

Experiences of newly employed professional nurses regarding their quality of work life at a private hospital in Gauteng.

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Background:

Objectives: The aim of the study was to explore and describe the experiences of newly employed professional nurses regarding their quality of work life at a private hospital in Gauteng.

Method: The research design for the study was a phenomenological, qualitative, exploratory, descriptive design that was contextual in nature. The purposive sample methods were selected to ensure that rich data would be collected. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted until data saturation occurred. After 11 interviews, the researcher and expert interviewer concluded that no new themes emerged and data saturation was reached.

Results: The newly employed professional nurses had positive and negative experiences regarding their quality of work life. The themes that emerged were: positive relationship experiences, positive experiences with supportive management practices, negative emotional experiences regarding quality of work life and negative experiences with some work organisational aspects with their related sub-themes as in Table 1.

Conclusion: Newly employed professional nurses needs support and guidelines should be implemented to reinforce the sustainability of their positive experiences and corrective actions to address their negative experiences.

Introduction and background

Quality of work life has been a major theme in human resource management and has evolved as a multidimensional concept when it was introduced by the theorist Moyo (1880-1949). Newly employed professional nurses expect decent working environments, which supports them and encourage assistance from their colleagues. South African research studies has found that newly employed nurses are generally dissatisfied with their working environments, and this dissatisfaction is caused by poor working conditions, increased workloads, lack of resources, inadequate remuneration processes, lack of career opportunities, and poor organisational climate (Klopper, Coetzee, Pretorius & Bester, 2012:693). Work demands were further increased by the National Core Standards for Health Establishments in South Africa's (2011) rollout of quality care standards for patients, which emphasise private and public sector professional nurses' compliance with these standards, and no focus on the newly employed professional nurses quality of work life.

Private hospitals are operating in a competitive business environment, placing a high premium on quality patient care to ensure profit margins, customer centricity, and organisational sustainability and growth. Research studies have identified while the professional nurses attend to the patients' quality of care, their own quality of work life is seldom being considered (Hsu & Kernohan, 2006:120). Through the implementation of suitable practices will encourage and lead to sound quality of professional nurses' work life and contribute to more favourable outcomes for health care provider, the patient, and the professional nurse's self-esteem and productivity, strengthening by an enabling organisational culture (Vagharseyyedin, Vanaki & Mohammadi, 2011:787).

It is against this background that the researcher seeks to explore the phenomenon of quality of work life as experienced by newly employed professional nurses because no focus is currently directed to them, and hence they leave the organisation very soon, often within one year of employment, due to their poor quality of work life.

Problem statement

Newly employed professional nurses finds it difficult to adapt and settle into their new work environment, they appear to be anxious and seeking support from their colleagues. Their quality of work life is further affected by an excessive workload, uncertainty of what is expected from them, and lack of support from colleagues and management that leads to frustration and staff turnover.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study is aimed at exploring and describing how newly employed professional nurses experience their quality of work life at a private hospital in Gauteng and to describe guidelines that will improve newly employed professional nurses' quality of work life.

Research methodology

Design

A qualitative research approach was used as it has the ability to explore and offer in-depth descriptions of the lived experiences of the newly employed professional nurses regarding their quality of work life at a private hospital in Gauteng. A research design that is qualitative, exploratory, descriptive, phenomenological, and contextual has been selected for this study. This design has the ability to explore and offer in-depth descriptions of the lived experiences of newly employed professional nurses regarding their quality of work life at a private hospital in Gauteng.

Population and sampling method

The target population comprised of newly employed professional nurses who have been in employment for less than 12 months at a private hospital in Gauteng. The purposive sampling method was used to ensure that rich data could be collected to fit the purpose of the study. Data were collected till no new information were forthcoming and data saturation occurred (Burns & Grove, 2009:361). After 11 interviews, the researcher and expert interviewer concluded that no new themes emerged and data saturation was reached.

Data collection method

In this study, an independent interviewer was recruited to ensure that data could be collected in a consistent way to maintain credibility and eliminate biasness. Individual, in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore and describe the experiences of the newly employed professional nurses regarding their quality of work life in a private hospital in Gauteng. During the interviews the following research questions were posed:

- Tell me about your experiences regarding the quality of work life as a newly employed professional nurse at this private hospital?
- What can be done to improve the quality of work life for newly employed professional nurses.

Data analysis

Tesch's qualitative open-coding data analysis method was utilised to analyse the data in this study (Tesch in Creswell, 2014:198).

Measures to ensure trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was maintained by using strategies of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability as described by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Credibility was ensured through recruiting an expert external interviewer who collected data with a recorder. Field notes were also made during the interviews. Two expert qualitative researchers from the University of Johannesburg supervised the research study. Transferability were ensured through providing a clear description of how the interviews, research questions, and communication skills were used to obtain the qualitative data.

Providing a clear description of the research process that included the population, sample and sampling method, the data collection method, data analysis method, and trustworthiness ensured dependability. Confirmability was established by recruiting an expert interviewer who collected data in such a manner that allowed for clarification, analysis, and summary of the data that the participants provided. Follow up research questions and field notes also contributed the process of confirmability.

Ethical considerations

The research process was guided by DENOSA's ethical standards for nurse researchers (Brink, 2011:46). These ethical principals were demonstrated through informed consent, the right to

self-determination, anonymity and confidentiality, right to privacy and the right to fair treatment. Ethical clearance was obtained from the University of Johannesburg's Faculty of Health Sciences Higher Degrees, Academic Ethics Committee and the executive management of the private hospital.

Discussion of findings

There emerged four themes with their relevant sub-themes from the data analysis process which captured the positive and negative experiences of the newly employed professional nurses regarding their quality of work life in a private hospital in Gauteng.

Positive relationship experiences include sub-themes of accepting and supportive colleagues, and teamwork. They further experienced supportive management practices with opportunities for professional growth and development through orientation and mentoring.

Negative emotional experiences regarding quality of work life were described as feelings of demotivation, stress, and frustration. Negative experiences with some work organisational aspects were identified as: lack of reward and recognition practices and inconsistent staff allocation processes (Table 1).

Theme 1: Positive relationship experiences

The participant stated that building positive relationships with their colleagues is very important as it allows them to adjust, adapt, and become part of the organisation. Newly employed professional nurses rely on building positive relationships with their colleagues to facilitate knowledge sharing, reduce uncertainty, and assists them in settling into their roles (Knapp & Daly, 2011:527).

Sub-theme 1.1 Accepting and supportive colleagues

Participants indicated that they felt supported because their colleagues were always there to assist them. This was evident in the following comment made by a participant:

“The unit manager is very straightforward but at the same time, she offers all the support you need to get there. She might not be in the unit as much as she could be, but you pick up a phone and you phone the unit manager on a Sunday afternoon, and she will talk you through what you need to know, or she will come in and help.”

Having a good relationship with the manager is very important for new employee since the manager guides, assists, and encourages the new employee to develop positive relationships with their colleagues and to internalise the organisational values. According to Hofmeyer (2013:783), managers lead teams and encourage them to develop positive relationships within the team by articulating common goals. Rush, Adamack, Gordon and Janke (2014:219) further suggest that employees who are supported and feel valued experience greater professional satisfaction and show commitment to the organisation.

On the contrary some of the participants experienced no support from their colleagues which contributed negatively to their quality of work life and the participant describe her experiences as:

“It’s tough and not easy to leave your friends that you have made. It is difficult! People can be quite unaccepting of you as a new person in this hospital. It is difficult to work in a unit where people do not know who you are. You come there and you say ‘Hello, hello!’ (Giggling) You know, please I am the new person here”.

According to Cockerham, Figueroa-Altmann, Eyster, Ross and Salamy (2011:232) lack of support from colleagues or horizontal violence can also create a hostile and oppressive environment, causing newly employed professional nurses to experience a sense of vulnerability.

Sub-theme 1.2 Teamwork

Some of the participants experienced teamwork as positive because they felt included, assisted and part of the team. The participant shared the following experience:

“I see that we are working as a team and we even have a multi-disciplinary approach when nursing the patients, for example, the nurses assist the radiographer with positioning of the patient when preparing to take an x-ray, or assisting the physiotherapist when mobilizing a patient. There is that cohesion and we are working as a team”.

Multi-disciplinary interactions allow team members to develop relationships that foster effective communication, sharing of responsibilities, and sharing information and their professional opinions (Birkeland, Hägglöf, Duhlgren & Rydberg, 2013:320).

In contrast some participant felt that teamwork was lacking and a participant described her experience as:

“The existing staff members created divisions between old and new staff. They said the new manager came with the new staff. The new staff members are the employees appointed by the new unit manager and the old staff are employees that were appointed prior to her arrival. You got the old team that the new manager is trying to retain or reorganise as a team. Therefore, there is conflict, and it is very negative”.

Disruptive behaviour and negativity interferes significantly with multi-disciplinary relationships since it affects collaboration, open dialogue, and shared decision-making within the team (Lachman, 2015:40).

Theme 2: Positive experiences with supportive management practices

Participants experienced some of the organisational practices such as orientation and mentoring were very well structured and helpful, and they deemed it necessary to understand the organisation.

Sub-theme 2.1 Opportunity for professional growth and development through orientation and mentoring

The participants felt that orientation was necessary to introduce them to some of the private hospital’s values, environment, policies and procedures. The participant stated:

“Starting off as a very new person at this institution, I found the orientation quite useful, you know. We had two weeks’ orientation and I had another two weeks where I was an observer in the ward, so you could get used to what you were doing and what was expected of you. You could learn the culture of the institution because every institution and company has its own culture”.

Orientation fosters a sense of belongingness, reduces anxiety levels, and reduces the adjustment time for newly employed professional nurse to settle into their roles in the organisation (Hendricks & Potgieter, 2012:2).

Another participant said:

“With the admission of a patient to ICU they must bring different documentation. However, you are not orientated on how to complete these forms as it is different from the documentation that I used in my previous employment”.

Dragomiroiu, Hurloiu and Milhai (2014:369) supports the finding that familiarising the newly employed professional nurses with the organisational documentation forms should be an important aspect of the orientation programme.

Another participant commented on the following mentoring practice:

“I think in the nursing environment if you are newly employed nurse you must always be paired up with a fellow colleague that can guide you. You must have someone like a mentor or shift leader in the department that can overlook what you are doing. The newly employed nurse must feel free to ask the shift leaders in each department relevant questions explaining how procedures are done”.

Mentoring improves nursing proficiency and prepares the newly employed nurses to work with others and to be efficient in the work environment (Frederick, 2014:590).

Theme 3: Negative emotional experiences regarding quality of work life

Some participants had negative emotional experiences regarding their quality of work life which they attributed to feelings of demotivation, frustration and stressful working conditions.

Sub-them 3.1 Feelings of demotivation, stress, and frustration

Some of the participants experienced difficulty in adjusting to the work environment, leading to them considering resigning because they felt demotivated and frustrated.

The participant said:

“There was a time I said, ‘I am going back. I will resign even if I do not have a permanent job anywhere’. So now, I feel demoralised and demotivated (Looking and sounding very distressed). Instead, I decided to write a letter requesting a transfer to another unit and having a fresh start”. (Talking louder)

According to research studies conducted by Nyathi and Jooste (2008:29) South African health care organisations grapple with work-related issues such as poor working conditions that can lead to demoralisation of nurses.

Theme 4: Negative experiences with some work organisational aspects

Organisational aspect such as lack of reward and recognition practices and inconsistent staff allocation were some of the negative experiences the participants encountered as newly employed professional nurses.

Sub-theme 4.1 Lack of reward and recognition practices

Participants stated there must be recognition for their work. The participant said:

“Another thing is like you find, say it’s a busy day, and I found this happens really a lot. You find that your staff is working very well and doing their best. You know they are short staffed; give them the recognition they deserve”. (Shaking her head in disbelief)

Lack of reward and recognition practices affect the employees’ attitude and performance towards the organisation if the organisation fails to fulfil its responsibilities regarding wages, benefits, and promotion (Van Aswegen, Botha, Lotz, Markham, Meyer, O’Neil & Schlecher, 2009:187).

Sub-theme 4.2 Inconsistent staff allocation processes

Some of the participants applied and were interviewed for specific positions however when contracts of employment were drawn up they assigned the participants to positions in other departments, which increased anxiety amongst the newly employed professional nurses.

A participant stated:

“Like, when I came for interview it was for Casualty and then they interviewed me for a position in Casualty, not in High Care. Afterwards when they informed me that I was successful in the interview, they send me the appointment letter but it was for High Care. I wanted to experience working in the private sector that’s why I said let me just go even though I was anxious”.

Muller et al. (2009:269) suggest that when hiring professional nurses, the unit managers should aim for and accomplish the suitable person-job-fit, enabling the newly employed professional nurses to contribute positively to their job responsibilities.

Table 1: Description of findings: Experiences of newly employed professional nurses regarding their quality of work life at a private hospital in Gauteng

THEMES	SUB –THEMES
1. Positive relationship experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accepting and supportive colleagues
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teamwork
2. Positive experiences with supportive management practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunity for professional growth and development through orientation and mentoring
3. Negative emotional experiences regarding quality of work life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feelings of demotivation, stress, and frustration
4. Negative experiences with some work organisational aspects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of reward and recognition practices
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inconsistent staff allocation processes

Conclusion and recommendations

Quality of work life should be a focus area when dealing with newly employed professional nurses, implementation of guidelines that can reinforce the sustainability of their positive experiences and corrective actions that will address their negative experiences can assist them to transition smoothly into the organisation. Improving the quality of work life for newly employed nurses will contribute to their job satisfaction, encourage employees to stay longer in the organisation and decrease staff turnover.

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Competing interest

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationship(s) that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Authors

C.M.A. (University of Johannesburg) a student, conducted this study, H.A. (University of Johannesburg) was the research supervisor and M.M.C. (University of Johannesburg) the co-supervisor.

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