Critical Thinking Cards: Transforming Classroom Knowledge and Clinical Judgment

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PURPOSE
- Implement an intervention to help students apply knowledge from the classroom to scenarios in the clinical setting.

BACKGROUND
- Teaching students how to apply classroom knowledge in clinical situations can be a challenge for any educator.
- Students retain up to 90% of content introduced when actively involved in the learning process.

METHODS
- IRB approved descriptive pilot study was designed to survey undergraduate nursing students regarding their perceptions about the use of Critical Thinking Cards.
- Population consisted of a convenience sample of 66 junior level nursing students enrolled in an obstetrics course at a Midwestern university.
- Researcher designed surveys were used to collect demographic and quantitative data from participants at the end of the semester.
- Two questions were included to elicit qualitative comments.

RESULTS
- Over 85% of students expressed a desire to use Critical Thinking Cards in other nursing courses and indicated the cards helped them apply content from class.
- 78% of students felt that the use of Critical Thinking Cards helped them improve clinical judgment.
- Qualitative student comments included: “The cards helped me think through problems,” “The cards helped me apply class and lecture content,” and “It was fun and helpful to work together to get the answers.”
- Faculty liked how the cards reinforced class content and indicated they were a valuable tool for use during periods of down-time in the clinical setting.

INTERVENTION
- Critical Thinking Cards are an active teaching strategy that incorporates questioning, coaching, and the “think-aloud” approach.
- Critical Thinking Cards were created by both researchers, who have over 50 years combined experience educating students and working in the field of obstetrics.
- A deck of 116 Critical Thinking Cards was distributed to each clinical faculty teaching in the obstetrics course at the beginning of the semester.
- Cards are the size of a standard deck of playing cards for convenience and ease of use by clinical faculty.
- Critical Thinking Cards were divided into four main content areas: Antepartum, Labor & Delivery, Newborn, and Postpartum.
- Each content area contained knowledge based cards for review, plus comprehension, application and analysis cards to enhance clinical judgment.
- Instructions for faculty included using the cards to help bridge the gap between classroom and the clinical setting.

DISCUSSION
- Critical Thinking Cards were a positive strategy to enhance clinical judgment at the point of care.
- Affordable strategy to actively involve students in problem-solving during the clinical experience.
- Interaction between students, faculty, and staff resulted in fostering a collaborative learning environment.
- Data gathered from this pilot study can be used to develop similar strategies in other disciplines.

FUTURE PLANS
- Create Critical Thinking Cards for use in other courses in the nursing curriculum.
- Develop focus groups to identify pros and cons of the cards as an educational resource.
- Implement further research to identify effectiveness of the cards and how questioning, coaching, and the “think-aloud” approaches were utilized.