

## Exploring Communities of Practice through Public Health Walks for Nurse Education

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**Abstract :** Introduction: Student nurses must develop skills in observation, communication and reflection as well as public health knowledge from their first year of training. This paper will explain a method developed for students to collect their own findings about public health in urban areas. These areas are both rich in the history of old public health that informs the content of many traditional public health walks, but are also locations where new public health concerns about chronic disease are concentrated. The learning method explained in this paper enables students to collect their own data and write original work as first year students. Examples of their findings will be given. Methodology: In small groups, health care students are instructed to walk in neighbourhoods near to the hospitals they will soon attend as apprentice nurses. On their walks, they wander slowly, engage in conversations, and enter places open to the public. As they drift, they observe with all five senses in the real three dimensional world to collect data for their reflective accounts of old and new public health. They are encouraged to stop for refreshments and taste, as well as look, hear, smell, and touch while on their walk. They reflect as a group and later develop an individual reflective account in which they write up their deep reflections about what they observed on their walk. In preparation for their walk, they are encouraged to look at studies of quality of Life and other neighbourhood statistics as well as undertaking a risk assessment for their walk. Findings: Reflecting on their walks, students apply theoretical concepts around social determinants of health and health inequalities to develop their understanding of communities in the neighbourhoods visited. They write about the treasured historical architecture made of stone, bronze and marble which have outlived those who built them; but also how the streets are used now. The students develop their observations into thematic analyses such as: what we drink as illustrated by the empty coke can tossed into a now disused drinking fountain; the shift in home-life balance illustrated by streets where families once lived over the shop which are now walked by commuters weaving around each other as they talk on their mobile phones; and security on the street, with CCTV cameras placed at regular intervals, signs warning trespasses and barbed wire; but little evidence of local people watching the street. Conclusion: In evaluations of their first year, students have reported the health walk as one of their best experiences. The innovative approach was commended by the UK governing body of nurse education and it received a quality award from the nurse education funding body. This approach to education allows students to develop skills in the real world and write original work.

**Keywords :** education, innovation, nursing, urban

**Conference Title :** ICPHMT 2016 : International Conference on Public Health and Medical Technology

**Conference Location :** Paris, France

**Conference Dates :** March 14-15, 2016