

Smart Nursing: How To Create A Positive Work Environment That Empowers And Retains

The relationship between empowerment and work environment on job satisfaction, intent to leave, and quality of care among ICU nurses

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Abstract

Aim: To determine whether empowerment and work environment predict job satisfaction, intent to leave and quality of care among intensive care unit (ICU) nurses.

Background: ICU nurses work in demanding environments and are subject to many work-related stresses. The retention of ICU nurses within these settings is important given the shortage of specialty nurses in Canada. Few studies have examined the relationships among healthy work environments, nurse satisfaction, and patient outcomes within ICU settings.

Methods: Nurses working in ICU settings were asked to complete an online survey consisting of measures on structural empowerment, work environment, job satisfaction, intent to leave, and perceived quality of care.

Results: A total of 533 nurses responded to the questionnaire. Participants perceived their work environment to be moderately healthy and reported high levels of collaboration between physicians and nurses. ICU nurses who had greater access to empowerment structures perceived their work environment as being healthier. Moreover, both empowerment and work environment were strong predictors of job satisfaction.

Conclusions: Our results suggest that workplace empowerment contributes to the creation of positive work environments and increases job satisfaction among ICU nurses.

Key words: work environment, empowerment, job satisfaction, intent to leave and quality of care

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Attracting and retaining qualified nurses into specialty areas such as intensive care units (ICUs) are necessary to ensure there are enough nurses to meet the increasing demands of patients requiring complex care. This is particularly important, given the shortage of specialty nurses in Canada (Buchan & Aiken, 2008; St-Pierre, Alderson, & St-Jean, 2010). Moreover, this situation may worsen as projections indicate that the number of critically ill patients will double by 2026 (Fisher, Baumann, Hunsberger, Blythe, & Fitzpatrick, 2008). Strategies, such as the creation of healthy work environments, are key to ensuring job satisfaction and increasing nurse retention (Laschinger, 2007; Masojovich & Laschinger, 2008). Healthy work environments also play an important role in patient safety and quality of care (Purdy, Laschinger, Finegan, Kerr, & Oliveira, 2010; Wong, Laschinger, & Cummings, 2010).

Literature review

Numerous studies have indicated that nurses are dissatisfied with their work environment (Aiken et al., 2002, 2011; Van Bogart, Clarke, Willems, & Mondelaers, 2013). Major sources of dissatisfaction originated with hospital restructuring and work reorganization during the early 1990s (Blythe, Baumann, & Giovannetti, 2001; Cummings, Hayduk, & Estabrooks, 2005; Ehrigbt, Patterson, Chalko, & Render, 2003). As a result of attempts to contain rising health care costs, organizational policies that were established affected nurses, the largest group of health care workers in hospitals. The closure of small hospitals, the increased use of non-nursing personnel and casualization

of the workforce all had a direct impact on nurses and nursing practice (Aiken et al., 2001). These changes have led to an increased workload and a decrease in nurse-patient ratios that have affected the quality of patient care (Gurses & Carayon, 2008).

Twenty years after the first wave of restructuring, many nurses continue to be dissatisfied with their work environment. In a large study examining the work environment of 33,659 nurses from 12 European countries, Aiken, Sloane, Bruyneel, Van Den Heede, and Sermeus (2013) found that one in five nurses was dissatisfied with their jobs, although the percentage of nurses reporting dissatisfaction varied substantially from 11% in the Netherlands to 56% in Greece. The major causes of dissatisfaction reported by nearly half of the nurses were factors related to the work environment, such as wages, opportunities for advancement and educational opportunities. Unhealthy work environments were also a significant predictor of intent to leave, with 20% to 50% of nurses reporting that they were intending to leave their current job in the next year, and 20% to 40% reporting they were planning to leave the nursing profession. In a recent study of ICU nurses, 41% of the respondents indicated that they intended to leave their current position eventually; of those nurses, 18% indicated that they intended to leave their current position in the next year (Fitzpatrick, Campos, Graham, & Lavandero, 2010). Stone et al. (2006) reported that 17% of ICU nurses intended to leave their current position in the coming year and poor working conditions was the primary reason for more than half of the respondents who intended to leave.

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