

Background

The health care system is under constant stress from a multitude of factors related to workforce issues, technological advances and political pressures. While much is written about nurses and nursing our knowledge pertaining experiences of night shift nurses is limited.

Study Aim

Explore the experiences of night shift nurses relationships with other night staff, non-night staff and general work satisfaction issues.

Method

Constructivist inquiry framed the study. Data was derived from interviews and participant diaries. Participants were 14 nurses working nights, half or more of their total shifts in medical or surgical wards in NSW regional hospitals. Thematic analysis of the data was undertaken.

Implications

The important areas of interpersonal relationships, effective leadership, work environment, clinical competencies and recognition of the critical role of night time nurses must be used to inform future decisions that impact night time nursing staff.

Recommendations

Health District and Facility Managers:

- Review current policy and develop new policy as required
- Build on teamwork of night staff
- Consider strategies to improve communication and cooperation
- Examine leadership options for night staff
- Explore professional development needs of night shift nurses

Conclusion

Night shift nurses had strong positive relationships with co-workers, but experienced disconnectedness with staff from other shifts and the facility in which they worked. They consider their role highly critical yet believed they were poorly regarded.

“... (night shift) makes you a good nurse though, it makes you a ... good decision maker and really responsible.”

“I personally feel that night staff are the least appreciated ... sometimes we just need to be remembered.”

Can you see me?

Experiences of night shift nurses in Australian regional public hospitals: A qualitative case study

Major Findings

Two dimensions:

Interwoven through the key themes

Ubiquitous feelings of being undervalued

Despite their perceived vital role

Desire for more control over conditions and decision making

In conjunction with skilled leadership and support.

Work Relationships - “A good group”

Positive relationships were more common and stronger with nurses on the same shift and less cooperative with nurses on different shifts

Work Environment - “Nobody has told you”

Night shift nurses endured poorer working conditions in terms of physical and interpersonal interactions than their daytime counterparts

Work Practices - “You make your own decisions”

Night shift provided opportunity for professional growth for some nurses but produced a slippage in skills for others

Impact on lifestyle/perception of others - “Living the life of a bat”

Night shift provided nurses with flexibility for family and social activities yet impeded these same activities, primarily through pervasive fatigue