Effectiveness of empathy education for undergraduate nursing students

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

- This is a summary of Levett-Jones T, Cant R, and Lapkin S.¹
- Empathy is the ability to understand and share other people’s feelings, often described as being able to put yourself in someone else’s shoes.
- Empathetic healthcare interventions are thought to improve patient outcomes.
- There is a need for preregistration nursing programmes to teach students how to be empathetic.
- The purpose of this systematic review was to critically appraise and synthesise the current evidence regarding empathy interventions in undergraduate nurse education.

METHODS

Inclusion criteria

- Studies looking at interventions to increase empathy in undergraduate nursing students.
- Experimental or quasi-experimental studies (quantitative data).

Search strategy

- Free text search of Google Scholar—to explore breadth of publications
- Pubmed—to identify MESH heading
- Searches in CINAHL plus, SCOPUS, Pubmed and ERIC

RESULTS AND AREAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

- Twenty-three studies from eight countries; two studies collected longitudinal data while four studies randomised students into intervention and control groups.
- Nine of the interventions resulted in an increase in empathy among participants.
- The most effective interventions were immersive and experiential simulations focusing on vulnerable patient groups (eg, wearing a hemiparesis suit) that provided opportunities for guided reflection.
- Larger studies using validated tools are needed that evaluate the impact of educational intervention on students’ behaviours in practice over the longer term.

TAKE HOME MESSAGES

- Nurse educators should employ methods such as immersive simulation to help their students enhance their ability to empathise with patients and carers.

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Funding

The authors have not declared a specific grant for this research from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

Competing interests

None declared.

Patient consent for publication

Not required.

Provenance and peer review

Commissioned; internally peer reviewed.

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Reference