

Title: Palliative Care Training Project for Direct Care Workers

Vaidehi Maniya

Northern Illinois University

29 April 2020

Working as a research assistant was never a plan. I still remember, I was studying for the first exam of the spring semester when I received an email about the research project. I immediately filled up an application and sent it to Dr. Jennifer Gray and Dr. Jinsook Kim. I am a third track nursing student, and I work as a Certified Nursing Assistant at Dekalb County Rehab and Nursing Center. When I came to know about the research Dr. Gray and Dr. Kim is conducting, I instantly decided to work under their guidance. Working as a research assistant and being a full-time student was a challenging task, but I wanted to explore various aspects of mental health and some issues that direct care workers experience in day to day life.

I was anxious when I received an email from my mentors that they wanted to interview me for the research assistant position. Since I have a background in nursing, I assumed that their expectations will be high. I did have somewhat knowledge about the research topic, but I felt so welcomed when I met with Dr. Gray and Dr. Kim. Dr. Gray is an Associate Professor at the Public Health Program in School of Health Studies. Dr. Kim is a Professor as well at the Public Health Program in School of Health Studies. I would say, I have the two best mentors who helped me grow so much both professionally and personally. I have always been so passionate about working in the health care field, and these two women set a perfect example of passion, work ethics, discipline, and patience. Initially, I was not sure how to approach them in time of trouble, but they made me feel extremely comfortable and offered assistance when needed. Even in times of a pandemic, they were flexible to work with and provided all possible opportunities to work from my own pace.

As I said earlier, they are passionate about what they are doing. They provided me with enough information regarding the research project. Initially, I was assigned to review all the PowerPoints related to the research topic: for example, difference between palliative care and

hospice, palliative care for older adults, living will, organ donation, power of attorney, pain assessment, types of pain, symptoms management, family support, ethical judgement, stress, mindfulness, deep breathing techniques, meditation, and so on. As the research topic is very wide, reviewing the PowerPoints gave me a good refresher about what the research may look like. I then started to review articles related to the research topic which includes a wide range of stress reduction techniques such as deep breathing, mindfulness, yoga, meditation, and so on. Reviewing articles helped me understand various research methods, research tools, different research designs, tools, and scales. It helped me to differentiate between qualitative and quantitative data. I reviewed over forty articles throughout my work period. Moreover, it helped me come across various relaxation techniques for direct care workers and CNAs. Working as a CNA, I can relate to the stress and burnout CNAs experience in day-to-day life.

Additionally, I worked on searching grants that may facilitate funding for the research in the future. Finding grant opportunities was not the priority, so I spent less time on looking for grant opportunities. I have found several case studies related to cultural competence in the health care system, stress and burnout feeling in health care workers, importance of a living will, advance directives, guide to advance directives, palliative care vs. hospice, importance of communication while delivering care, and so on. CNAs and direct care workers are highly underrated, and it is difficult to deal with daily stress or burnout. Deep breathing techniques and mindfulness have shown tremendous effects of their well beings. These jobs are also underpaid. Our goal was to enhance their work experience by providing some relaxation techniques. The participants were in the research were told to use an app for a deep breathing technique.

I knew little about data analysis when I started to work under Dr. Gray and Dr. Kim. I was assigned to do data cleaning. I have completed all the data cleaning using an Excel

spreadsheet as per Dr. Gray and Dr. Kim's request. Working on data was detail oriented and time consuming, but I enjoyed working with data. As I mentioned earlier, I did not know much about working with data. Dr. Gray and Dr. Kim were kind and generous to help me with my assignments.

Overall, I consider myself fortunate to work under such mentors who were always there to help me. One of the many things I learned from them was professionalism. I am grateful for the opportunity that Dr. Gray and Dr. Kim have provided me, and I will always cherish this experience.