

Conflicts Between Nurses and Patients: Their Nature and Methods of Resolution

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Abstract:

As nurses work in a complicated social environment, they meet many conflicts in their workplaces. This paper will define and describe different types of conflicts between nurses and patients. It will analyze the most common types of conflicts that nurses have experienced. It will examine research on the factors leading to the conflicts. Then the paper will present specific strategies for addressing those causes. Next, the article will give some specific strategies for each factor. Finally, the paper will make recommendations for training and the qualities nurses need to be most effective.

Introduction

“The Covid-19 outbreak is having a severe and profound socioeconomic impact worldwide. There are daily reports in the news media of health care services that are overwhelmed due to a lack of protective equipment and an increasing caseload of patients in need of hospitalization or intensive care” (Paulo Marcos et al. ,2020). Nurses are the frontal line of the pandemic in the health care services, and much evidence shows that they are under increased risk of infection and psychological distress. Some people think nurses should stick to their positions because people think nurses belong to a service industry. It is reasonable that nurses do their duty to take care of patients during the severe pandemic period. In contrast, other people think nurses should take care of their own needs because everyone has their own rights of selection, and nurses can choose to stay at home instead of working under a dangerous and stressful human environment.

Nurses are supposed to be a central axis in health care services because each part of management needs to work with nurses, including management administrators, families of patients and coworkers. Nurses are an essential part of the constitution in a health care service. However, nurses face many challenges. First nurses face different types of patients everyday, specifically, they treat different ailments, illnesses, and diseases and work with people of different ages, genders, cultures, ethnic and racial backgrounds, social classes, and personalities. There are always some unexpected or emergency events happening in their workplaces. Nurses might meet vexatious patients who are unsatisfied with the plans nurses are giving

them, and also family members might provoke some conflicts with nurses while patients have some uncomfortable symptoms. Second there are always some conflicts happening between nurses and patients because of communication obstacles, and patients can not understand the medication plans. Third nurses need to endure the physical stress of their job and psychological stress of competition among coworkers. One factor increasing nurses' psychological stress is that Nursing salaries are only middle income salaries or low income if they support a family, so some nurses are not earning sufficient money. The stress and tensions that often create conflicts among nurses and physicians, family members, and coworkers (Koesnell, B. 2019). For this reason, this paper will expand on the definition of conflicts and analyze the different types of conflicts and ways to address them.

Definition of Conflicts between Nurses and Patients

Inter-relational Conflicts occur in any organization, especially in hospitals where abundant human interactions exist. It is hard to avoid conflicts among people because once there is a relationship of interest, there will be conflicts. A standard definition of conflicts in nursing: "The study definition of "conflict" was a dispute, disagreement, or difference of opinion related to the management of the patient involving more than one individual and requiring some decision or action" (Studdert, B. et al. ,2003). This paper includes many types of conflicts happening in social environments. The most common types of nursing conflicts have been identified in medical research. It is important to understand these conflicts because nurses are

the core of the medical system and they may dramatically influence the care patients get and the overall well-being of nurses and their ability to persist and succeed in providing strong service.

There are two major areas of conflicts noted in this research: Interpersonal Conflict and Ethical Conflict. In the section of interpersonal conflict, this paper will discuss the specific types and impacts of the interpersonal conflict. For the ethical conflict, this paper is going to discuss the three factors that cause the conflict between patients and nurses.

Types of Conflicts

Interpersonal Conflict

Human society is a complicated environment, and there are many conflicts in daily life. Interpersonal conflict is one type of conflict, and this is an inevitable part of a relationship in a social interaction. "We defined interpersonal conflict as "a dynamic process that occurs between interdependent individuals, groups, or both, as they experience negative emotional reactions to perceived disagreements and interference with the attainment of their goals""(Jerng et al. ,2017). Each individual has their own emotions, feelings and opinions, and most of the time people hold different points of view about the same things, so there will be a conflict while people have an incongruous opinion and action. This is called interpersonal conflict.

Usually, "The two types of focus of the interpersonal conflict identified include the conflicts related to task content or process, and the conflicts related to the interpersonal relationship" (Jerng et al.,2017). To be more specific, the task content

conflict usually occurs in a disagreement between two people about the decision they made. Conflicts related to interpersonal relationships are more closely tied to emotional elements, and this kind of conflict often takes place when people are under significant distress. Naturally, nurses who work with people every day, encounter interpersonal conflicts in most situations. As we all know, patients cannot always control their own emotions when they experience pain and diseases, so they will expose their dissatisfaction to nurses. At this time, if the nurses are not able to address the situation appropriately, the interpersonal conflict will occur between them. "Interpersonal conflict is a type of mistreatment acknowledged to be a serious problem in the United States workplace, particularly for women. This interpersonal conflict is related to negative outcomes in women, as well as the exclusion of women in the workplace, which highlights the importance of investigating ways to reduce this conflict."(Psychology & Psychiatry Journal, 2014). From this reporting, we can know interpersonal conflict occurs in each sector, especially common in the women workplaces. This kind of conflict can directly affect workers' feelings on jobs and their daily life. Therefore, it is imperative to implement strategies to reduce conflicts.

On the one hand, if there is a conflict between patients and nurses, patients are less likely to have a positive recovery environment, and they will have negative feelings that influence their recovery. In addition, it is a waste for patients and management because if they have not gotten what they need and their recovery time is longer, and also health care services need to pay more attention to take care of these patients. At the same time, nurses are less likely to be able to fully focus on

their position when they are working under significant psychological stress. Nursing is a highly meticulous job, and they need to be cautious about the details such as dosage of medicine for each patient, and this requires nurses not be distracted by personal emotions during working hours. Once a conflict takes place between nurses and patients, it can cause an unpredictable result or dangerous. Nurses might administer the wrong dosages medicines to a patient, which can be a tragedy both for the nurses and patients as the nurses could lose their licenses, and patients could lose their life (Van Bogaert, v. et al. , 2014).

Ethical Conflicts

Nurses sometimes encounter and are involved in ethical situations. Ethical conflict is defined as “any situation where normative factors such as moral principles or values clash and require incompatible actions” (Kim, O. et al. , 2020). Sometimes nurses face a dilemma, and they do not know if their behavior is ethical or not. They are concerned about if their actions will cause an argument with their patients. For example, “when I get the feeling that I should actually be giving the patient some form of medication at that moment, which might help him on the one hand but on the other hand might make him sleep more and put him in a state of semi-consciousness. At that moment, I don’t know myself: is that advisable? Is it the right thing to do?” (Mao et al. ,2020,). In some cases, nurses want to follow their inner minds to give some form of medication to help patients release their pains, but nurses are worried about possible side effects or down sides to the medications as well as. Controversial, if they are not following the exact direction of doctors their

options might provoke some arguments. Consequently, some of the nurses have experienced ethical conflicts, and they will feel disappointed, hopeless, angry and indignant, which can overtime cause psychological problem for nurses.

There are many factors that contribute to the ethical conflicts for nurses. Expectation of patients might cause ethical conflicts between nurses and patients. There are many definitions for a positive nurse, such as responsible, sympathetic, amiable and equitable, and nurses know that these morals are quite essential for an efficacious nursing. In other words, these values are the most basic occupational qualities to be a positive nurse. However, nurses have to follow rules of professionalism qualities for patients' health even though they might against ethics. According to Kim's et al. , "A TB patient became verbally abusive because the nurse ward head was not giving him pain relief before the prescribed 6-hour wait. Thus the ward head gave him water in an injection and, psychologically satisfied, he went to sleep" (Jafree, Z. 2015). Sometimes nurses also want to help their patients release their pain, and try to satisfy the demands of the patients; but nurses have followed the rules of hospital instead of their code of ethics. If a patient thinks the nurse who takes care of the patient should follow his or her medical requirements no matter the requirements are reasonable or not; this kind of case often causes ethical conflicts because nurses cannot make arbitrary decisions about the medication plans of patients. Nurses need to deal with abundant events every day, so it is hard for nurses to provide a perfect care plan for patients. As a result, nurses' service does not meet the expectation of patients, which is easy to cause ethical conflicts between nurses

and patients.

The factors of arising conflicts among nurses and patients

Patients satisfaction

Patients satisfaction is one of the factors that gives rise to the conflicts between nurses and patients. Patient satisfaction is an important standard to evaluate the quality of service of a healthcare service or hospital, but it is also a key factor that causes the conflict among nurses and patients. There are some patients who are impolite and censorious, so these patients are more difficult to take care of for nurses because no matter what nurses do, they are always dissatisfied with the nurses. These patients complain because of delayed care and lack of respect. Sometimes nurses might be a little bit late due to other emergency events, but patients often do not understand the situations, and they will show their dissatisfied expressions to nurses; this can affect nurses' emotions and make them feel stressful. Therefore, inappropriate medicine requests can be the most severe events in conflicts among nurses and patients. A nurse described an incident:

A nurse colleague was about to administer a painkiller injection, when the patient abused her and said: "Don't you know this causes muscle pain for seven days?" The patient demanded to be given an alternative medicine. Although the staff nurse attempted to explain that the alternative medicine had harmful side-effects, the patient was unwilling to listen. The nurse had to wait until the doctor discussed ongoing treatment with the patient and as a result medicine

was not administered at the prescribed time (Jafree, Z. et al. , 2015).

We know that sometimes patients cannot endure their pain, so they ask nurses to provide an analgesic to release the pain. However, nurses do not have the right to prescribe medication for patients, so patients will argue with nurses. In summary, disgruntled patients are a key factor in provoking conflicts.

Poor Communication

Communication is the easiest way to transfer information between individuals and groups, but it is hard to communicate with different languages and cultures. Hospitals or health care services are international places where you can meet people who come from different countries and speak different languages. Though most nurses can speak English, some patients cannot understand some academic English words when nurses report a medical issue. For example, nurse asks if patient is allergic to Amoxicillin. The patient does not know this is penicillin based so they say no. However, the patients is allergic to penicilion so they have an allergic reaction. As a result, this might initiate an argument or a conflict between the nurse and the patient. In conclusion, poor communication is another factor that causes conflicts between nurses and patients.

Stressful Working Environment

Nursing is an incredibly stressful career. Nurses need to endure the physical and psychological stress. Nurses do physically demanding work for long hours, such as moving and adjusting patient beds, being on their feet all day. Moreover, nurses' work schedules are different from the normal occupations, and they need to shift

between days and nights, and it disorders their Circadian Rhythms, which can cause some health problems for them. Furthermore, Nurses find it is hard to balance their jobs and their families. Nurses need to spend their energy both on their family, taking care of kids, doing housework and jobs. They need to endure the long work because they want to get a higher salary to support their family expenditures. They do this because nurses' salary is dependent on their work time, if they work for a long time, they can get a higher salary. Therefore, nurses are under a huge amount of physical pressure.

In addition, nurses are surrounded by sickness and death, so they need a strong-mindedness to maintain constant workloads to endure the competence from co-workers. If a person sees somebody die in front of him or her, they have a strong psychological change. They imagine their future might be the same as the patients. Nurses meet many deaths in their daily life, and they need to keep work under the psychological stress. When they encounter an argument with patients nurses might not control their emotions, and the argument might transfer to a conflict. Furthermore, not only do nurses have stress from patients' death and sickness but they also have stress from co-workers. There are competitions in any career, and nurses have to compete with each other for the higher salaries and promotions (Leever, H. et al. , 2010). Social comparison exists in each sector, and nurses are also compared their salary with their coworkers. If one nurse gets a high salary, others want to get more too. Therefore, being competent with coworkers is also stressful. Accordingly, these two stresses are a flash point to cause the conflicts between

patients and nurses.

Solutions

Nurses should be provided get more training about how to manage interpersonal relations, follow professional ethics, provide positive customer service and adjust to physical and psychological stress. Improving nurses' professionalism is not just the responsibility of nurses, the relevant institutions or organizations have the responsibility to support nurses with appropriate professional development and conditions. The next section in this paper will give specific solutions for the conflicts between nurses and patients from both nurses' and organizations' perspectives.

From nurses' perspective, "interpersonal communication is a best strategy to decrease the conflicts between nurses and patients" (Mahvar, M. et.al,2020). Nurses should be able to deal with different types of diseases, and provide appropriate services for the patients by interacting with them. This can decrease the rates of conflicts because once a nurse satisfies the patients' demands, there is less trouble. Firstly, listening is an important communication skill. Nurses should be patient to listen to what a patient or family member is saying, so nurses can understand their needs. In addition, the easy-to-understand language used is essential when nurses communicate with patients. It is hard for people to understand academic words and knowledge, especially for sick people because they do not have energy to support their listening carefully to what nurses are saying. Therefore, nurses should use understandable words to transfer medical information. If it is necessary, nurses can also provide a translator for patients when they receive the patients who speak

different languages.

Organizations and organizational leaders should take actions to try to decrease the rates of conflicts between nurses and patients. “There are several essential elements related to patients’ experiences of the quality of nursing care: clinically competent nurses, collaborative working relationships, autonomous nursing practice, adequate staffing, control over nursing practice, managerial support and patient-central culture” (Kieft, R. et al. , 2014). Managers should spend time on teamwork and set clear and friendly promotion rules; in this way, nurses can have a positive work environment with their coworkers. Employers can arrange some learning abroad projects, and let nurses experience different work environments. Nursing schools should prepare nurses better, and they should provide more practical experience for nursing students before they graduate. Employers should offer professional and equal development opportunities for nurses and give them time and compensations to do them. Hospitals or health care centers should be more intentional about the hours they demand of nurses, and they need to create an appropriate work schedule for nurses. These solutions can improve the qualities of nurses and reduce their stress so that they can take care of patients better, and also the satisfaction of patients can be improved. Consequently, the less complaints and dissatisfaction can decrease the conflicts among nurses and patients.

Moreover, Managements should organize seminars to create a positive work environment to release nurses distress to reduce rates of conflicts between nurses and patients. “Staff can share typical examples of conflicts happening in health

care services, and nurses can exchange strategies and solutions” (Lin, L. et al.,2020). At the same time, this kind of communication is also a beneficial way to provide an opportunity for co-workers to get to know each other. This is necessary because all staff are busy with their occupations, and they do not have social interaction time. The seminars can help each staff release their stress by sharing their experiences and feelings, which can prevent the negative attitudes of nurses to spread in the whole team and also patients. A positive attitude can encourage nurses to devote themselves to work, and it can improve their service qualities. “Negative acts might be perceived by a series of negative feelings such as poor mental health, burnout, and intention to resign. That is, one holding a negative attitude is possible to yield negative perceptions that might lead to a feeling of all negative acts around him or her” (Ma, W. et al. ,2017). People’s feelings and actions are connected together; once people get negative feelings, their actions are affected. In contrast, if a nurse shares a positive attitude when they face a conflict with a patient, other nurses will learn from it, and they will have a correct attitude for conflicts. Therefore, organizations should hold more seminar opportunities, and nurses can learn more strategies by exchanging their own experiences.

Characteristics of Nurses

Advanced nurses should possess 6 occupational qualities: “caring, empathy, problem solving skills, stamina, and sense of humor”(Kim, O. (2020). First of all, nurses should be caring. People think nurses are angels because they take care of

sick people and help them recover, and nurses should learn to care about people no matter what relationship they have. Nurses should be sympathetic to patients. Nurses should treat patients like their own family members. Nurses can not have any discrimination of gender and race, and their services should be equal to each patient. Problem solving skills are vital techniques for nurses because they can encounter different kinds of problems during their services. Sometimes nurses need to give solutions immediately before the problems get worse. Nurses should have the quality of stamina because they need to take care of different types of patients; nurses need to check some patients' heartbeats, blood pressure, etc. They need to being their feet for long shifts. Finally, nurses should have a sense of humor because we know that the atmosphere of a hospital can be pretty depressing, so nurses should try to release the repressive atmosphere by chatting and joking with patients. These morals are the indispensable characteristics for a professional nurse.

Conclusion

Ethical and interpersonal conflicts are two common types of conflicts nurses experience. This paper gives three main factors: patient satisfaction, poor communication, and stressful working environment, which increase the possibilities of these conflicts. For this reason, nurses should cultivate their interpersonal communication skills, be a good listener to understand patients needs and use easier-to-understanding words to communicate with patients. Organizations should prepare nurses better, provide equal and professional development opportunities, and create appropriate schedules for nurses. This paper concludes that a good nurse

should have caring, empathy, problem solving skills, stamina, and sense of humor.

Finally, organizations and nurses should work together to reduce conflicts between nurses and patients in order to create positive conditions for patients care.

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