

CLINICAL PRACTICE

Educational strategies to implement domains 2, 6 and 10 of the 2021 AACN core competencies

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ABSTRACT

This article features strategies to instruct the competencies in Domains 2, 6 and 10, i.e., respectively, Person-Centered Care, Interprofessional Partnership, and Personal, Professional, and Leadership Development, of American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) 2021 core competencies for entry- and advanced-level psychiatric mental health nursing courses. These three Domains feature scientific knowledge, effective communication skills and collaboration with patients and other healthcare professionals in diverse clinical situations, and lifelong learning and leadership, which are essential in nursing practice. The creative examples for AACN Domains 2, 6 and 10 offered in this article can help faculty to more effectively prepare both entry- and advanced-level nursing students for evolving clinical practices.

Key Words: AACN core competencies, Competency based education, Entry- and advanced-level psychiatric mental health nursing curricula, Person-centered care, Interprofessional partnerships, Personal, Professional, Leadership development

1. INTRODUCTION

The American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) released the new Essentials: Core Competencies for Professional Nursing Education in 2021. These new Essentials outline competency-based intentions as well as the necessary content for graduates of all nursing programs within the following ten Domains: (1) Knowledge for Nursing Practice, (2) Person-Centered Care, (3) Population Health, (4) Scholarship for Nursing Discipline, (5) Quality and Safety, (6) Interprofessional Partnerships, (7) Systems-Based Practice, (8) Informatics and Healthcare Technologies, (9) Professionalism, and (10) Personal, Professional, and Leadership Development. The Core Competencies were developed based on foundational elements, which emphasize nursing as a distinct

profession that derives from general education and achievement of nursing-specific competencies. The main thrust is that nursing will transform the healthcare experience of the patient using an approach in which practitioners work together to address and better inform nursing care provided.^[1]

The following four spheres of care are used to describe healthcare across the lifespan, and move away from a primary focus on acute care: (1) promotion of mental and physical health, well-being and disease prevention; (2) chronic disease care, including managing and preventing harmful outcomes; (3) rehabilitative, critical, complex, acute and chronic care; and management of medically frail patients; and (4) terminal care for persons with complex and chronic diseases requiring extended care, and those requiring rehabilitative care. Entry-

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level nurses must master specialty knowledge and skills to care for populations across the lifespan and within each of these four spheres of care.

The Essentials include the following interwoven eight knowledge- and skills-based Concepts: (1) Clinical Judgment, (2) Communication, (3) Compassionate Care; (4) Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI); (5) Ethics, (6) Evidence-Based-Practice, (7) Health Policy, and (8) Social Determinants of Health. These Concepts are integrated in the Domains and Competencies to enhance learning for students.

Students' learning should be based on integrating the Concepts throughout professional entry- and graduate level nursing curricula. The Essentials can facilitate the transition from nursing education to practice. Mastery of the Sub-competencies enables both professional entry and progress to advanced education and practice.

This article presents key concepts from the new Essentials in psychiatric mental health nursing (PMHN) curricula, and offers creative examples relevant to instructing Domains 2, 6 and 10, of the 2021 AACN Essentials: Core Competencies for Professional Nursing Education,^[1] which are, respectively, Person-centered Care, Interprofessional Partnerships, and Personal, Professional and Leadership Development. Domains 2, 6 and 10 are featured in this article particularly to emphasize the critical importance of scientific knowledge, effective communication skills and collaboration with patients and other healthcare professionals in diverse clinical situations, and lifelong learning and leadership, which are essential to prepare entry- and advanced-level students for evolving nursing practices.

2. DOMAIN 2: PERSON-CENTERED CARE

Domain 2, Person-Centered Care, is the heart of PMHN, and nurse educators need to know how to incorporate this Domain throughout all aspects of education. The topic of person-centered care was first described by Rogers and Balint in the 1960's and 1970's in relation to psychiatric medicine.^[2,3] The discipline of nursing has adopted the idea of taking care of the whole person with a biopsychosocial approach, which PMHN educators teach today. Holistic patient-focused care is the heart of the nursing profession, which impacts all phases and aspects of patients' lives. Accordingly, nurses treat each patient uniquely, and encourage contribution to decisions about their care with the healthcare team.

Person-centered care is a foundational element of PMHN from entry- to advanced levels. Nurse educators must know how to incorporate these new Competencies into all levels of the nursing curriculum. Person-centered care encompasses areas of caring, communication, and self-care. Nurses must

be able to demonstrate empathy and compassion while also establishing mutual respect.^[4-6] Therapeutic communication is key to developing the respect and trust that is essential in the nurse-patient relationship. Another important aspect of person-centered care that helps build mutual respect is the promotion of self-care management. The patient is an integral part of the care team, who must be involved in decisions related to their care.^[7]

Competency 2.1 in Domain 2 focuses on engaging the patient in establishing a caring relationship. How can one teach caring, empathy, and compassion at both the entry and advanced levels? On an entry-level to practice this might include competencies of demonstrating qualities of empathy and compassionate care while also establishing mutual respect. Caring, empathy, and compassion are challenging skills to teach or quantify as a measurable outcome. At a beginning level, for example, something as simple as students attending a local support group for mental health patients to hear stories or view videos of patients' personal journeys coping with mental health.^[6] Case studies followed by small group discussion at both the entry and advanced levels can help hone these important skills. On an advanced level, this would include promoting and fostering caring relationships. The use of self-reflection with patients in the clinical setting at the advanced level can also help the instructor measure the level of competency in promoting and fostering caring relationships.^[8]

Competency 2.2 in Domain 2 focuses on effective communication. On an entry level, this includes demonstrating relationship-centered care using a variety of therapeutic communication modalities. At the beginning level, therapeutic communication techniques should be started so that students have the opportunity to hone these skills throughout their educational journey. There are several ways to effectively teach communication, but it takes time and practice. This is another Competency that touches all four spheres of care, because communication is at the heart of what nurses do. At the entry-level, the instructor can start with simple small group activities to identify therapeutic and nontherapeutic statements, and then they can practice with some small case examples.^[6] Being able to identify and use therapeutic communication techniques is how one develops relationship-centered care.^[8]

At the advanced level the nurse would be expected to demonstrate advanced communication skills and facilitate difficult conversations. Faculty can begin to use advanced levels of role-playing with students before going into the clinical setting. Role-playing can be done in a small group setting where students are given specific tasks and everyone can take a turn.^[9] Role-playing can offer a safe way to handle

difficult conversations before going out into practice. Another technique is the use of standardized patients, where the instructor can measure the ability to communicate. The use of standardized patients is an especially effective teaching method for PMHN student.^[10]

Competency 2.8 focuses on self-care management skills. For the entry-level nurse this includes assisting patients to engage in self-care management through education and respect for their perspectives in self-care. This competency emphasizes the independence of patients and the promotion of their ability to maintain personal health through all four spheres of care. Self-care management involves not only having the knowledge of the disease process and care, but also the ability to educate the patient regarding their illness. At the entry-level this includes teaching students motivational interviewing techniques to get buy-in from the patient. Without buy-in, the patient will not be an active participant in their care. Motivational interviewing has been shown to be an effective tool for nurses to use when promoting self-care management skills.^[10]

For the advanced level nurse, Competency 2.8 includes developing strategies to promote self-care by employing counseling skills and evaluating resources to support care. Motivational interviewing incorporates more advanced counseling techniques. Advanced practice nurses must be able to not only identify what is going on with a patient, but also offer the best options possible that align with the patient's beliefs.^[6] Being able to evaluate resources and offer current evidence based care can help the patient in their journey to mental wellness.

3. DOMAIN 6: INTERPROFESSIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

Domain 6 focuses on strategies to foster interprofessional partnerships in PMHN curricula. Competency 6.1 requires that entry-level students must learn to communicate to achieve an effective nurse-patient relationship particularly for mental health care. At the entry and advanced levels, interprofessional, intraprofessional, and paraprofessional partnerships are the focus for this competency. For example, respectful, collaborative, confidential, and intentional student-preceptor-staff-family communications must occur wherever mental health needs occur such as in obstetrics sites, geriatric care, primary care, and child care in throughout the educational lifespan.^[11] Collaboration between team members of multiple health professions, and of them with patients and families enhances healthcare. Relevant information from individual community needs assessments and healthcare consumer concerns can enhance optimal care for patients.^[12]

Competency 6.2 requires that students must demonstrate the ability to practice successfully in multiple and changing healthcare team roles. Students and clinicians must interact with healthcare team members to foster clear communication between patient and caregiver in areas such as shared purpose, mutual inclusion, trust and openness, and willingness to admit and correct errors.

Competency 6.3 requires students apply knowledge of nursing and other healthcare professions to deliver effective healthcare. Both entry- and advanced-level nurses must cooperate and collaborate with multiple mental health disciplines such as with psychiatrists, social workers, pharmacists, mental health counselors, occupational therapists and law enforcement personnel to serve patients' mental health need. Students shall learn to apply knowledge from nursing, other healthcare professions (e.g., medicine, patient case managers, and pharmacy), and community resources such as the National Alliance for Mental Illness to effectively care for persons in sites where mental health crises may initially appear, including personal residences, emergency departments, on the street, and in and police stations.^[13,14]

The focus of Competency 6.4 is for students to "discuss the importance of working with other professions to maintain a climate of mutual learning, respect, and shared values." This competency encourages students to recognize and reject any biases that could compromise effective collaboration with other healthcare professionals. Students must be taught to cooperate and collaborate with multiple mental health disciplines such as psychiatrists, social workers, pharmacists, mental health counselors, occupational therapists and police to serve patients' mental health needs. Working as a team exchanging different perspectives and knowledge markedly improves students' interprofessional learning.^[15]

Domain 6 encourages nurses at all levels to communicate and collaborate interprofessionally. For example, this competency can be taught through collaborative research and scholarship, including mentoring, networking, support from statistical consultants and editing services, facilities to conduct research, and institutional technology assistance. Multiple benefits can arise from collaborative scholarship, such as addressing issues of concern in multiple disciplines and opportunities for scholarship presentations and publications.^[16,17]

A study conducted by an interdisciplinary team consisting of a pharmacy student, nursing student, occupational therapist, pharmacologist, pharmacist-gerontologist, psychiatric nurse practitioner and statistician developed a non-invasive, convenient tool to assess for mild cognitive impairment in community dwelling older adults, which proved to be a successful strategy for collaboration across healthcare disciplines.^[18]

4. DOMAIN 10: LEADERSHIP

Domain 10, Personal, Professional, and Leadership Development is essential in PMHN education. Nurse educators are aware of the importance of addressing mental health issues in all populations. Having a strong foundation in matters related to personal, professional, and leadership development is key to providing sound mental health care. PMHN faculty must set examples as leaders in their clinical practices, professional organizations and community activities. Key concepts of Domain 10 include nurses being resilient, life-long learners, and advocates for patients.

Sub-competency 10.1 expects students to develop mentally and physically healthy self-care behaviors. At entry-level practice, this includes students engaging in reflective activities regarding management of inpatient situations and conflict resolution with other healthcare professionals.^[19] At advanced level, this includes resources to discuss self-care, including personal psychotherapy,^[20] supervision of patient clinical cases,^[21] and activities in which advanced level students present examples of patient cases to entry-level students, creating an educational collegiality.

Lifelong learning is a key concept of personal, professional, and leadership development. Nurses must be lifelong learners to adapt to a constantly transforming healthcare environment. For the entry-level nursing student, this includes continuing development in areas of professional need, such as learning Spanish or sign language to adequately meet patients' healthcare needs. For advanced level students, activities that support a culture of lifelong learning include educating healthcare professionals at the clinical practicum site about the scope of practice of psychiatric-mental health nurse practitioners (PMHNPs).^[22] Advanced-level students are encouraged to create posters to present at conferences, and develop manuscripts related to the mental health issues that present in diverse populations. Clinical sites are ideal environments for nurses to interact with advanced-level students, which may inspire some nurses to continue their own education.

Students at the entry- and advanced-levels should be encouraged to join professional organizations where they can meet peers and experts to develop their professional skills and interests. Students should be encouraged to participate in campus-wide and community events related to mental health awareness, suicide prevention, and healthcare advocacy. Organizations, such as the National Alliance of Mental Illness (NAMI) sponsor local and national advocacy events. The American Foundation of Suicide Prevention (AFSP) offers training, including walks to promote awareness of mental health issues, and educational materials that highlight their

advocacy work.

Developing a capacity for leadership is sub-competency 10.3 of Domain 10. For entry-level students this may be a unique experience in clinical rotations, where they first care for patients of diverse ages, cultures and ethnicities. In order for students to become self-aware and demonstrate cultural humility, clinical instructors may ask students to share information about the cultural and religious practices of assigned patients in clinical conferences.^[23]

Both entry- and advanced-level nursing students must be encouraged to promote diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) to reduce inequality in access to healthcare.^[24]

How might some of these ideas related to Personal, Professional, and Leadership Development, be integrated in an updated curriculum? For advanced level PMHN students, experts could instruct on topics such as the following: telehealth, suicide assessment, patient interviewing techniques, innovations and problems in psychopharmacology, family and group therapy techniques, legal issues related to practice, identification and initiation of research projects, and application process for an advanced-practice position. Entry-level students can benefit from learning how to compose a resume and cover letter, and how to dress and act at a professional position interview.^[25]

Competency 10 of Domain 10 may be interpreted to mean that nurse educators must continually update evidence-based course content and teaching strategies. Faculty must ensure that their information is relevant, current and evidence-based. Faculty must also review students' evaluations, and incorporate changes as is appropriate. It is essential to psychometrically analyze test scores; improve, revise and delete test items, and review material that students did not master. Examples of topics for course updates may include care of the LGBTQ population, health policy, professional service and leadership, quality improvement of care provision, trauma-informed care, treatment of specific psychiatric and movement disorders, and techniques in psychotherapies.

5. CONCLUSION

What will future PMHN education look like? Where will students acquire clinical experience and decision-making expertise? Answers to these challenging questions should begin with incorporating the new 2021 AACN Essentials and other resources from the AACN (<https://www.aacnursing.org/>) at both entry- and advanced-levels. This article focusing on Domains 2, 6 and 10 offers some examples to guide curricular revision to enhance student learning, confidence and professional development. The availability of inter-specialty clinical experiences, which affords students opportunity to

learn and respect the practices of other healthcare professionals, and vice versa, is vital to the evolving future of patient-centered healthcare.^[26]

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