

# THE PERCEPTIONS OF PROFESSIONAL NURSES REGARDING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF STAFF DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES IN A PUBLIC HOSPITAL IN GAUTENG, SOUTH AFRICA

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## **Abstract:**

This article addresses the topic of staff development programmes and how it is being implemented in a public hospital in Gauteng. This research is important because the National Department of Health in South Africa views staff development programmes as a national priority, it features in the National Core Standards for quality. Readers of an article of this nature will most probably be managers, and generally individuals who are interested in staff Development and improving the provision of patient care. The study from which this article originates was a qualitative, exploratory, descriptive and contextual research design. Data was collected by means of focus group interviews with a purposive sample of professional nurses who were identified from staff development attendance lists and who were willing to participate in the study. Data was analysed using Tesch's method of qualitative data analysis. The findings of the larger study on which this article is based revealed two main themes namely that of ineffective management practices and negative staff attitudes towards the implementation of staff development programmes. Recommendations were made towards effective management practices to facilitate the implementation of staff development programmes. This will assist planners and managers of staff development programmes to encourage nurses, and to show them the value of staff development.

## **Keywords**

Implementation, perceptions, professional nurses, staff development.

## **INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

This article originates from a larger study on staff perceptions and attitudes towards staff development programmes. Staff development is the induction, orientation, clinical teaching, in-service training, and continuous education of staff (Jooste, 2010:249). The importance of the implementation of staff development programmes is to enhance the existing clinical skills and competencies of nurses to bring about quality nursing care (Roberts & Kelly, 2007:16).

According to The South African National Department of Health Strategic Plan for Nursing Education, Training and Practice (2012/13-2016/17:40), a Continuing Professional Development system for all nurses must be introduced urgently. The availability of staff development programmes does not guarantee that the implementation of programmes will be used efficiently. However, effective support systems will enhance the professional nurses' satisfaction to implement staff development programmes (Chang & Lee, 2008:827).

According to The Skills Development Act, (Act 97 of 1998), it is primary legislation that seeks to restructure the country's National Education and Training system which is supported by the Skills Development Levies Act, (Act 9 of 1999). These Acts were promulgated to develop and improve the skills of the South African workforce to improve the quality of the lives of workers.

The South African Nursing Council in South Africa regulates the training and development of nurses as well as the quality that it provides. It creates an environment in which quality healthcare will flourish, ensures delivery of quality care through staff development. Consequently, the Human Resource strategy (2012/13-2016/17:10) states that the strategic framework must ensure a health care environment where the health force is supported and has the opportunity to develop.

The National Department of Health (2011:38), emphasises staff development programmes as a national priority which is highlighted in the National Core standards for quality, as domain 6. This domain states that a comprehensive programme for staff training and continuing professional development must be in place. Having introduced the study, the problem statement will be discussed below.

## **STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM**

Staff development programmes that nurses are required to attend are offered in a public hospital in Gauteng. However, nurses are reluctant to attend, and if they do attend, they do not implement what they have learned. As a result, identified learning needs are not remedied by staff development programmes. Some professional nurses make excuses to justify not attending and implementing the staff development programmes, the most common excuse being that they do not have the time to attend and to implement new procedures. According to Hughes (2005:47), nurses may be experiencing a lack of direction and support which contributes to the negative perceptions surrounding the implementation of staff development programmes. The research questions that guided this study are presented below.

The following research questions emanated from the above problem statement:

What are the perceptions of professional nurses regarding the implementation of staff development programmes in a public hospital in Gauteng?

What recommendations could be developed to facilitate the implementation of the staff development programmes in a public hospital in Gauteng?

## **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY, OBJECTIVES,**

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe the perceptions of professional nurses regarding the implementation of staff development programmes and to develop recommendations to facilitate the implementation of staff development programmes in a public hospital in Gauteng. The objectives of the study were:

To explore and describe the perceptions of professional nurses regarding the implementation of staff development programmes in a public hospital in Gauteng.

To develop recommendations to facilitate the implementation of staff development programmes in a public hospital in Gauteng.

## DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS

### Implementation

**Implementation** is the act of accomplishing some aim, or executing an order. "The act of implementing is providing a practical means for accomplishing a task" (WordNet, 2003-2012:16), while the Oxford Thesaurus and English Dictionary, (2006:224) defines implementation as "an application, carrying out, performance and administration." In this study implementation refers to the direct action of professional nurses regarding the implementation of staff development programmes.

### Perceptions

According to Oxford Thesaurus and English Dictionary (2006-445), '**perception**' is the ability to sense, feel, hear, believe. In this study perception refers to the professional nurses' views, their intuitions, opinions regarding the implementation of staff development programmes in a public hospital in Gauteng.

### Professional Nurses

A **professional nurse** is a person qualified and competent to independently practice comprehensive nursing in the manner, the level prescribed and who is capable of assuming responsibility and accountability for such practice (Nursing Act, South Africa, 2005:6). In this study, professional nurses refer to those nurses registered with SANC in the capacity of a professional nurse and work in all the wards of this hospital.

### Staff Development Programmes

According to Jooste (2013:249) **staff development** programmes refer to "a well-planned, comprehensive system of continuing professional growth activities carried out over a period of time to achieve specific institutional goals, objectives." In this study, staff development programmes refer to the scheduled development programmes designed for professional nurses, additional preparation to fulfill their job requirements in leadership and patient care, in the public hospitals in Gauteng.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A research design is a blueprint for conducting a study. It maximizes control over factors that could interfere with the validity of the study findings (Grove, Burns & Gray, 2013:195). The research design for this study is qualitative, exploratory, descriptive and contextual in nature. The design was used to explore and describe perceptions of professional nurses regarding the implementation of staff development programmes in a public hospital in Gauteng.

### The Research Site

The research site where this study was conducted is a public hospital in Gauteng.

### Population, sample and sampling

According to Brink, Van der Walt and Van Rensburg (2012:131), population is a group of people that is of interest to the researcher and that meets the criteria for the study. In this study the population was all professional nurses working in this hospital. The sample was professional nurses who were identified from staff development attendance registers and were willing to participate in the study. Purposive sampling was used to obtain rich information to answer questions.

### Inclusion criteria

The inclusion criteria were participants who had the characteristics to be included in the sample that is; those employed at a public hospital who had experience of eighteen months or longer in the field and who were willing to participate in the study and who had consented to the use of an audio tape recorder

### Data collection

Data was collected by means of focus group interviews. The researcher conducted this study in an environment that encouraged a comfortable conversation for participants to share their perceptions regarding the topic. Participants were able to share information regarding the implementation of staff development programmes in a short space of time (Kroll, Barbour & Harris, 2007:691).

During the focus group interviews the researcher asked the following questions: "What are your perceptions regarding the implementation of staff development programmes in this hospital?" "What can be done to facilitate the implementation of staff development programmes in this hospital?"

The researcher made use of the following interview techniques: clarifying, paraphrasing, probing and summarizing. The data recorded from the audio recorder with participant's permission was transcribed verbatim. Compiling field notes was helpful for data collection. Interviews continued until data saturation was reached. Four focus groups were interviewed on the 9/10/14 and 13/10/14 each lasted approximately 45-60 minutes.

### Data analysis

Data recorded from the audio recorder was transcribed verbatim before being analysed and all data was analysed according to Tesch's open coding as described in (Creswell, 2013:184). All transcripts collected were carefully read by the researcher and the independent coder who is a data analyst working independently on data to minimise the chances of errors. Consensus discussions between the researcher and the independent-coder were confirmed.

### Trustworthiness

To ensure trustworthiness the strategies of credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, reflexivity supported by (Lincoln & Guba, 1985:218-316) were used.

### Ethical considerations

The study commenced after permission was granted by the Research Ethics Committee, Higher Degrees Committee of the University of Johannesburg, permission from the management of the hospital under study, and the participants who consented to participate. To ensure the rights of the participants the following principles were adhered to principle of autonomy, non- maleficence, beneficence, privacy, confidentiality and justice, referred to by (Dhai & McQuoid-Mason, 2011:14-15).

### Discussion of Research Results

A central theme that was identified was that professional nurses had negative perceptions regarding the implementation of Staff Development Programmes in the hospital where this study was conducted. The table below presents the themes and sub themes as identified in the analysis of the raw data.

**Table 1 Theme and Sub Themes**

<b>THEMES</b>	<b>SUBTHEMES</b>
<b>1. Ineffective management practices</b>	1.1 Bureaucratic management 1.2 Poor planning for staff development programmes 1.3 Poor implementation of staff development programmes 1.4 Lack of support
	2.1 Reluctance and Uncooperative attitudes

<b>2. Negative staff attitudes towards the implementation of staff development programmes</b>	
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The above themes and sub themes were identified from the analysis of the raw data and are discussed below in detail.

**Central Theme: Negative perceptions regarding the implementation of staff development programmes**

Participants had negative perceptions regarding the implementation of staff development programmes as evidenced by the main themes which are: Ineffective Management Practices, Negative Staff Attitudes towards the Implementation of Staff Development Programmes. According to Roussel, Russell, Swansburg and Swansburg (2006:470) staff development programmes are designed to motivate nurses to consider the learning process, consequently staff development programmes should not elicit negative perceptions. Staff Development activities are aimed at enhancing performance in nurses' current roles and based on the employer's policies, procedures (DeSilets, 2006:10). Staff education is therefore key to success (Roussel et al., 2006:470). Ineffective management practice contributes to the negative perceptions.

**Ineffective management practices**

Professional nurses identified ineffective management practice as managers who are not engaged in promoting the implementation of SDPs. Managers are expected to be involved with the planning for SDPs. Dymoke and Harrison 2006:80; Heaney 2004:42; Mewborn and Huberty (2004:6) concur that managers should keep evidence through records of staff development programmes that have taken place and names of staff who have attended, to ensure equitable allocations of staff to SDPs.

Ineffective management according to participants involved unfair treatment, of staff for SD, the long waiting period before being sent for study, no staff involvement, poor planning for staff development programmes, poor implementation of staff development programmes and lack of support by management towards the implementation of SDPs.

In response to the question; what could have been done to facilitate the implementation of staff development programmes? Some Participants responded that they required staff development in order to grow, staff development is a lifelong professional process (Gallagher, 2007:467). Closely related to ineffective management is bureaucratic management.

**Bureaucratic Management**

Bureaucratic management refers to a leader who is insecure and who finds security in following established policies (Booyens & Bezuidenhout, 2014:291). Muller, Bezuidenhout and Jooste (2011:422) assert that with bureaucratic management the manager buries herself in administrative detail, does not involve personnel, blames failures in the organisation on the members of her team. Participants perceived management as bureaucratic where staff development was run by matrons only, without the involvement of staff. This is evidenced by the following response: *"Matrons are the ones running staff development alone. 'We always hear that there are people for staff development committee.", When it comes to staff selection to send people for courses, it's only done by management"*. Ono and Ferreira (2010:1) refer to this lack of involvement as demotivating for nurses. Papastamatis, Panitsidou, Giavrimis, and Papanis (2009:84) argue that management that fails to consult and involve nurses in SD has not been successful in their staff development programmes.

To the question what could have been done to facilitate the implementation of staff development programmes a participant responded. *"If nurses can be involved in selection of staff to go for studying and not done by management only, I think that can be well done. Nurses must be involved, operational managers should give input regarding selection because they work with and know staff. Another participant commented "We don't even know who to ask, hence if we had staff development committee, we would ask them."* According to Roussel et al. (2006-

471) a staff development committee is vital for identifying needs and planning programmes. Poor planning inhibits the implementation of SD.

### **Poor Planning for Staff Development Programmes**

Planning and provision of the necessary educational programmes is the opportunity for staff to be developed and it is management's responsibility to ensure that there is adequate planning for SD (Marquis & Huston, 2006:10). Staff is sometimes required to attend SDP without prior notice and this is perceived as poor planning. *"With staff development you know mmm..., there is no proper planning in our institution. You can be phoned that morning and be told come transport is waiting you must go and attend of which you were not told in advance."*

The participants also indicated that poor planning affected the working conditions in their units. *"What I think is lacking firstly eh, is planning, If there is no planning, there is no direction.* Professional nurses were deterred from attending staff development programmes because of poor planning (Roussel et al., 2006:321).

*"They must give us a programme to know when to attend and not to be phoned now, and expect you to go. When you are busy with the patient then you have to leave go and attend the SDP* was the response to the question what could have been done to facilitate the implementation of staff development programmes?

Effective staff development programmes begin with an analysis of staff needs (Roussel et al., 2006:472). Nurses are interested and motivated when they enter educational programmes if their needs are identified. They are aware of the level of competencies that they would like to achieve, the knowledge they require to improve their performance. A participant stated. *"In forthcoming workshops, send relevant people of different departments, e.g. Maternity staff for maternity workshops."* An important attribute to the planning of SDPs is that it has a structure that facilitates an investment in staff as the asset of the institution (Davidson, 2005:31). Nurses remain the core of any healthcare facility, claims Muller et al. (2011:326). Not only do they attend to the patients' needs around the clock, they constitute the facility's early warning system. Staff shortage was also mentioned by participants.

### **Staff shortage**

Staff shortage refers to insufficient nursing staff, high patient–nurse ratio in the wards to deliver nursing care (Cleary, Horsfall, Muthulakshmi, Happell & Hunt, 2013:2608). The above is evident in the following quotation: *"We should be send for courses but because of staff shortage we cannot leave the wards with less staff and high patient ratio to go and attend SDP.* Staff shortage in any institution affects the effectiveness that an organisation wishes to achieve (Jooste, 2013:93). When nurse-patient ratio is high, active support may be crucial for nurses' professional survival (Cleary et al., 2013:2611). Participants conceded that SDPs are important for nurses, but staff shortage inhibited their attendance. Participants made reference to poor implementation of SDPs.

### **Poor Implementation of staff development programmes**

Staff members who attended SDPs were unable to implement what they had learned as is evidenced by the following comment. *"Staff development is a very good idea but is not properly implemented.* Poor implementation of programmes are a result of staff not attending SDPs, to implement what has been learned from the programmes (Cleary et al., 2013:2608). *"A participant conceded that; "Sometimes people who have attended do not implement if you ask someone you will hear, eh..., but it was boring."* (Gigling).

The benefit of implementing staff development programmes includes ensuring that nurses improve their responsibility and commitment to educational programmes. Nurses' effectiveness and improvement emphasises the necessity for the continuous growth (Desimone et al., 2006:178; Knight & Wiseman, 2005:387).

A participant shared the following when asked what could have been done to facilitate the implementation of staff development programmes. *"What I can say with implementation is that it has to be done well. If staff development is implemented properly that will improve absenteeism, self-esteem, staff morals, knowledge and skills* "The need to enhance their knowledge and skills is a priority, implementing the programmes attended is pivotal" (Claffin, 2005:263). The implementation of SDPs that have been attended will contribute towards improving the ongoing change in the work practice (Shanley, 2004:84), nurses should give feedback after attending staff development and implement programmes that actively promote the ongoing changes.

### **Lack of support from Management**

Management being unable to support nurses in the implementation of staff development programmes causes demotivation which affects the implementation of staff development programmes (Galvin & Timmins 2010:726-735). Participants mentioned that their seniors do not support them, management need to enquire about their experiences regarding the manner which staff are sent for training as they believed that they needed to be developed. According to a participant lack of support is a barrier to the implementation of SD programmes (Haywood, Pain, Ryan & Adams 2012:137). Desimone et al. (2006-205) confirm that as a result of the lack of support regarding educational programmes, nurses have less confidence, motivation to implement what they have learned at the SDPs.

Participants were requested to provide suggestions regarding the implementation of staff development programmes a participant replied; *"We want support if a person wants to go to school she must be supported sent to acquire knowledge and be developed."* Staff development in health care enhances practice and promotes the delivery of quality care. Continuous education must be accessible for nurses to engage fully in staff development programmes (Clafin, 2005-263). A theme that emerged strongly from the analysed data was the staff's negative attitude towards the implementation of staff development programmes which is presented below.

### **Negative staff attitudes towards the implementation of staff development programmes**

Negative staff attitude was identified as affecting the implementation of staff development, this includes; reluctance and uncooperativeness. Lee (2005:41) claims that the effect of negative attitude in the workplace impedes the implementation of SD programmes.

Asked what could have been done to facilitate the implementation of staff development programmes? A participant responded. *"Attitude will improve if we are working together as a team. We must be approached in a proper manner to be motivated and implement what we have learned."* Nurses should have a positive attitude towards their work and other people because a negative attitude affects the implementation of knowledge acquired (Swanepoel, Erasmus & Schenk, 2008:19). When staff is demotivated, they inevitably manifest reluctance and uncooperativeness.

### **Reluctance and an uncooperative attitude**

Participants mentioned that staff was sometimes reluctant when attempts were made to implement what was learned from SDPs. *"Sometimes when one tries to implement what one has learned; staff is reluctant to show interest in what you say. Continuing education in nursing is a key element to the maintenance of quality healthcare. Richards and Potgieter (.2010:44) pointed out that organisations which do not invest in the development of their employees may discover that their organisation is characterised by reluctant employees who are not interested in implementing current knowledge, skills acquired from SDPs.*

Participants were adamant that: *"People must change we all need to change and stop being reluctant, staff development is for our own growth. "I think people are stuck in doing things the old way rather than moving with the current age. People must change for their own benefit and that could help to implement the knowledge they have acquired."* This is important to facilitate the implementation of staff development programmes. Nurses must take responsibility for their own development in order to be empowered (McGillis Hall, Waddell, Donner & Wheeler, 2004:232) a positive attitude towards nursing practice is associated with job satisfaction (McGillis et al., 2004-232) and new skills are essential to professional and organisational success.

### **Uncooperative attitude to SDPs**

Participants mentioned, that staff was uncooperative because they were not recognised and were overlooked. *"I am a junior sister in this hospital. You will find that if there is a new community service sister in the unit, some staff members will start treating her unfairly because they feel she is of their age and cannot delegate them to carry out their duties. Insufficient knowledge predisposes nurses to have negative attitudes towards the implementation of SD (Yfantis, Tiniakou, & Yfanti, 2010:193). A lifelong process of active participation of nurses in SD and to give*

feedback as well as to implement what they have learned from SD should be encouraged. With regard to the facilitation of the implementation of staff development programmes a participant's response follows. "We need to be trained and all to take part in our wards". "Training must be given to all staff members in order to be developed", "All staff that has attended must implement what they have attended." Since SD is essential and the South African National Quality Policy acknowledges the need for the development of nurses it is obligatory that nurses are given the requisite SD (Mseleku, 2007:14). Healthcare organisations are committed to ensuring a quality of opportunities in the development of all its healthcare professionals (Jooste, 2013).

### **Recommendations**

Recommendations were made based on the findings emanating from the analysis of the focus group discussions into which literature was integrated. The implementation of staff development programmes should be conducted effectively. If staff development is implemented correctly, it could promote staff productivity, improve the standards of nursing care. Staff development must be attended, knowledge acquired must be implemented to deliver quality nursing care (Thomas, Benbow & Ayaris, 2010:524). Continued competence for health professionals is an accepted guarantee for the provision of safe patient care. Jones and Jenkins (2006:4) recommend the implementation of staff development programmes to enable staff to enhance professional performance.

### **Limitations of the Study**

No matter how careful and meticulous a researcher might be in planning a study of this nature, there will always be limitations. The limitations of this study are as follows. The study focussed only on professional nurses working in the hospital under study. Interviews were conducted during the participant's lunch break, when some participants were unable to because of the workload in the department and staff shortage.

### **Conclusion**

This article discussed the perceptions of nurses regarding staff development and identified several aspects pertaining to staff development. Participants highlighted Ineffective management and sub themes, bureaucratic management, poor planning of staff development programmes and poor implementation. The central theme that was identified was the negative perceptions regarding the implementation of staff development programmes, with the sub themes of reluctance and uncooperative attitudes. A discussion ensued pertaining to the shortage of staff and its impact on nurses attending staff development programmes. This article emanated from a larger study and intended to discuss the findings and the perceptions of nurses regarding staff development in a hospital under study.

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