Traditionally, health promotion experiences are provided external to the university setting in places such as area day care centers, schools, churches, elder living environments, and senior centers. Why not focus on the internal environment: the university community? This was a question posed to students, which in turn raised other questions. What are the health promotion needs of members of the university community? What role can sophomore nursing students play in promoting health among this population? The first step was to identify the health needs of the university community. A survey of students, staff, and faculty identified many needs, and students became aware that they had the knowledge and skills to address these needs. The outcome was that the sophomore nursing students sponsored, designed, and implemented a university-wide health fair as their first clinical nursing experience.

The overall objective of the health fair was to enhance participant self-care practices in health promotion. Specific student objectives focused on increasing awareness of the nurse’s role in health promotion, heightening recognition of individual responsibility for health maintenance, and developing skills for the nurse educator role.

Assessment

The health fair was designed over a 3-month period. The design was developed based on an analysis of the assessment data gathered from students, faculty, and administrators. Questions to the university community included the following: “What health information or screenings would be valuable for you to promote a healthy lifestyle?” and “Would you attend a health fair if it was available on campus?”

Responses to the assessment questions were compiled, and the most frequently mentioned domains for health promotion activities were identified. Major interest areas emerged and became the foci for the health fair. These areas included blood pressure screening, body fat analysis, osteoporosis screening, drug and alcohol awareness, nutrition, cardiovascular health, prevention and transmission of infection, strength and flexibility testing, massage therapy, cancer prevention and screening, alternative therapies, natural family planning, and prevention of sexually transmitted diseases.

Student groups assumed responsibility for each health promotion area. Students and course faculty contacted units within the university with expertise in the identified interest areas, and invited them to participate in the health fair sponsored by the College of Nursing.

Nursing diagnosis, specifically wellness nursing diagnosis, was introduced in this semester as a part of the nursing process.1 “Potential for enhanced knowledge” was identified by students as the diagnosis best suited to respondents of the needs assessment. To address this diagnosis, interventions identified by students focused on enhancement of participant knowledge and skills in each of the health promotion areas.

Planning

Students were involved in all levels of the planning process. Planning included selection of date, time, and a centrally located site on the university campus. Once this was completed, students organized into work groups according to topical areas, publicity, and site management.

The topical area groups met with campus group representatives to request their involvement. The public relations group designed tents for tabletops, innovative flyers for distribution throughout the campus, campus-wide e-mail announcements, and articles for the university newspaper. In addition, students contacted the three city television stations, one of whom responded by sending a photographer and reporter on the day of the health fair. The health fair then...
appeared as a local spot on the evening news. The site management group was responsible for set-up and tear down of the site, coordinating student participation in the health promotion booths, and assigning students to blood pressure screening.

During the planning process, students voiced concern about maximizing university-wide participation. Their idea was to use door prizes as a way of attracting participants. To this end, each student assumed responsibility for contacting one or two area merchants, family members, or campus centers for donations. Course faculty provided a letter on college stationery for presentation when making these requests. Merchants and campus centers were extremely generous with their donations; prizes ranged from gift certificates and tee shirts to a floral display and headphones. The prize drawings were conducted hourly during the fair.

Students had numerous opportunities to apply course learning during planning and implementation of the fair. One interesting learning activity occurred when an area merchant provided a tanning certificate. Because one topical area involved skin cancer, the students discussed the negative message of offering a tanning certificate, returned to the merchant, and received a replacement gift certificate for a hair cut.

As the final step in the planning phase, students designed an evaluation tool that also served as a registration for prize drawings. This dual approach resulted from their discussion that fair participants might be more likely to complete an evaluation if they registered for a prize drawing at the same time.

Planning by students was a key component to the success of the health fair. They worked within their work groups and each week delegated tasks for completion. They were creative in their focus, in planning the broad topics for inclusion, and in deciding which university departments and community agencies to contact for services. Student-designed health promotion posters, which were part of a separate course requirement, lined the walls of the health fair area, and were a testimony to the art of nursing.

**Implementation**

Student involvement in the process of carefully assessing, diagnosing, and planning contributed to the successful implementation of the health fair. The topical health promotion areas that developed from the needs assessment dictated the physical layout of the fair.

The first booth was a mini-assessment area that included centers for measurements of height, weight, and body mass index; screenings for osteoporosis and blood pressure; and information on cardiac and stroke risk factors. Students contacted the campus recreation center, the American Heart Association, and one hospital system to help with this station. The osteoporosis screening proved very popular with faculty, students, administrators, and staff. Students interacted with nurses from the hospital as they learned to perform the assessment, participate in data interpretation, and recommend referrals.

Blood pressure measurement has been reported as a popular screening in the literature. With this in mind, and because it was a nursing intervention the students had recently mastered, they provided two blood pressure screening areas. This was a positive intervention, as they documented blood pressure screening and education for 110 persons.

Because the time frame for the health fair coincided with the flu season, students focused the infection control station on handwashing. They provided demonstrations of effective handwashing, and emphasized its importance in preventing infectious diseases. They also distributed informational sheets on influenza and phone numbers for obtaining confidential counseling. The Director of the Institute for Natural Family Planning in the College of Nursing provided information developed through the Institute, including brochures and CD-ROM materials. He additionally provided a large display detailing the components of natural family planning and was available to answer questions.

Healthy eating, obesity, anorexia, bulimia, and vegetarian health information was provided by members of the Recreational Center, Counseling Center staff, and the nursing students in the nutritional area. Body-mass index testing was also available at this site.

A booth on alternative therapies was developed with the expert guidance of a nursing faculty who teaches a course in this area. Area merchants provided materials including aromatic oils, herbal teas, and information on the use of vitamins. Another alternative therapy, music, was played during intervals throughout the day. Students became aware of the effect of music on the crowd by noting a decrease in noise levels during music intervals. Information was available regarding the use of these modalities as well as other alternative therapies.

Faculty and students from Health Sciences facilitated the exercise physiology station. Professors, faculty, and students from Physical Therapy and Exercise Physiology developed a station for assessment, massage, and strength testing. One of the most popular offerings was a massage by the Physical Therapy students!
Nursing students observed, participated in, and enjoyed the benefits of this offering.

Evaluation

The student-designed evaluation tool asked six questions utilizing a Likert-scale format. The tool assessed organization, quality of information, usability of information, suitability of time and location, overall impression, and asked for additional comments. The lower section of the evaluation tool was the registration form for door prizes. Over 200 evaluations were returned for a 66% return rate.

The evaluation process provided the students with a time for reflection on a successful health promotion activity, as more than 300 people attended this first university-wide health fair. Students, staff, faculty, and administrators completed evaluations that reflected positively on the work and professionalism of the students. Some of the positive comments included the following: “Not only do the students know how to take my blood pressure, they know how to talk to me about what it means,” “This should be held every semester,” “Students were very well prepared, did an excellent job,” “A nice service for the MU community,” and “It’s a great way to let others know more about your discipline.” Among the suggestions for improvement were the following: “Should be in a bigger room,” “The hours for the fair should be extended,” “Hold it in a room that is more visible,” “Have an allergy table,” “Have a more anonymous STD table,” “A table about College of Nursing,” and “Flu shots.”

Analysis of the Likert-scale items on the evaluation instrument, with 5 being “strongly agree” and 1 being “strongly disagree,” revealed that 95% or more of the responses were in the “strongly agree” category on all items. This analysis is based upon the 200 returned evaluations.

Indirect Benefits

Leadership experiences for students in colleges of nursing are often placed at the senior level. Although not a direct objective of the health fair, several students emerged as leaders, and remain comfortable in the role. Many students became more aware of themselves as nursing students, as teachers, as sources for referral, as professionals, and as leaders. As students came together to assess, plan, implement, and evaluate the health fair, they built upon the skills needed to succeed in group or team endeavors.

Many comments at the health fair related to the professionalism and knowledge displayed by the nursing students. This reflected positively on the College of Nursing. Griffiths4 described the importance of sharing nursing knowledge with the public. The “public” in this case was the university community. One university student stated that she had limited knowledge of nursing before the health fair, but as a result of the health fair was now considering transferring to the College of Nursing.

Faculty analysis of the health fair process revealed many serendipitous outcomes. The students definitely became aware of the roles of nurses in health promotion activities. They acknowledged that they improved their technical skills prior to and during the fair. Faculty were gratified to see that a health fair venue for the university community was one option for health promotion activities, as well as a means of increasing the visibility of the College of Nursing.

Students also came to realize that they could benefit from information provided by other disciplines. Health fairs are both experiential and educational, and students became educated through their participation. One goal of a health fair can be to educate healthcare workers on better health habits,5 and students indicated that they learned valuable information through participation in activities including osteoporosis screening and alcohol awareness activities.

Faculty identified several areas of course content that were reinforced during the health fair experience. These areas included nursing process; leadership; the role of the nurse in health promotion; improvement in technical skills; application of skills, such as blood pressure monitoring, and breast and testicular exams; communication; collaboration with other disciplines; professionalism; and team building.

Summary

The health fair, which provided screenings and educational resources, was an innovative approach to address health promotion and illness prevention needs of the university community. As the sophomore students in the College of Nursing, using the nursing process, coordinated the event with the cooperation of faculty and students from a variety of university departments, they became cognizant of the roles of other disciplines in health promotion activities. Faculty and students involved in the event support the comment, “We should have one each semester.”

References