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# Quality of patient care and the activities of hospital nursing unit managers in South Africa: a paradox?

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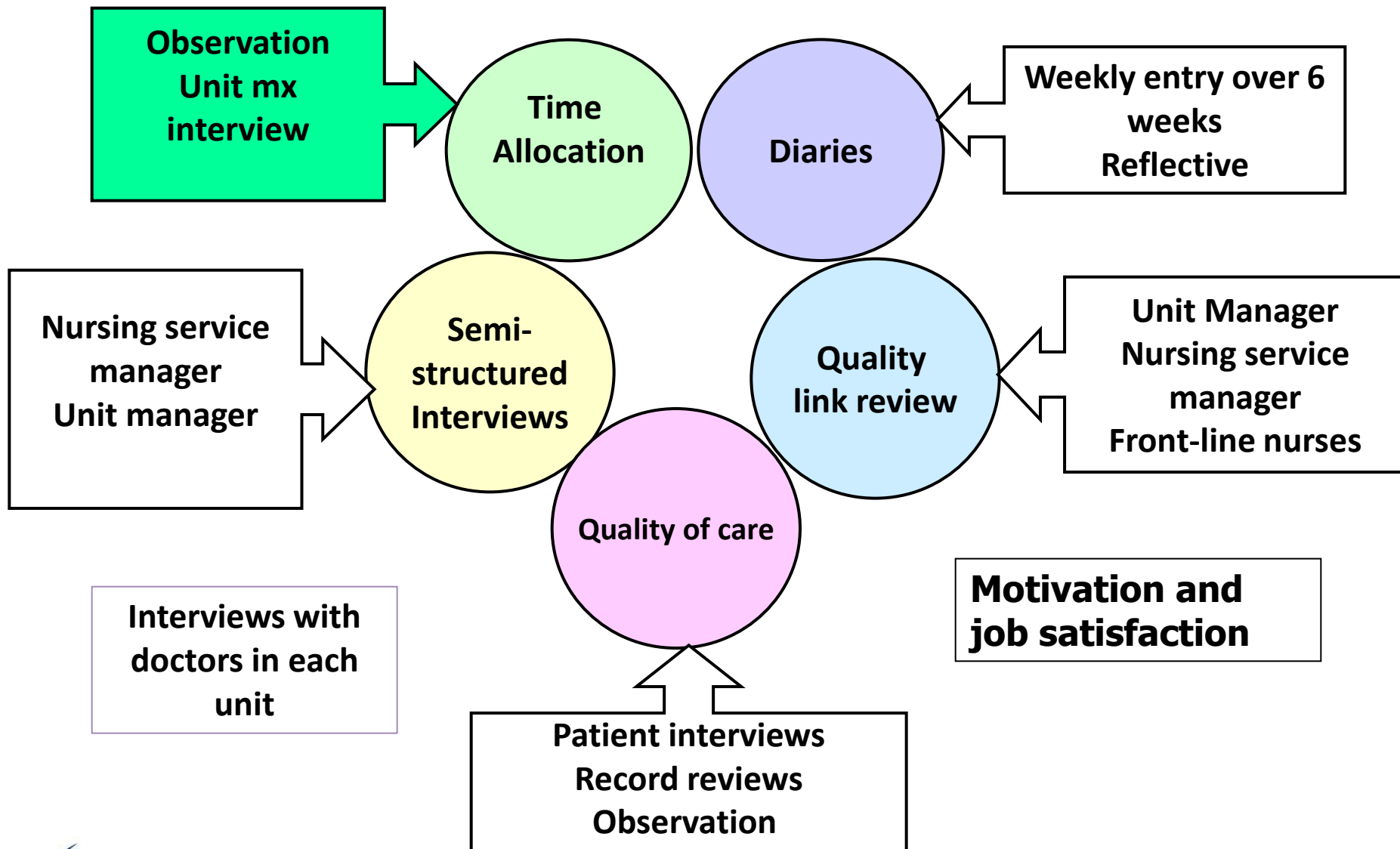
# BACKGROUND

- Major health care reforms in South Africa
- Improving the quality of health care delivery a priority
  - Amendment to the National Health Act
  - Compulsory accreditation of all health facilities
- ‘Reconstruction & revitalisation’ of nursing profession health ministerial priority
  - Strategic plan on nursing education, training and practice

# FOCUS OF PAPER

- Examine the activities of nursing unit managers in South Africa in light of emphasis on quality of care
- Study focused on:
  - Two South African provinces: Free State & Gauteng
  - Nine hospitals
  - Four units in each hospital: internal medicine, surgery, paediatrics, maternity
- Done as part of an overall study to examine the relationship between nursing unit management and quality of care in hospitals.

# OVERALL METHODS



# METHODS TO EXAMINE ACTIVITIES

- Each unit manager observed for a period of two hours a day:
  - One hour recorded in the morning and one in the afternoon.
  - Activities recorded on a minute by minute basis.

# EXAMPLE OF RAW DATA

- 08:30 Organised dressings for discharged patient
- 08:32 Made call to doctor to see patient with chest pain
- 08:33 Stocked basins with hand rub
- 08:36 Checked if patient received his medicines to take home
- 08:37 Checked on condition of patient
- 08:39 Explained operation to patient's relatives

# ANALYSIS

- Raw data entered into excel spread-sheet
- Data coded into categories, independently by two nurse researchers
- Data analysed according to the time spent on activities in each category
- Data validation through workshop with unit managers, and examining data from other components

# CATEGORIES OF ANALYSIS (1)

- **Patient care:** includes checking care; discussing care; directing care; providing care; organizing & coordinating care; assessing patients
- **Patient administration:** admissions & discharges; nursing records; hospital administration; quality assurance
- **Education:** patient education; teaching staff; organizing staff development
- **Support & communication** to: doctors; nurses; patients; visitors; other staff; students; phoning

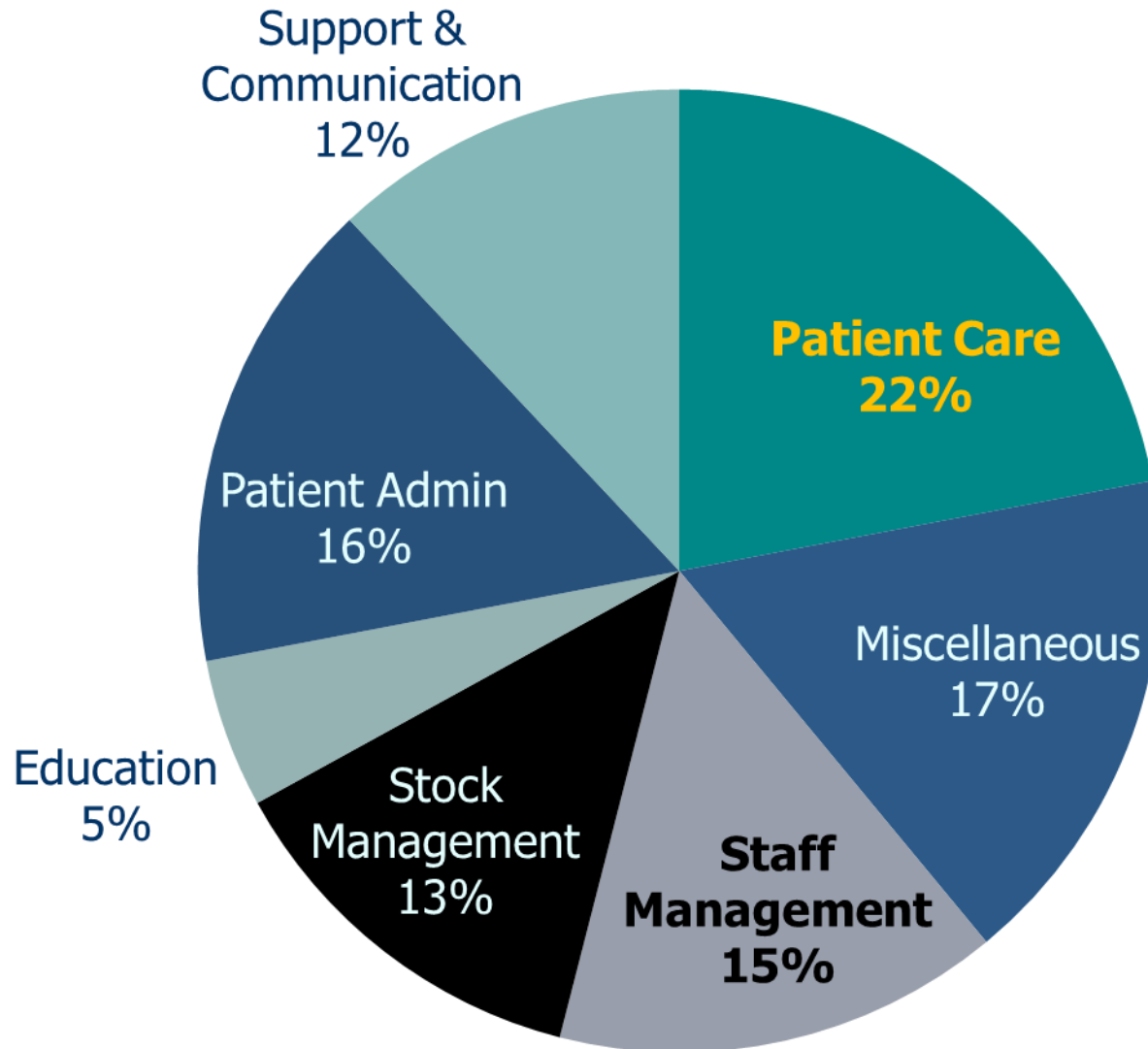
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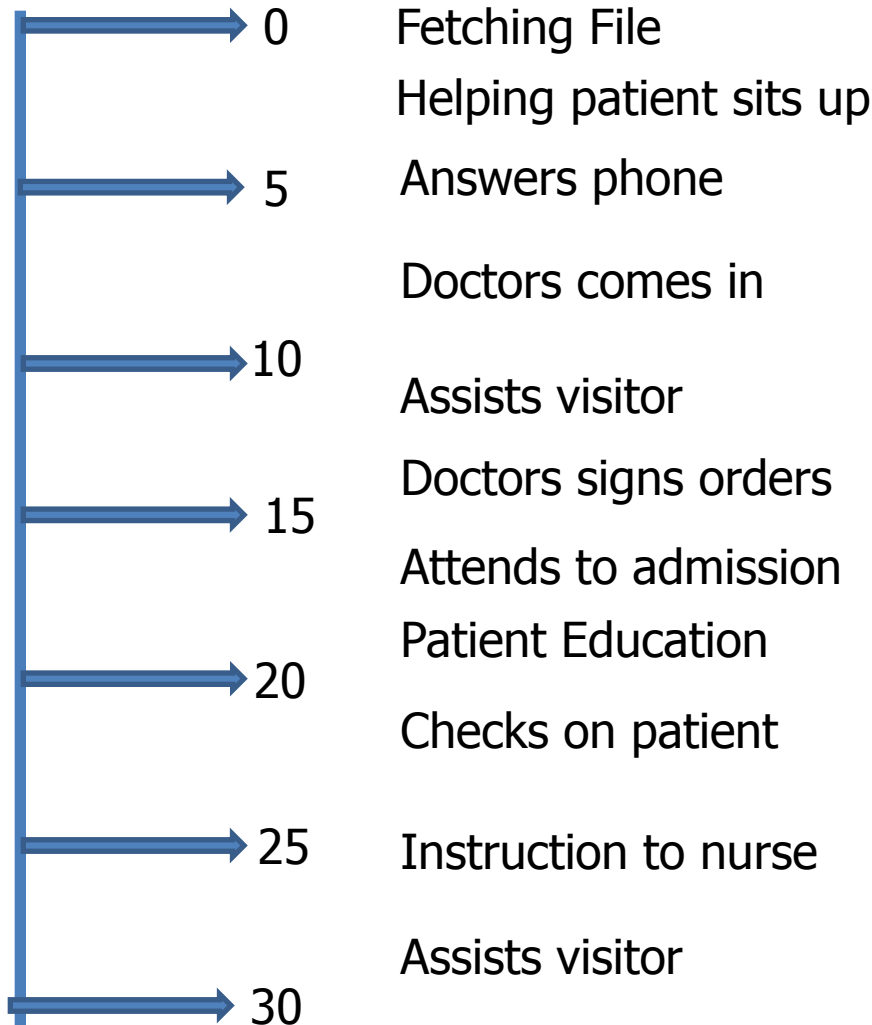
# CATEGORIES OF ANALYSIS (2)

- **Stock management:** ordering; checking; receiving; distributing/locating
- **Staff management:** directing; correcting; orientating; sourcing; allocating & delegating
- **Miscellaneous (other):** walking & seeking; hygiene; maintenance & support services; breaks - tea/lunch/rest; tidying; meetings; donors, sales people & outsiders

# RESULTS



# INTERRUPTIONS



**Average  
number of  
activities per  
hour = 36**

**Writing patient reports – total 30 minutes**

# OTHER TIME CONSUMING ACTIVITIES (1)

- Walking and seeking staff and equipment
- Repetitive activities – could have been done by lower categories of staff
- Provided a great deal of hands on care personally – stated this was due to fact that then they knew it would be done.
- Allocating & delegating – spent a lot of time pouring over off-duty allocations and often re-arranging schedules due to nurse absenteeism

## OTHER TIME CONSUMING ACTIVITIES (2)

- Sourcing staff from agencies – private sector issue as run on minimum staff and supplement when cannot manage
- Donors and other kind people visit and require unit managers' time e.g. bringing toys for children
- Tidying – obsessive activity – may have been due to presence of field workers

# DISCUSSION

- Diversity of nursing unit managers work & workloads make it difficult to focus on quality of patient care in their units
- Nursing managers seem to engage with trivia (tidying lockers, tying curtains, fetching keys, etc.), rather than ward management.
- Nurse unit managers spent more time on actual ward management issues:
  - Where another registered nurse as a shift leader to supervise care
  - Ward clerk for administration

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## SHORT-TERM

- **Mentoring Programme:**
  - Experienced, senior nurses who are respected and keen to teach and assist.
- **Ward clerks** to relieve the unit manager of routine administrative work.
- **Managers forums**

## LONG-TERM

- Review of the **content of Nursing Management courses** and the teaching methods.
  - Delegation
  - Conflict management (Doctors, fellow nurses, patients, patient relatives)
  - Human resource management
  - Time allocation
  - Organisations skills
  - Ward management
  - Clinical management
- An **open and transparent merit - based promotion** system

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