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Teaching Tenacity: Shaping Competent and Resilient Nurses

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Successful completion of a baccalaureate nursing education program by potentially unsuccessful students is a phenomenon that has repeatedly grabbed my attention. Many nursing students graduate at the top of their high school class, are on the Dean's list and for the most part, have achieved academic success with minimal effort. Unfortunately, by the middle of their first semester of nursing school, nearly 20% of these students are at-risk of failure. This number decreases to approximately 5% by the end of the semester. This is significant because graduation rates for baccalaureate programs continue to be negatively impacted by increased attrition and decreased retention. After observing this phenomenon semester after semester, I pondered what enables potentially unsuccessful students to succeed. When counseling potentially unsuccessful students, they verbalize feelings of anxiety and stress, but are able to succeed despite academic adversity. These students possess an indomitable spirit; are supported by family, friends, peers and professors; are able to view adversity through a positive lens and approach it from a position of empowerment; and are flexible with their thoughts and feelings.

A two-day resiliency training program was developed to increase resiliency by cultivating four competencies: Grit, Relationships, Optimism and Emotional agility. Prior to the first session, student's grit and academic resiliency are assessed. Session one occurs 3-5 weeks after the start of the academic term with session two occurring 6-8 weeks later. Educational strategies implemented during the two sessions include motivational self-talk, goal-setting, journaling and relationship building. At the conclusion of the academic term, student's grit and academic resiliency are reassessed.

Biography:

Kwanza M. Thomas, MSN, RN is a nursing faculty member at Valdosta State University, College of Nursing and Health Sciences in Valdosta, Georgia. She is a member of Georgia Association of Nurse Educators (GANE), Sigma Theta Tau International Honor Society of Nursing and is a certified BLS for Health Care Providers instructor. Kwanza has worked in a Level III NICU and also has experience in Medical-Surgical nursing and home health care. She believes the knowledge and skills received from her teachers were gifts and loves sharing those gifts with students who long to partake in this sacred work.