

# Community Practice: Strengthening Primary Health Care with Nursing Students

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## ABSTRACT

Primary Health Care (PHC) is essential to guarantee universal access and equity in health. The incorporation of nursing students in community practices emerges as a promising strategy to strengthen PHC, while enriching the training of future professionals. This article explores the impact and benefits of community practice of nursing students in the context of PHC, highlighting its potential to address the health needs of communities and develop essential competencies in students. Community practice is an essential component in the training of nursing students, allowing the development of clinical, educational and social competencies in real scenarios. This study analyzes the impact of student participation in Primary Health Care (PHC) activities in vulnerable communities, highlighting how this experience strengthens both their professional training and community health. Through a qualitative-descriptive methodology, data were collected through observations, semi-structured interviews and field diaries. The results show improvements in health promotion, community education and the link between the health system and the population. It is concluded that community practice is a key tool to reinforce the comprehensive approach to PHC and train professionals committed to social welfare. Integrating nursing students into community practice not only improves their skills and knowledge, but also strengthens primary care. This article explores how the active participation of nursing students in community settings can improve both their training and the quality of primary health care.

**Keywords:** Primary Health Care, Community Practice, Nursing Students, Nursing Education, Community Nursing

## INTRODUCTION

Primary Health Care (PHC) is globally recognized as the cornerstone of efficient and equitable health systems (World Health Organization, 1978). In this context, the training of nursing professionals with solid PHC competencies is crucial. Community practice, understood as the immersion of students in real community environments under the supervision of professionals, offers an invaluable opportunity to achieve this goal. This modality of practice not only exposes students to the realities and challenges of PHC, but also actively contributes to the strengthening of health services at the community level. This article seeks to analyze how the community practice of nursing students positively impacts PHC and the training of future professionals. It is also the fundamental strategy to guarantee equitable and efficient access to health services. In this context, the training of trained human resources who are sensitive to community realities is key. Community practice in the Nursing career not only allows the application of the knowledge acquired, but also strengthens social commitment and the ability to respond to local needs. This article explores how community practice carried out by nursing students contributes to the strengthening of PHC in vulnerable contexts.

## Development

The integration of nursing students into PHC teams through community practice generates a series of interrelated benefits:

### 1. Strengthening PHC

**Expanded scope of interventions:** Students, under supervision, can expand the capacity of PHC teams to carry out health promotion, disease prevention, chronic patient follow-up, and home visits.

**Identification of community needs:** Direct contact with the population allows students to understand first-hand the specific health needs of the community and the social determinants that influence them.

**Innovation and new perspectives:** Students bring new ideas and approaches, enriching care strategies and promoting the adaptation of interventions to local particularities.

## 2. Development of competencies in nursing students

**Practical application of theoretical knowledge:** Community practice provides the opportunity to apply the knowledge acquired in the classroom to real situations, consolidating learning.

**Development of clinical and communication skills:** Students gain experience in conducting assessments, basic procedures, health education, and effective communication with patients and families in their environment.

**Fostering social sensitivity and professional ethics:** Exposure to the realities of vulnerable communities promotes empathy, understanding of diversity, and commitment to social justice in health.

**Development of interdisciplinary teamwork skills:** Collaboration with other health professionals in the community context strengthens teamwork skills and understanding of the role of nursing within the PHC team.

## METHODOLOGY

A qualitative descriptive approach was used. The participating population was composed of 30 final-year nursing students who carried out their community internship in three vulnerable neighborhoods in the urban area over a period of 8 weeks. The following techniques were used, such as:

- Participant observation
- Semi-structured interviews with students and community leaders
- Field diary analysis

Data analysis was performed using open coding and thematic categorization.

## RESULTS

The main findings were grouped into three categories:

a. Strengthening of professional competencies: Students improved skills in communication, interdisciplinary work, activity planning, and problem-solving in community contexts.

b. Impact on the community: The promotion and prevention activities carried out (talks, home visits, vaccination campaigns) contributed to improving health knowledge and strengthening the link with primary care centers.

c. Institutional articulation: An improvement was observed in the articulation between universities, health centers and neighborhood organizations, generating an effective collaboration network.

## Role of Nursing Students

Hands-on training in community settings allows nursing students to gain skills needed to meet health care challenges in the community. This direct experience fosters a sense of social responsibility and professionalism in future nurses.

## Acquired Skills

- Effective Communication: Encourage clear and empathetic communication with patients.
- Needs Assessment: Identify and prioritize community health needs.
- Community Intervention: Develop and implement community health programs.

## Implementation of Community Practices

Implementing community practices for nursing students requires effective collaboration between educational institutions and community health organizations.

### Implementation Strategies

1. Intersectoral Collaboration: Establish alliances between universities and local health centers.
2. Training Programs: Design specific programs that prepare students to work in community settings.
3. Supervision and Mentoring: Provide ongoing supervision and mentorship by experienced professionals.

## Community Impact

The inclusion of nursing students in primary health care not only benefits students, but also has a positive impact on the community.

## Positive Results

- Improvement of Health Services: Increase in the quality and accessibility of health services.
- Community Empowerment: Greater community participation in the management of their own health.
- Reducing Disparities: Reducing health disparities in vulnerable populations.
- Teaching-learning methodologies in community practice

Community Practice has become an essential pillar in the training of nursing students, as it not only allows them to apply the knowledge acquired in the classroom, but also strengthens their practical and social skills. Through

this experience, students develop key competencies such as effective communication, empathy and the ability to work in a team, skills that are fundamental in the field of primary health care. By engaging directly with communities, students have the opportunity to face real-life situations that help them better understand the health needs of the population, which, in turn, prepares them to be more competent and engaged professionals. In addition, primary health care benefits greatly from the implementation of innovative teaching-learning methodologies within community practice. These methodologies, which include problem-based learning and collaborative work, promote an active approach to learning, where students are not only receivers of information, but also become agents of change in their communities. This dynamic approach improves the quality of care provided, as students are able to apply their knowledge effectively and adaptively to the particular circumstances of each community.

- **Relationship between theory and practice in health education**

Community Practice significantly enriches the training of nursing students by providing a real context where they can apply the theory learned in the classroom. The connection between theory and practice is crucial in health education, as it allows students to see the relevance of their studies and how they translate into concrete actions that impact people's lives. By participating in community activities, students can observe first-hand how theories on public health, disease prevention, and health promotion are implemented in everyday life, helping them consolidate their learning.

On the other hand, nursing students also play a fundamental role in strengthening primary health care through their interventions in communities. Their presence and active participation not only contribute to the improvement of the health of the population, but also allow them to gather valuable information about the needs and concerns of citizens. This feedback is essential to tailor health programs and ensure they are relevant and effective, thus creating a cycle of continuous improvement.

- **Success stories in student-led primary care projects**

Community Practice has proven to be an effective approach to improving primary health care, and there are numerous success stories to support this claim. In various communities, nursing students have led innovative projects that address specific health issues, such as vaccination campaigns, health education workshops, and chronic disease prevention programs. These projects have not only had a positive impact on the health of the population, but have also empowered students, giving them the confidence and skills needed to lead initiatives in the future.

A notable example is the development of a diabetes education program in a rural community, where students not only taught about the disease, but also worked with residents to develop self-care strategies. Not only does this type of initiative improve the health of the community, but it also provides students with invaluable experience that complements their academic background, demonstrating that community practice can be a real and lasting driver of change.

- **The voice of the community in nursing education**

One of the most enriching aspects of Community Practice is the opportunity to empower nursing students by giving them a platform to listen to and learn from the community's voice. Through direct interaction with community members, students can better understand the realities and challenges people face in terms of health. This connection not only provides them with a broader perspective, but also helps them develop a more humane and patient-centered approach to their future professional practice.

Primary health care is significantly strengthened when the community voice is incorporated into the training of students. By listening to community concerns and needs, students can tailor their health interventions and programs to be more effective and relevant. This collaborative approach fosters a relationship of trust between health professionals and citizens, which is essential for the success of any public health initiative.

## **DISCUSSION**

Community practice allows students to understand the complexity of the social determinants of health and act on them with a participatory approach. At the same time, their presence in the territory represents a valuable resource to reinforce PHC actions, especially in areas with a lack of resources. These findings coincide with previous studies that highlight the value of field training for a nursing committed to equity and justice social. Community practice represents a win-win strategy. On the one hand, it strengthens the operational capacity and quality of Primary Health Care by expanding the scope of interventions and providing new perspectives. On the other hand, it significantly enriches the training of future nursing professionals, preparing them to address the challenges of PHC with competence and sensitivity.

However, the successful implementation of community practice programs requires careful planning, adequate supervision by teachers and health professionals, and effective articulation between educational institutions and

health centers. It is critical to ensure that student activities are aligned with the needs of the community and that they are provided with the necessary support for meaningful learning.

## CONCLUSION

Community practice with nursing students is a powerful tool to strengthen Primary Health Care. Its strategic implementation not only contributes to improving the health of communities, but also trains nursing professionals who are more competent, committed and sensitive to the realities of the first level of care. Encouraging and supporting these initiatives is critical to moving towards fairer and more equitable health systems.

The experience of community practice represents a powerful pedagogical strategy that contributes both to the comprehensive training of students and to the strengthening of Primary Health Care in community contexts. Its systematic inclusion in training programs and greater articulation with local actors is recommended to maximize its impact.

Incorporating nursing students into community practice is an effective strategy to strengthen primary health care. Not only does it benefit students and communities, but it also promotes a more equitable and accessible health system. This collaborative and educational approach can be key to improving overall public health.

## Recommendations for Improving Community Practice Experience

To maximize the benefits of community practice, it is critical to foster collaboration between nursing students and the communities in which they work. This collaboration not only enriches the students' learning experience, but also ensures that health interventions are relevant and well-received by the population. Partnerships can be established with community organizations, local leaders, and other key actors to create a more inclusive and effective learning environment.

In addition, implementing workshops on primary health care during internships can be an effective strategy to improve the student experience. These workshops can address topics such as health promotion, disease prevention, and community resource management, providing students with practical tools and knowledge that they can apply in their community projects. In the end, the key to a successful community practice experience lies in the collaboration, continuing education, and commitment of everyone involved in the process.

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