

Reducing Undergraduate Healthcare Students Test Anxiety: MSN Capstone Project

Jayne Droge MSN, RN, Amy Hensley MSN, RN, C. Ann Lif MSN, RN, Betsy Perez MSN, RN
Faculty Advisor: Barbara Sittner, PhD, RN, APRN-CNS, ANEF
For more information contact: Ann.Lif@bryanhealth.org

Background: Cognitive Test Anxiety (CTA) is a growing issue for college students who find themselves pressured to succeed. Anxiety increases the threat toward the stimulus-driven system which increases task-irrelevant stimuli. Goal-directed attention is a voluntary process directing attention to the current task at the time.

Purpose: The purpose of this quality improvement project was to teach students three methods to reduce their cognitive test anxiety.

Methods: Twenty-one undergraduate students enrolled in an Anatomy & Physiology course completed the Cognitive Test Anxiety Scale (CTAS-2) (Thomas, Cassady, & Finch, 2017) prior to an educational session on techniques to reduce test anxiety. In addition to these techniques (aromatherapy, progressive muscle relaxation and visualization), students were instructed to log their chosen techniques and time spent practicing. After one month, a post-survey was administered to capture their anxiety after practicing the techniques.

Results: The CTAS-2 pre- and post-survey comparison analysis showed a downward trend from a high cognitive test anxiety (n=7) to moderate test anxiety (n=11) after practicing techniques for 31 days. Of the students who took the post-survey (n=18), 78% reported practicing the techniques. The technique most frequently practiced was aromatherapy (57%), followed by progressive muscle relaxation (36%), and visualization (21%). Seven percent stated they practiced all the interventions, while 7% stated they did not practice any of the interventions. Most students practiced their chosen intervention 1-5 times per week.

Conclusion: Anxiety-reducing techniques are useful strategies to reduce cognitive test anxiety for students, used not only in college, but post-graduation and into their profession.