

Vision and Hearing Screens for Elementary Schools: Innovative Teaching and Service in the Community

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Background

UT Health San Antonio School of Nursing's goal is to expand the relationship between UT Health School of Nursing with the military community to include services to our military families. Aside from having many military bases, San Antonio serves many veterans at the Veterans Hospital and severely injured or burned servicemen at San Antonio Military Medical Center (SAMMC) and the Center for the Intrepid for Wounded Soldiers. Vision and hearing screens are a vital part for child health and promotion. After the child's home, school represents the second most influential environment in a child's life. The Vision and Hearing Screening Program at the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) and UT Health-SoN work together to identify children with vision and hearing disorders who attend public or private preschools and schools (TDSHS). About a quarter of all school-aged children have a significant vision problem [1].

Too few children receive the vision screening services that they need, which means that they go through childhood with untreated visual impairment. Common childhood eye conditions include nearsightedness, lazy eye (Amblyopia), and misalignment of the eyes (Strabismus). Left untreated, these eye conditions can create far-reaching and long-lasting consequences. Two to three out of every 1,000 children are born with hearing impairment, which can range from mild to profound. Many more children develop hearing problems after birth. These problems can have a negative impact on language and speech development, academic performance, and overall well-being. Research shows that identifying and treating hearing impairments early - before 6 months of age - can help prevent these outcomes [2].

Methods

The Faculty's goal is to provide health promotion and disease prevention services to the community, primarily military schools in San Antonio, and to prepare nursing students for post-graduation employment in a changing health care system (UT Health, 2018) [3]. San Antonio, Texas is considered a Military City with multiple bases. UT Health has many nursing students who are also in the military and upon graduation they will re-enlist as officers and serve as future leaders of our military. Faculty revised the nursing curriculum of Course NURS3273 to incorporate Vision and Hearing schools out at Randolph, Fort Sam Houston, and Lackland military bases, to better serve the community and the college's students.

By replacing hospital-based clinical experiences with community-based care, faculty responded to the community's changing needs while enhancing students' knowledge, skills, and employment opportunities outside the hospital settings [3-6].

- A. Family Course Curriculum
- B. # of Students
- C. 1 Day per week
- D. Reflection of Experience

Significance

School vision screenings are important and can help to detect eye conditions that are defined as “Commonly Occurring,” meaning that they occur in more than 1% of the target population (Timmreck, 2002). Early detection of vision problems has a demonstrated impact on quality of life for students, especially in the case of color-blindness, which is often not assessed “in any other venue except as necessary for entry into certain occupations [4].” Although traditional school vision screenings have focused on myopia (nearsightedness, or lack of clear distance vision) [7], children need to receive an eye exam by an eye doctor in a clinical setting that can detect issues with distance vision, close vision, color detection, and binocular vision (NAN, 2018). Schools, parents, and the community should work together to promote the health, well-being, and learning of all students. Faculty hopes to better prepare nursing graduates for employment in other settings by integrating community-based care into the nursing curriculum (UT Health, 2018).

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