

Factors influencing professional nurses' time management at Mankweng Hospital, Limpopo Province, South Africa

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to identify factors influencing professional nurses' time management at a tertiary hospital campus in Limpopo Province South Africa and to make recommendations. A quantitative descriptive research design was used to describe the factors that influence professional nurses' time management at a tertiary hospital in Limpopo Province. The population for this study consisted of all professional nurses employed at the tertiary hospital. Simple random sampling was used and respondents were selected alternatively until a sample size of 150 was reached. Data were collected using a self-administered questionnaire with open and closed- ended questions. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse data. The study revealed that the hospital had policy guidelines which enabled professional nurses to provide quality patient care. The majority of professional nurses were able to prioritize their nursing actions when there was an emergency. Shortage of staff and working under pressure were also identified as factors that contributed to poor time management leading to poor nursing care. Delegated tasks were not completed and were carried over to the next shift. The study also found that the majority of professional nurses spend more time on unproductive nursing duties which included answering of phone calls, gossiping and socializing among themselves. It is recommended that in-service education programmes on time management should be instituted so as to improve patient care.

Keywords: Time management, professional nurses.

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Introduction

Time management is the way in which time is planned, controlled and utilized and it is very important in health care services. Andongndou (2004) reports that time is a precious commodity that should be used effectively to improve quality patient care. Rossenfeld, McEevoy and Glassmen (2003) also state that health care services are in constant struggle with time management during accomplishment of tasks. They further indicate that effective time management by professional nurses may result in the provision of quality patient care.

Effective planning, organization and utilization of time by nurses could contribute towards decreased costs for patient care in health care institutions. Cherry and Jacob (2007) support this notion that planning is the most important step in time management. They further indicate that ineffective time management could contribute to poor patient care. Rossenfeld, McEevoy and Glassemen (2003) further indicate that nurse leaders and administrators may be assisted by professional nurses in planning and measurement of time spent when providing patient care.

Time management is important in a health care institution because patients' lives depend on the type of health care service rendered to them (Werner, 2010). Time is therefore, a valuable resource in a nursing care unit leading to achievement of goals as planned. Thus, professional nurses should plan properly on how patient care activities can be executed within acceptable time frames. The purpose of this study was to identify factors influencing professional nurses' time management at a tertiary hospital campus in Limpopo Province.

Methodology

Research design

A quantitative descriptive research design was used to describe factors influencing professional nurses' time management at a tertiary hospital. This design was appropriate because it allowed variables to be quantified whilst at the same time facilitating descriptive analysis. The study was conducted in one tertiary hospital in the Capricorn District of the Limpopo province, South Africa.

Population and sampling

The study population was all professional nurses employed at a tertiary hospital, Limpopo Province. Simple random sampling was used whereby each professional nurse had an equal chance of being included in the study. Systematic random sampling was used to select respondents alternatively and each respondent was allocated a number that was written on a piece of paper. Respondents were selected until a sample of one hundred and fifty (150) was reached. The inclusion criteria were all professional nurses registered with the South African Nursing Council (SANC) and who were employed at Mankweng tertiary hospital, Limpopo province.

Data collection

A self-administered questionnaire was used to obtain information on the factors influencing professional nurses' time management in a tertiary hospital in Limpopo province. The questionnaire was hand delivered to the professional

nurses at the tertiary hospital. The questionnaire included both open and closed-ended questions and it took 30 (thirty) minutes for each respondent to complete the questionnaire. The data collecting instrument consisted of three parts. Part A consisted of questions related to biographic data. Part B related to professional nurses' agreement, disagreement, strongly agree and not sure with factors influencing professional nurses' time management in the clinical setting and Part C entailed questions related to professional nurses' awareness of time management in the clinical setting.

Reliability and validity of research instrument

Measures to ensure reliability of the tool were stability, consistency and equivalence (Polit & Hungler, 2006). Pre-testing of the instrument was done at Pietersburg hospital on 20 respondents to determine if they understood the instructions, questions and to monitor the time spent when responding to the questionnaire. No discrepancies were found between the results from the pre-test and those of actual interviews, thus stability of the instrument was ascertained.

Ethical considerations

Ethical clearance to conduct the study was obtained from the University of Limpopo Medunsa Research Ethics Committee and from the Pietersburg-Mankweng hospital complex Research Ethics Committee. Permission to conduct the study was also obtained from the Department of Health and Social Development, Limpopo Province. Participation in the study was voluntary and respondents were informed of their rights to withdraw from the study without any threat of victimization (Burns & Grove, 2003). Anonymity and confidentiality were ensured to the respondents.

Data analysis

Data were analysed using descriptive statistics with the assistance of the statistician at the University of Limpopo. Data were entered on the excel MS word using codes to enable follow-ups in cases of entry errors. Frequencies and percentages were calculated. The central tendencies statistics particularly the mean was also calculated.

Results and Discussion

The following is the presentation of the analysed data from 150 respondents who completed a self-administered questionnaire. Research results are discussed by referring to the extent to which research respondents strongly agree, agree, strongly disagree, and disagree, not sure with the statements. The percentages

were calculated based on the responses per item. Table 1 represents work experiences of professional nurses after completion of training.

Table 1: Work experience after completion of training as a nurse

| Years of experience | Frequency | Percentage |
|----------------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| 0-3 | 6 | 7.5 |
| 4-6 | 21 | 26.25 |
| 7-9 | 19 | 23.75 |
| 10-15 | 15 | 18.75 |
| 16-20 | 19 | 23.75 |
| Total | 80 | 100 |

The work experience of the respondents ranged from 1 to 19 years amongst all genders. The findings indicated (n=125) for age 20-55 years. Twenty-one (26.25%) of the respondents had 4-6 years of experience as professional nurses while, (19) 23.75% respondents had 7-9 and 16-20 years of experience as professional nurses. Only 15 (18.75%) had 10-15 years of experience as professional nurses. The mean age was 17.7±14.02 years. Thus, the sample size was heterogeneous.

Training institution (n=132)

Respondents with university education were 72 (56%). Respondents with qualifications obtained from nursing colleges were 51 (37%) with 9(7%) respondents who completed their training as nurses from training hospitals. According to Meyer and van Niekerk (2008) professional nurses should possess certain skills acquired during education and training so as to prevent nursing errors. They further indicate that sharing of knowledge and skills amongst professional nurses from diverse training background will result in good productivity.

Table 2 indicates the frequency and the percentages on the factors influencing professional nurses’ time management at Mankweng hospital.

Professional nurses spend much time gossiping (n=128)

The study revealed that 91 (71.09%) respondents agreed that professional nurses spend much time gossiping with 19 (14.84%) disagreeing with the statement, while 18 (14.06%) respondents were not sure.

These findings indicate that professional nurses spend more time gossiping while at work rather than rendering nursing care to patients. Spending too much time on gossiping while expected to render patient care will always result in poor patient care and increased costs for both patients and the health care institution. The health care institutions and patients expect high standard of quality patient

care from nurses at all times. Kelly-Heidenthal (2003) indicates that nurses should always put patients and their families at the centre of all their nursing activities at all times.

Table 2: Frequency and percentages of the factors influencing professional nurses' time management

| Items | Agree | | Disagree | | Not sure | | Total |
|--|-------|-------|----------|-------|----------|-------|-------|
| | f | % | f | % | f | % | |
| Professional nurses spend much time gossiping | 91 | 71.09 | 19 | 14.84 | 18 | 14.06 | 128 |
| There is allocated time for socialization | 75 | 63.02 | 11 | 9.24 | 33 | 27.73 | 119 |
| Shortage of staff contributes towards poor time management | 115 | 57.12 | 3 | 2.27 | 14 | 10.60 | 132 |
| Answering of telephone wastes time allocated for patient care | 101 | 75.93 | 21 | 15.78 | 11 | 8.27 | 133 |
| I Need in-service training on time management | 108 | 83.07 | 19 | 14.61 | 3 | 2.30 | 130 |
| I am able to prioritise tasks in case of emergencies | 82 | 56.55 | 63 | 43.44 | 0 | 0 | 145 |
| Proper supervision of nurses will improve time management | 116 | 87.21 | 2 | 1.50 | 15 | 11.27 | 133 |
| Delegation of duties to personnel is done according to level of competence | 124 | 93.23 | 4 | 3.0 | 5 | 3.75 | 133 |
| Able to implement time management guidelines | 86 | 65.64 | 7 | 5.34 | 38 | 29.0 | 131 |
| Able to avoid tasks that delay patient care | 118 | 87.4 | 4 | 2.96 | 13 | 9.62 | 135 |
| Able to utilize time productively | 103 | 79.84 | 2 | 1.55 | 24 | 18.60 | 129 |
| Planning for time management | 114 | 87.69 | 3 | 2.30 | 13 | 10 | 130 |

Allocated time for socialization (n=119)

The results indicated that 75(63.02%) respondents agreed that there was allocated time for socialization at workplace, while 11 (9.24%) respondents disagreed and 33 (27.73%) were not sure. This study found that the majority of nurses spend more time socializing during working hours. If professional nurses socialised during tea breaks or lunch time, the health care institution will experience increased rate of productivity. Therefore, nurses should be aware of the amount of time spend on non-productive activities, such as negative gossiping which could be practised by unlicensed, non- professionals who are not committed towards patient care (Kelly-Heidenthal, 2003).

Shortage of staff (n=132)

The study found that 115 (57.12%) respondents agreed that poor time management occurs due to shortage of staff in the health care institution and that shortage of staff contributes towards poor time management. Only 3 (2.27%) respondents disagreed with the statement while 14 (10.6%) respondents were not sure. The study indicated that shortage of staff results in poor time management for patient care leading to poor quality patient care.

Jooste (2003) indicates the importance of rendering patient care as expected, by stating that nurses are to provide quality patient care irrespective of shortage of staff and that they should prioritise delegated activities. Andongndou (2004) states that incomplete delegated activities may overlap leading to conflicting work performance and poor quality patient care. Kelly-Heindenthal (2003) was also of the opinion that over- delegation usually puts the patient at risk.

Answering of telephone calls waste time (n=133)

The research found that 101 (75.93%) respondents agreed that telephone calls waste allocated time for the provision of patient care. Only 21(15.78%) respondents disagreed, while 11 (8.27%) respondents were not sure. These findings indicated that professional nurses spend more time answering telephone calls and this waste a lot of time that could be used to provide quality patient care. Telephone calls during working hours disrupt nurses' plans and decrease expected work performance. Andongndou (2004) indicates that the amount of time spend on responding to telephone calls can be limited by attending to important messages only.

In- service training on time management (n=130)

The findings of the study indicated that 108 (83.07%) respondents agreed that in-service training on time management should be conducted for professional nurses, while 19 (14.61%) respondents disagreed with the statement and 3 (2.3%) respondents were not sure. The results of the study indicated that there is a need for professional nurses to undergo in-service training on time management. This will assist in improving quality patient care in the health care institution.

George et al. (2003) indicate that continuous education is important and must be encouraged in all health care institutions. High quality of nursing care will be of reality if nurses are kept abreast with modern developments if they attend in service training (Nourishe, Van Rooyen & Strumpher, 2004).

Able to prioritise tasks in case of emergencies (n=145)

The study found that 82 (56.6%) respondents agreed that they are able to prioritise nursing activities when an emergency arise while 63 (43.44%) respondents disagreed with the statement. The findings of this study therefore, indicated that the lives of patients were not at risk because there is a large number of professional nurses who will attend to emergencies when the need arises.

The hospital has to ensure that professional nurses attend in- service training on prioritization of activities so as to reduce health risks. Peltier, Dennik- Champion and Winsniewski (2004) assert that professional nurses should have the necessary knowledge and skills that will enable them to prioritize nursing activities at workplace as they are expected to respond immediately in a case of an emergency.

Proper supervision of nurses improve time management (n=133)

The study results indicated that 116 (87.215%) respondents agreed that proper supervision of nurses improve time management, whilst 2 (1.51%) respondents disagreed with the statement. Only 15 (11.27%) respondents were not sure. The findings of this study indicated that the majority of professional nurses recognized the importance of proper supervision in the provision of quality patient care within specified time frames.

Alksnis, Duffield and O'Brien-Pallas (2004) are of the opinion that supervision of nurses is important in the hospital because it increases good work performance and thus less time spent on performing a delegated task. They further assert that supervisors should monitor and evaluate delegated activities so as to check if the work is done according to the needs of patients. Katajisto and Kuorrraine (2003) maintain that formal discussion, co-operation and supervision amongst nurses and supervisors during and or after work performance contribute towards achievement of the mission and vision of the hospital.

Delegation of duties to personnel (n=133)

The study revealed that 124 (93.23%) of the professional nurses agreed that they were aware that delegation of duties to personnel was done according to one's level of competence. Only 4 (3.0%) respondents disagreed and 5 (3.75%) were not sure. The study found that professional nurses were aware that time management can be achieved through delegation of nurses' duty according to one's level of competence.

Implementation of time management guidelines (n=131)

The study revealed that 86 (65.64%) participants agreed that they were able to implement time management guidelines as indicated. Only 7 (5.34%) respondents disagreed and only 3 (29.0%) respondents were not sure. The study revealed that the hospital has time management guidelines because the majority of the respondents agreed that they were able to implement these time management guidelines which assist them to provide quality patient care (Werner, 2010).

Able to avoid tasks that delay patient care (n=135)

The study results indicated that 118 (87.46%) respondents agreed that they were able to avoid tasks that delay patient care. Only 4 (2.96%) respondents disagreed with the statement and 13 (9.62%) were not sure. The study found that professional nurses at Mankweng hospital provide patient care as expected and are able to avoid tasks that delay the provision of quality patient care. Burke, De Causemaecker, Petrovic and Berghe (2006) state that professional nurses should at all times minimise unproductive use of time. This will reduce high risks and error when they render patient care.

Utilizing time productively (n=129)

The study revealed that 103 (79.84%) respondents agreed that they were able to utilize time productively. Only 2 (1.55%) respondents disagreed, while 24 (18.60%) respondents were not sure. The study found that professional nurses were able to use time productively as evidenced by the high percentage of professional nurses who agreed with the statement.

Planning for time management (n=130)

The study found that 114 (87.69%) respondents agreed planning was important for time management. Only 3 (2.30%) participants disagreed with the statement and 10% (n=13) were not sure. The study found that professional nurses were able to plan for time management as evidenced by the high number of respondents who agreed with the statement. Jooste (2003) indicate that planning forms part of professional nurses' managerial functions.

Limitations

The study was conducted in one tertiary hospital with 150 respondents in the Limpopo province. Therefore, the findings of this study cannot be generalized to other tertiary hospitals in South Africa.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that:

- Time management is essential when dealing with the lives of individuals. Therefore, professional nurses at Mankweng tertiary hospital should be allowed to attend in- service education on time management.
- In- service education on the prioritisation of tasks should also be conducted so as to assist professional nurses with the provision of efficient and effective quality patient care. Peltier et al. (2004) indicate that professional nurses are competent health professionals who are expected to attend to patients' needs at all times
- Professional nurses are expected to render quality patient care in spite of the shortage of professional nurses in the institution. Therefore, in-service education on stress management should be provided so as to enable professional nurses handle stress related to overwork.
- The nurse manager should ensure that delegation is done according to the professional nurse's knowledge and skills and that the delegation is written according to unit expectations.

Conclusion

The study found that the hospital has time management guidelines that enabled professional nurses to provide quality patient care. The study also revealed that professional nurses spend more time using the telephone, gossiping and socializing among themselves instead of attending to the health needs of patients. These findings indicate that there is a great need for in-service education programmes in the hospital particularly on time management and supervision. The standard of nursing care in many public hospitals in South Africa is on the decline. It is therefore, the responsibility of professional nurses to revive the caring values that are fundamental in the nursing profession. Nursing education also has an important role to play in the socialization of the neophytes with regards to these fundamental nursing values so as to improve the standard of nursing care.

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