

# Evaluation of a New Women's Health Curriculum for RN-BSN students

Women's health courses traditionally have focused on the reproductive system. Feminist involvement is required for women's health courses to help women solve their problems more effectively. Callister, Coverston, Hobbins-Garbett (1998) proposed five advantages of incorporating feminism into women's health courses, namely improved self-awareness, understanding social context, active health consumers, integrated community activities, and increased nursing professional competencies. Among 16 nursing schools in Taiwan four (25%) provide women's health courses, while one offers a women's health curriculum combined with feminism. This study evaluates the relevance of a new women's health curriculum in RN-BSN students in one nursing school of southern Taiwan.

The women's health curriculum included ten units on dealing with feminism including Liberal, Marxist, Existentialist, Radical, and Psychoanalytical feminism and women's health issues including body image, infertility, abortion, menopause, and violence. The new women's health curriculum is designed to have nursing students to:

\* Consider women health issues from a feminist perspective. The first stage of this course is to introduce five different strands of feminism to the RN-BSN students and then lead the students into considering various women's health issues from a feminist perspective. After completing the course, RN-BSN students should be able to

apply feminist concepts to empower women to solve clinical problems. A five-point Likert scale was applied to 96 RN-BSN students to evaluate the relevance of the curriculum.

\* Additionally, three open-ended questions were designed to have RN-BSN students share opinions regarding feminism, women's health issues, and curriculum design. This study was conducted over two semesters from September 2001 to June 2002.

The results have identified that 96 RN-BSN students agreed that each unit on women's health is relevant, except for the unit on Marxist feminism. In open-ended questioning, some students indicated that the application of existentialist feminism to body image issues helped them distinguish self from the other and induced them to quit the medications on a diet. Moreover, two RN-BSN students were experiencing family violence, and the courses gave them the information as well as the courage to apply for protection orders or divorce. Additionally, some students recognized that the new and creative curriculum could lead them to consider women's health from new and fresh perspectives.

This study thus concluded that feminism could inspire RN-BSN students to make their own decisions and voice their own clinical needs. In the long term, RN-BSN students who have completed this course can act as women's advocates in raising consciousness when facing issues of body image, infertility, abortion, menopause, and violence.

**Ya-Lie Ku PhD Candidate, RN, Instructor of Community in the Department of BSN Program Foo Yin University**

**Man-Hua Shen MSN, RN, Instructor of Maternity in the Department of B SN Program**

**Wen-Ting Chen MSN, RN, Instructor of Psychiatry in the Department of B SN Program**