

Plymouth University Courses and Learning Nursing Sustainability by Design: Embedding healthcare sustainability in curricula through interdisciplinary learning

Summary

How Plymouth University is addressing issues of sustainability in its provision of nursing education and training.

Project partners

This is a collaboration between the University's School of Nursing and Midwifery and its School of Architecture, Design and Environment.

The problem

Nurses have limited knowledge of sustainability and are poorly equipped to deal with the challenges of working in a changing environment. How does university education prepare its students for future scenarios where natural resources could be impacted by issues such as geopolitical unrest?

The approach

At Plymouth University, nursing and design students work together to tackle issues of sustainability in the health sector. They participate in interdisciplinary sustainability scenario sessions with the design students observing their nursing counterparts as they conduct clinical procedures as part of their skills training. Healthcare items and issues about waste are discussed, before design students produce sustainable prototype products that are then tested by nursing students and lecturers.

Our goals

To embed sustainability in the nursing curriculum; to make sustainability relevant to nursing and healthcare by focusing on resources use and design alternatives.

Obstacles and solutions

Making sustainability relevant to nursing	Use of clinically relevant scenarios in skills sessions
Embedding an interdisciplinary approach	Design students observe nursing skills, participate in sustainability discussion
Sustainability seen as a problem	Co-production of design solutions by working together



Profile

- HEI
- 28,000 students (includes full and part time students)
- 3,000 staff
- Urban

Finalist's case study

Performance and results

Over 300 nursing students and 30 design students have taken part thus far. We have demonstrated significant improvements in knowledge about and attitudes towards sustainability, and excellent evaluations have resulted in this approach being embedded in the nursing and midwifery curriculum and extended to other health professionals.

Lessons learned

The success of the project demonstrates the very innovative way that the academic community at Plymouth has embraced the challenge and opportunity of embedding sustainability in the curriculum. The main learning from this project has been in the positive engagement of nursing students in discussing sustainability issues when we use realistic scenarios that are relevant to their practice. Sustainability requires a multidisciplinary approach, and we have found that involving design students challenges conventional ways of thinking about healthcare practice, and enables the co-production on sustainability solutions.

Sharing our project

The project has been presented at five external and two internal conferences:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sw9rknh0RnE> is available.

Presentations have been given at a number of universities in the UK and EU (including Universities of Worcester, Maastricht, Zuyd, Jaen, and Esslingen), resulting in academics travelling to Plymouth to observe the sessions. Two papers have been published in peer-reviewed journals, and a further two have been submitted. The project has a potentially wide reach in UK and other English speaking countries as the skills sessions are being developed into a training package, and this Sustainability and Health Skills e-tool will be widely available from January 2015. We are working with colleagues in Germany, Spain, Switzerland and the Netherlands via Erasmus and have just been awarded EU-funding (€448,000) to develop sustainability teaching and learning materials in nursing (NurSus project). Replication will be supported through the development of the Health and Sustainability Skills e-tool, and an interview study to explore how the approach could work with other disciplines (currently underway). At the time of writing, the University is pitching the 'story' of the development of the module to regional health correspondents, and has published a feature on its website to raise awareness among staff, students and prospective students.

What has it meant to your institution to be a Green Gown Award finalist?

Professor David Coslett, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, said: "At Plymouth, we pride ourselves on the way we have embedded sustainability across the curriculum, and nowhere is that better demonstrated than with our nursing team. Being a Green Gown Finalist is a deserved reward for their innovation and vision."

Further information

Email: janet.richardson@plymouth.ac.uk Twitter @SSHRPlymUni #SSHR #NurSus

Sustainability, Society and Health Research: <http://www.plymouth.ac.uk/pages/view.asp?page=32806>