Knowledge Gained Through a Labor Support Seminar

by Gayle Kipnis, PhD MSN RNC-OB AHN-BC

Abstract: Continuous labor support has been found to be the gold standard in the management of labor but the increased demands on nurses take them away from the bedside. Labor coaching is being taught to student nurses within their college curriculum through three-hour labor support seminars in Northern California. As an evaluation tool, a test was developed and administered pre and post seminar to document knowledge acquisition. Results showed a statistically significant increase in scores. To ensure that laboring women receive the continuous labor support they need, interdisciplinary collaboration between childbirth educators, doulas, and nursing school faculty is vital.

Keywords: Labor support, nursing students, childbirth education, prepared childbirth

Introduction

Nursing programs throughout the United States offer obstetrical curricula to thousands of nursing students each semester that include hospital clinical experiences in labor and delivery. Student nurses enter into their hospital rotation in labor and delivery but may not have the necessary information to function with comfort and competency. Limited clinical placement sites require beginning clinical practicum early in the semester prior to the presentation of the majority of the didactic obstetrical content. Teaching labor support to nursing students needs to be an interdisciplinary effort as it can enhance knowledge as well as increase respect among professionals that begins while they are novices. Effective nursing education can be accomplished in a variety of ways including having collaboration between university/college faculty, childbirth educators, and doulas.

A three-hour labor support seminar was developed through a Northern California university (Kipnis, 2011) and is now being offered each semester during the first weeks of class in order to prepare student nurses for their labor & delivery experience. This seminar is also being taught to students in other schools of nursing upon invitation. Prior to one of these guest seminars, a test was developed and administered to 36 associate degree nursing students. The objective of this test was to compare the student nurses’ knowledge before and after this labor support seminar.

Background and Significance

Continuous labor support has been found to be the gold standard in labor management. According to a Cochrane systematic review of 21 research trials involving 15,061 laboring women, continuous labor support can result in decreased use of epidurals and cesarean births as well as an increase in shorter labors and satisfaction with the birth experience (Hodnett, Gates, Hofmeyr, Sakala, & Weston, 2011). However, in 2011, AWHONN (Association of Women’s Health, Obstetric and Neonatal Nurses, 2011) published their position statement, “Nursing Support of Laboring Women,” which identified that although labor support by nurses is a vital component to achieving improved birth outcomes, many institutions do not staff adequately to enable registered nurses to provide it. The increase in obstetrical acuity, technology, obstetrical interventions, and high-alert medications consume the focus and time of the nurses which allows little time to offer support to the laboring woman.

Hodnett et al. (2011) also reported that the person most beneficial in providing continuous labor support is one who is present solely to provide labor support and is not a member of the woman’s family or social circle. Doulas are specifically trained to provide labor support but in our rural
Knowledge Gained Through a Labor Support Seminar  
continued from previous page

setting the public is either unaware of their presence or unable to pay for individualized services. Nursing students want to be involved and participate in their obstetrical clinical hospital experience but often they are limited by a lack of labor basics, the practical aspects of labor support, and what they can do to assist the nursing staff and the patients. It was hypothesized that with this seminar, the student nurses’ knowledge level would increase so that they would be able to offer labor assistance to women and their families in the hospital setting during their clinical practicum.

Setting

A three hour labor support seminar was offered to 36 associate-degree students in the Sacramento, California area. The seminar was held during the second week of their obstetrical course content in a childbirth education classroom at a local area hospital. Twenty-five percent of this group of students had already started their clinical practicum in a Sacramento area hospital. A 10-question test was designed to evaluate student nurses’ knowledge of practical obstetrical concepts and labor support. The test was administered immediately prior to and at the conclusion of the three-hour labor support seminar. The data was analyzed utilizing a paired t-test to evaluate the impact of the seminar on student’s knowledge scores.

Results

There was a statistically significant increase in scores from the pre-test (M=64.44, SD 12.06) (Refer to Figure 1) to the post-test (M=91.11, SD 11.66) (Refer to Figure 2), t (36) = 10.45, p<.0005 (two-tailed). The mean increase in scores was 26.67 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from 21.48 to 31.85 (Refer to Table 1). The eta squared statistic (.76) indicated a large effect size.

Table 1. Paired Samples T-test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paired Differences</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig. (2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pair 1 post - pre</td>
<td>26.66667</td>
<td>15.30639</td>
<td>2.55107</td>
<td>21.48773 to 31.84561</td>
<td>10.453</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1. Mean Scores on Labor Support Pre-Test

Figure 2. Mean Scores on Labor Support Post-Test
Knowledge Gained Through a Labor Support Seminar
continued from previous page

Discussion
The magnitude of the effect of this labor support seminar was quite large. The average score of the 36 students was 64/100 on the pre-test and 91/100 on the post-test. The interactive focus to this labor support seminar engages multiple senses of each learner and demands full focus as the students learn the practical and hands-on aspects of being a labor coach. Once basic concepts were covered, the students formed laboring dyads and learned interventions such as massage, relaxation, verbal encouragement, and labor symptom management. Breathing exercises are a favorite focus of almost each group of nursing students especially as they each have the opportunity to practice pushing techniques for second stage labor. Being fully present during an active learning experience is very powerful and makes recall easier for students.

Implications
As a childbirth educator, participating in teaching labor support seminars to nursing students can expand their awareness of and respect for the vital roles of childbirth educators and doulas. As these new nurses enter the profession, there will be an enhanced understanding of labor education and the primary role of doulas in providing continuous labor support. Interdisciplinary collaboration between nursing faculty, childbirth educators, and doulas is vital for success of labor support seminars since most faculty do not possess the specialty training as a childbirth educator or doula.

As a childbirth educator, participating in teaching labor support seminars to local nursing students can expand their awareness of and respect for the vital roles of childbirth educators and doulas.

As with any educational program, evaluation is necessary to assess whether knowledge acquisition is occurring. Statistical analysis can be utilized through the pre/post-test method utilizing paired sample t-tests which can be run on statistical software within minutes. Output includes tables and charts that can explain the results graphically.

Conclusion
Offering a 3-hour labor support seminar is a very effective approach in delivering obstetrical content and experiential learning of labor support for nursing students. For this group of 36 nursing students, their test scores demonstrated a statistically significant increase averaging over 26 points. Most importantly, they enjoyed their learning and have knowledge that can be applied to assist laboring women during their clinical practicum.

If labor & delivery nurses do not have the time to offer continuous support, within every community we need an alternative to supporting laboring women and their families toward the goal of lessening cesarean births and promoting shorter labors and birth experience satisfaction. The collaboration between childbirth educators, doulas, and faculty in providing labor support seminars to nursing students can be an effective component toward a solution.

continued on next page
Knowledge Gained Through a Labor Support Seminar

continued from previous page

References


Gayle Kipnis is an assistant professor in the School of Nursing at California State University in Chico, California. She has been a nurse for 40 years and remains passionate about providing labor support to women during childbirth and in mentoring her nursing students.

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