. These factors may negatively affect on their happiness. According to the current literature, great attention has been paid in this field both in terms of factors relating to happiness and how to improve people's happiness. Interestingly, happiness is associated with several preferable outcomes. For example, perceived happiness can lead to greater physical health, because it increases immune function and enhances cardiovascular functioning (Kauffman 2006) and accounts for fewer physical health complaints (Huebner 2004). Further, people experiencing positive emotions such as feeling joyful are more likely to think expansively and creatively (Fredrickson and Joiner 2002). Moreover, people with higher level of happiness tend to have greater mental health such as less anxiety and depressive symptoms and enjoy increased ability to cope with stressful life events (Carruthers and Hood 2004). Subjective well-being and life satisfaction is also associated with positive social relationships and active involvement in community, contributing to greater performance in school and more achievement at work

(Huebner 2004). It can be seen that happiness may contribute to even greater wellness in physical, psychological and social domains of one's life. Therefore, the authors are interested in identifying strategies based on the theories and relevant literature to increase nursing students' happiness, which in turn could lead to greater learning outcomes. In this article, we will discuss on the definition of well-being, its measurement and how to easily increase well-being for nursing students based on the three pathways to happiness identified by Seligman et al. (2005).

Definition

There are many approaches to define well-being. The definition developed from general concepts analyzed is "the experience of joy, pleasure or gratification, combined with a sense that one's life is good, meaningful and worthwhile". (Lyubomirsky 2001, p. 239). Further, there are two main approaches commonly used as a framework to define well-being. The first one is hedonic approach (subjective well-being). According to this perspective, well-being is based on the presence of positive moods, absence of negative mood and cognitive evaluation of various domains of one's life and assessment of overall life satisfaction (Carruthers and Hood 2004). The other approach is called eudemonic (psychological well-being). For the latter approach, it is described as fulfilling one's potential in a process of self-realization and it includes concepts such as sense of control, meaningfulness, personal growth and self-acceptance (Carruthers and Hood 2004). However, the subjective approach is more commonly used to define happiness

and it will also be used to define “happiness” in this article.

Well-being measurement

Well-being is commonly measured in terms of subjective well-being by using self-reported life satisfaction or affect. There have been a number of tools developed to assess subjective well-being with Likert-scale for self-evaluation. For example, WHO (Ten) well-being index is used to measure overall well-being. This scale seems to address both life satisfaction and affects as the 4 items aim at assessing symptom of depression, anxiety and vitality and the remaining 6 items address coping skills and judgment to life (Hansson et al. 2005). Further, the five-item Satisfaction with Life Scale developed by Diener and coworkers (cited in Vitterso et al. 2005) is commonly used in the literature to measure life satisfaction. In relation to affect assessment, Watson et al. (1988) have developed Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS) to measure both positive and negative affect, each with 10 affect items. The items that reflect positive affect include feeling enthusiastic, active and proud and the negative items include feeling upset, guilty and distressed. These measures have been proven to have adequate to excellent psychometric properties (Diener, 1994). Objective well-being is measured in dimensions such as freedom, medical care and standard of housing (Vitterso 2004). However, it is less used than subjective well-being scales under the assumption “happiness is a subjective phenomenon” (Lyubomirsky 2001, p. 239). In others words, happiness should not be measured by the objective dimension such as standard of living or access to medical service alone, but self-reported or subjective well-being should also taken into an account.

Pathways to happiness for nursing students

There are three pathways to happiness identified by Seligman et al. (2005): 1) through positive emotions, 2) through engagement in life and 3) through personal meaning. They call these dimensions “Pleasant Life, Engaged Life and Meaningful Life”. Strategies or actions based on each of these pathways will be introduced and briefly explained how to apply to reinforce happiness among nursing students.

1. The Pleasant Life

This pathway is about increasing positive emotions to promote pleasure in life. It is found that happiness is caused by frequent experiencing of a positive mood in daily life and only a little more positive experiences contribute to a significant increase in perceived well-being (Fredrickson and Losada 2005). The following 4 main strategies are example actions which can be applied in nursing students’ context to promote positive emotions.

1.1 Think of three good things

This intervention consists of thinking and writing down three good things that happened each day even a small thing such as providing a good care for patients, writing a complete care plan or having a chance to help others and receiving a compliment from someone and asking a student what he did to make each good thing happen. The intervention has been proven its effectiveness as people participating in this activity were happier and less depressed compared with those participating in a placebo exercise (Seligman 2005).

1.2 Savoring pleasurable activities at least an hour a day

Nursing students should be encouraged to identify their favorite enjoyable activities and devote a period of time to do such activities and mindfully savor the pleasure and feelings resulted from doing them. Some activities are found effective

to strengthen happiness and these are given as examples: 1) Writing a journal of thoughts, feelings, experiences, and what have learned in everyday life is recommended as it facilitates thinking process and it is a vehicle for reflecting one's thoughts, feelings or experiences (Brown and Stephen 1995). 2) Doing regular exercise is well documented as a significant factor leading to not only physical health, but also psychological well-being (Bonhanser et al. 2005). 3) Meditation is also reported as an effective way contributing to positive changes in the participants' feelings of relaxation and well-being (Dancan and Weissenburger 2003). They explain that it help facilitate a person to find internal peace which is found to be a great source of happiness, reduce stress and anxiety and has many positive impacts on physical and psychological functioning (Urme-Johnson 2003). Further, a long-term benefit of meditation is the development of personal insights that lead to greater self-awareness and ultimately happiness as well as spiritual development (Welwood cited in Dancan and Weissenberg 2003)

1.3 Development of hopeful thinking

Hope is a strength strongly associated with subjective well-being, and hopeful people tend to have less depressive symptoms, thus, cultivating hopeful thinking may enhance the pleasant life. (Park et al. 2004 and Snyder 2005). According to Snyder (2005), the hope could be enhanced by either improving sense of agency (Sense of I Can) or pathway thinking as the following strategies: breaking a goal into smaller ones, recalling past success and brain storming for ways to success. These activities are explained as follows: 1) Nursing students' advisors or instructors are encouraged to help them break their goal, or assignments into smaller tasks to increase sense of agency. 2) Nursing students should be promoted to recall past success such as getting a good grade in the previous semester,

being elected to be a leader in the class or winning an award in the past. This strategy creates pleasure when they have a strong sense of accomplishment and would generate motivation or power to complete a new goal. 3) Brainstorming exercise is done by identifying 5 ways to attain a goal. This intervention helps a person acknowledge that there are many routes to reach a goal and lead the person to use an alternative way when the first plan is blocked.

1.4 Forgiveness exercise

Under the context of nursing students' life in Thailand, they spend most of their time in the class and the college dormitory. Atmosphere in the college and the relationship between the students are important factors of their quality of life. Besides, they are usually required to live in a dormitory and assigned to work with other students who have various background, personality, attitude and interest in many tasks and assignments throughout the course. These can cause conflicts and dissatisfaction while living together. The students need some time to adjust themselves in a new environment and people and learn to forgive in order to increase their happiness. There are a number of studies indicating that psychotherapies that involve forgiveness contribute to improvements in many indices psychological well-being (McCullough 2002). This intervention is suggested by Kauffman (2006) to write a person's name that has done something hurtful to a participant in the middle of paper with few words about the hurtful actions. After that, draw 15 circles and fill each circle with a phrase describing positive aspects such as kind, helpful or generous actions the person did to the participant. The final step is to find the balance between hurtful actions and the positive circles in order to make a decision to forgive. Therefore, this activity should be used for nursing students who have conflicts or relationship problems with others.

2. The Engaged Life

The second pathway to happiness that can be applied to nursing students is called the engaged life. To increase their happiness, nursing students should not stay with their personal world alone, but spare some time to enthusiastically participate in activities that meet their personal strengths and take opportunities to engage with others. The literature indicates that the engaged life can be met when one actively involves in one's life by increasing engagement with activities and engagement with others (Kauffman 2006). Thus, these strategies are recommended to create the engaged life.

2.1 Engagement with activities

It is argued that one can find a task more motivated and intrinsically rewarding by addressing more on personal strengths to make a task more joyful (Kauffman 2006). All nursing students are encouraged to know their own personal strengths because this is the most important step to decide activities that can reinforce their happiness. In other words, this strategy is about identification and application of one's signature strengths by using free VIA-Inventory of Strengths copyright by Values in Action Institute which is the most accepted tool for identifying personal strengths. The assessment tool can be accessed online at <http://www.viacharacter.org>. These are the list of all 24 personal strengths: Creativity, Curiosity, Open-mindedness, Love of learning, Bravery, Persistence, Integrity, Vitality, Love, Kindness, Social intelligence, Citizenship, Fairness, Leadership, Forgiveness and mercy, Humility and Modesty, Prudence, Self-regulation, Appreciation of beauty and excellence, Gratitude, Hope, Humor and Spirituality. After completion the survey, five greatest personal strengths will be shown and they should be promoted to design activities according to their own personal strengths. For example, if one of their

personal strengths is gratitude, they have to write an action plan to participate in activities that allow them to express their gratitude such as writing a gratitude letter to someone they appreciate so much, but the persons have never been properly thanked.

2.2 Engagements with others

Carruthers and Hood (2004) argue that people gain positive affects and happiness through interaction with others. The strategy which is based on the notion is spending time with others on activities that gain mutual interest. Ideally, nursing students should be facilitated to join activities with those having shared interest. Besides, the activities they plan must promote use of the personal strengths among the persons spending time together (Kauffman 2006).

3. The Meaningful Life

The meaningful life can be fulfilled by increasing one's sense of purpose. This pathway includes identification of the most meaningful life goals and use of one's personal strengths in the areas that go beyond oneself. Kauffman (2006) suggested asking oneself about what are the most meaningful things that one wants a great grandchild to perceive and remember. The researcher also reported on a pilot study indicating that using character strengths in the service that bring benefits to others increases life satisfaction and experience of fulfilled life. Nursing students' happiness can be strengthened by arranging volunteer activities for other people's interest such as giving health education, reading a book for the blinds, donating money, clothes toys or personal stuff for children and the poor and blood for the Red Cross. Activities that they could apply their nursing knowledge and skills to provide benefits for others not only can increase self-value for the students who participate in such activities, but may also develop great attitude toward nursing profession. These positive emotions generate a sense of giver, usefulness

and purposeful life, contributing to what we call “internal happiness” for nursing students.

Conclusion

There are many stressors in nursing students’ context put nursing students at risk of stress and unhappiness. For example, changing environment and living with people from different background, difficult subjects, strict rules and seniority in the dormitory and a great amount of assignments and facing with sadness and loss of the patients and families they care for. Inadequate adjustment to these circumstances can decrease the students’ well-being. However, three pathways which include the pleasant life, the engaged life and the meaningful life as well as strategies addressing each pathway have been recommended to promote happiness for nursing students. We realize the importance of this issue because increased well-being would eventually contribute to better learning performance and many positive outcomes in various aspects of life. Nursing students’ happiness should be continuously assessed and there should be a certain action plan to increase happiness by using the strategies informed by the literature. The research on nursing students’ happiness level and the effectiveness the happiness program which include the three pathways to happiness in this article is recommended to expand knowledge in this area and use it as a guideline to develop a happiness program not only for the nursing students, but also for other groups.

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