

The concept of health among Japanese nursing students (Part 2)

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Abstract: This study compares the concept of health between nursing and non-nursing students. In this second part of our study, we analyzed the collected individual views on health and clarified the relevant factors and tendencies. Fourth-year nursing students had many more abstract and affirmative expressions, and non-nursing students had a tendency for both affirmative and mixed expressions. Moreover, only non-nursing students delivered negative expressions. Non-nursing students had a tendency to prioritize the social aspect of health first. However, this was not the case for nursing students. Fourth-year nursing students prioritized the physical aspect first compared with the other groups, but they did not put the mental aspect first compared with the other groups. Fourth-year nursing students can be said to consider their health not from one side, but from three sides, because they were anxious about their lifestyle and showed high levels of concern. Since fourth-year nursing students had many opportunities to experience both health and illness during their training, they considered their own health deeply and were simultaneously concerned about their healthy lifestyle. Deepening their own concept of health in connection with their actual life is required for people who wish to enter the nursing profession.

Keywords: concept of health; non-nursing school student; nursing school student; lifestyle; mental, physical, and social health.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of health differs between people and societies, and changes according to the passage of time. It is necessary for nursing students to develop the concept of health. In the first part of this study [1], we showed that:

First, when the three aspects of social (S), physical (P), or mental (M) health were observed, first-year nursing students tended to think that mental health was important when physical or social health was disturbed. In addition, first-year non-nursing students tended to attach importance to physical health. Fourth-year nursing students tended to think that mental and social health was important when physical health was disturbed. On the other hand, fourth-year non-nursing students tended to think that mental health was important when social health was disturbed. There was a tendency for fourth-year nursing students to perceive health from these three aspects, but not to perceive health optimistically compared with other groups

because they were anxious and showed high levels of concern about their lifestyle.

In their responses to the healthy opinion questionnaire, a significant difference was seen for “healthy optimism factor” and “lifestyle anxiety factor” between first- and fourth-year nursing students. A significant difference was seen in “lifestyle anxiety factor” between first-year nursing and non-nursing students, and for “healthy optimism factor,” “lifestyle anxiety factor,” and “health information desire factor” between fourth-year nursing and non-nursing students. Fourth-year nursing students had many opportunities to experience both health and illness during training; they considered their own health deeply and were simultaneously concerned about a healthy lifestyle, and desired information about health.

The first part of this study aimed to examine views regarding health among first- and fourth-year nursing and non-nursing students, and to clarify the differences. In the second part of this study, we

analyzed the collected individual views on health and clarified the factors and tendencies relevant to these perspectives.

METHODS

Design and participants

This study was a cross-sectional survey using a self-completed questionnaire as described [1]. The subjects were 96 first- and fourth-year nursing students at Kyoto Prefectural University of Medicine, and 89 first- and fourth-year non-nursing students at the Faculty of Regional Promotion, N University. The nursing students comprised 96 females (100%), and the non-nursing students comprised 23 males (25.8%) and 66 females (74.2%). Our investigation was carried out between September 1 and November 30, 2013.

Data collection and analyses

To analyze the students' views on health based on the free descriptions, the procedure involved first labeling what was described, ranking the descriptions according to the three aspects of physical, mental, and social health, defining the descriptive expressions (affirmative and negative, concrete and abstract), and analyzing the responses. The frequency tables of the responses to the questionnaire items were analyzed for the health survey. Regarding these three aspects, the definition of health from the World Health Organization (WHO) [2] was used, i.e., with P, M, and S dimensions. We evaluated the intergroup weight of the frequency distribution of the questionnaire using the chi-squared test. Significance was set at $p < .05$, two-tailed.

Ethical considerations

This study received ethical approval from the Institutional Review Board of Kyoto Prefectural University of Medicine (notice number of determination: ERB-E-30). The students received an information sheet that explained the study's purpose and methods, were given oral assurances that participation was voluntary, and their personal information was kept confidential during and after the study.

RESULTS

Overall view on health as assessed by descriptive labels

The free descriptions for questions concerning "thoughts about health" were divided into the minimum words or phrases from which a descriptive response could be derived, labeled, and examined quantitatively. The total number of labels was 92 and 63 for fourth- and first-year nursing students, respectively; 63 and 59 for fourth- and first-year non-nursing students; and the average number of descriptions was 1.7 ± 1.2 (fourth-year nursing), 0.9 ± 1.1 (first-year nursing), 1.2 ± 1.0 (fourth-year non-nursing), and 1.0 ± 1.0 (first-year non-nursing) per person.

Individual views on health

(1) Descriptive expressions (concrete and abstract)

The expressive descriptions were examined as to whether they were concrete, abstract, a mixture of concrete and abstract, or could not be referred to as being either abstract or concrete. For a representation to be concrete, it has to be distinctly understandable as a fact. "I am sound in health" and "I eat three meals daily" are examples of concrete expressions, while "I can move on with a smile," "I am sufficient in mind and body," and "I am sharp and motivated" are examples of abstract expressions. Meanwhile, responses such as "self-control is important" and "what I must maintain to do things I want to do" cannot be referred to as being either abstract or concrete. In this regard, the students whose whole descriptions were concrete expressions were 0 (0%) for fourth-year nursing, 0 (0%) for first-year nursing, 0 (0%) for fourth-year non-nursing, and 1 (3.4%) for first-year non-nursing. Those whose whole descriptions were abstract expressions were 41 (89.1%), 16 (69.6%), 20 (60.6%), and 19 (65.5%), respectively; fourth-year nursing vs. first-year nursing ($p < .05$), fourth-year nursing vs. fourth year non-nursing ($p < .01$), while those whose whole descriptions were both concrete and abstract expressions were 2 (4.3%), 1 (4.3%), 2 (6.0%), and 2 (6.9%), respectively. Students whose whole descriptions were neither abstract nor concrete expressions were 3 (6.5%), 6 (26.1%), 12 (36.4%), and 7 (24.1%), respectively. Overall, many abstract expressions were recorded. Only first-year non-nursing students responded with concrete expressions. Fourth-year nursing students responded with abstract expressions.

(2) Descriptive expressions (affirmative and negative)

Descriptive expressions were considered to be affirmative, negative, both affirmative and negative, or not divided clearly, i.e., mixed. In other words, we considered positive-oriented items to be affirmative, such as "I have a good appetite," "I have relationships with people," "I feel good," and "my mind and body are perfect." We considered non-negative-oriented items to be negative, such as "I have no pain," "I do not have a serious illness," "I have no discontent in my everyday life," "I have no problems with my body and surrounding environment," "I am not isolated socially," and "I have no bad feelings." We considered those items that were not divided clearly as being mixed, such as "I can appear to be enthusiastic every day even if there is a physical hindrance," "I think that I largely depend on my subjectivity," and "I can take care of myself." Affirmative expressions were 29 (63.0%) for fourth-year nursing, 13 (56.5%) for first-year nursing, 12 (36.4%) for fourth-year non-nursing, and 13 (44.8%) for first-year non-nursing; fourth-year nursing vs. fourth-year non-nursing ($p < .05$). Negative expressions were 0 (0%), 0 (0%), 3 (9.1%), and 4 (13.8%), respectively. Expressions classified as a mixture were 17 (37.0%), 10 (43.5%), 18 (54.5%), and 12 (41.4%),

respectively. Fourth-year nursing students had many more affirmative expressions, and non-nursing students had a tendency for both affirmative and mixed expressions. Moreover, only non-nursing students delivered negative expressions.

(3) The descriptive content of a health concept

We classified the students' descriptive responses into three aspects as shown in the Methods section. Among the respondents, 4 fourth-year and 23 first-year nursing students did not answer. Twelve fourth-year and 15 first-year non-nursing students did not answer. We carefully examined the aspects of each student's whole description. Descriptive responses for the P aspect included "I sleep well," "I eat well," and "I am physically fit and happy in life and work." Responses for the M aspect included "I am not seriously ill and am

without pain," "I regard myself as being healthy," "I feel good," and "I can keep smiling." Responses for the S aspect included "I have relationships with people" and "I am not isolated socially." For the combined P+M and P+M+S aspects, the responses for each facet were integrated. There were numerous other responses, including "I protect myself from illness" and "I largely depend on my subjective feeling." The results are shown in Table 1. There were relatively few (28.6%) first-year non-nursing students whose responses indicated complex thinking. However, 45.4% of fourth-year non-nursing students, and 47.9% and 43.5% of fourth- and first-year nursing students, respectively, gave responses indicating complex thinking about their health from the three aspects. More fourth-year nursing students responded with P+M compared to first-year nursing students ($p < .01$).

Table 1. The Side of the Descriptive Content of a Health Concept
Number of persons (%)

side		Nursing 4 th year n=46	Nursing 1 st year n=23	Non- nursing 4 th year n=33	Non- nursing 1 st year n=29
Single	P	7 (15.2)	4 (17.4)	4 (12.1)	8 (27.6)
	M	15 (32.6)	4 (17.4)	4 (12.1)	6 (20.7)
Compound	P+M	13 (28.3)	0 (0)	6 (18.2)	5 (17.2)
	M+S	2 (4.3)	4 (17.4)	0 (0)	1 (3.4)
	P+S	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (3.4)
	P+M+S	7 (15.2)	5 (21.7)	9 (27.3)	1 (3.4)
Others		2 (4.3)	6 (26.1)	10 (22.2)	7 (24.1)

P:Physical, M:Mental, S:Social, *: $p < 0.01$

(4) Ranking the three aspects

We ranked the P, M, and S aspects (see Table 2). The S aspect held first place for first-year non-nursing (4.5%) and fourth-year non-nursing (8.9%) students; fourth-year nursing vs. fourth year non-nursing ($p < .05$). However, this was not the case for nursing students. Moreover, fourth-year nursing students put the P aspect

in first place compared with the other groups; fourth-year nursing vs. first-year nursing ($p < .05$), fourth-year nursing vs. fourth-year non-nursing ($p < .01$). Fourth-year nursing students did not put the M aspect in first place in comparison with the other groups; fourth-year nursing vs. first-year nursing ($p < .05$), fourth-year nursing vs. fourth-year non-nursing ($p < .01$).

Table 2. Attachment of Rank to the Three Aspects

Number of persons (%)

		P	M	S
Nursing 4th year n=50	1 st	38 (76.0)	12 (24.0)	0 (0)
	2 nd	10 (20.0)	36 (72.0)	4 (8.0)
	3 rd	2 (4.0)	2 (4.0)	46 (92.0)
Nursing 1st year n=46	1 st	24 (52.2)	22 (47.8)	0 (0)
	2 nd	15 (32.6)	24 (52.2)	7 (15.2)
	3 rd	7 (15.2)	0 (0)	39 (84.8)
Non-nursing 4th year n=45	1 st	22 (48.9)	19 (42.2)	4 (8.9)
	2 nd	19 (42.2)	22 (48.9)	4 (8.9)
	3 rd	4 (8.9)	4 (8.9)	37 (82.2)
Non-nursing 1st year n=44	1 st	16 (36.4)	22 (59.1)	2 (4.5)
	2 nd	22 (50.0)	17 (38.6)	5 (11.4)
	3 rd	6 (13.6)	1 (2.3)	37 (84.1)

P:Physical, M:Mental, S:Social, *: p<0.05, **: p<0.01

DISCUSSION

Health views are generally accepted to change with individual perspectives on life and senses of values, but greatly change with cultural and historical backgrounds [3,4]. Mita et al. [5] reported that most first-year postgraduate students are more aware about health than when they were first-year undergraduate students because their health behavior was influenced by their daily life and shaped by college lectures and practices. Adachi et al. [6] reported that first-year students considered the concept of health as being passive, but on the other hand, second-year students considered the concept of health as being active. The nursing students' concept of health deepened according to their year of study.

The views described by students in this study differed according to the descriptive responses by individuals, and it was shown that there were 185 various views. In addition, if a descriptive response is analyzed as per the three aspects of the WHO (1947) definition [2], fourth-year nursing students are considered to show high concern about health and to be able to express their thoughts about health using many more words in comparison with other grades. When the individual aspects were examined, however, there were more nursing students with complex perceptions than among first-year non-nursing students. This might indicate a more holistic view of health, in that these

fourth-year nursing students have expanded their concept of health to include the mind-and-body approach, beyond the traditional notion of health for which the P aspect was emphasized. This concept of health is considered to depend on the students' historical background and educational content. Subsequently, to reveal whether the description of a health view is ideological or practical, we examined the descriptive responses depending on whether they were abstract or concrete expressions. Abstract expressions were most common among fourth-year nursing students. However, many more non-nursing students offered concrete expressions, which were practical and realistic in comparison with those of nursing students. Students with few opportunities to study the concept and model of health are considered to have thought about health in their own life. Moreover, in affirmative or negative expressions, although there were many affirmative expressions overall, we found that fourth-year students stated affirmative expressions when compared according to specialty grades.

To a significant degree, first-year nursing students consider the M aspect to be more important for health than fourth-year nursing students do, and fourth-year non-nursing students consider the mental aspect to be more important for health than fourth-year nursing students do. Therefore, fourth-year nursing students can be said to consider their health not from one side, but

from three sides. This may be because they have many opportunities to learn the concept of health and to study various health theories during the nursing curriculum, and consequently there are many opportunities to recognize one's own health. However, according to Tagami's study [7], nursing students did not recognize the concept of health linked to the environment. Therefore, it is further necessary to support the students to have more environmental interests and develop concepts of health while they are still nursing students.

The limitations of this study were that it included a relatively small number of participants and that the context was confined to a particular geographic location. However, this study offers some valuable insights into concepts of health among nursing students.

CONCLUSIONS

We aimed to compare the health perspectives between nursing and non-nursing students. Fourth-year nursing students were considered to show high concern about health and to be able to express their perspectives on health with many more words in comparison with other grades. Non-nursing students perceived health concretely, and tended to correlate health status with real life. Fourth-year nursing students responded with abstract and affirmative expressions. Non-nursing students had a tendency to prioritize the social aspect first. However, this was not the case for nursing students. Moreover, fourth-year nursing students prioritized the physical aspect first compared with the other groups. Fourth-year nursing students did not prioritize the mental aspect first compared with the other groups. Fourth-year nursing students can be said to consider their health not from one side, but from three sides. We concluded that fourth-year nursing students consider their own health deeply, while also considering their healthy lifestyle using information on health, partly because they have had many opportunities to encounter patients through their education and training. Given these results, it is necessary for the

future development of the nursing profession for nurses to further contemplate the concept of health by deepening their understanding of health, and to obtain knowledge on how others view health.

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