

Nurse–Patient Assignments

Moving Beyond Nurse–Patient Ratios for Better Patient, Staff & Organizational Outcomes

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Objectives & Disclosures

- ▶ By the end of the session the learner will:
 - Be able to describe at least two purposes, factors and steps for making nurse–patient assignments.
 - Understand the connection between the nurse, the patient and the environment when making patient assignments.

Nurse–Patient Assignments

- ▶ The matching of the nurse and patient for a specified time for the provision of nursing care.
- ▶ The Research
 - Nurse Education & Unit Tenure affect patient outcomes (Aiken, Clarke, Cheung, Sloane & Silber, 2003; Bartel, Beaulieu, Phibbs & Stone, 2014)
- ▶ Potential to affect outcomes
 - Patient–Falls, Hospital Acquired Infections, Medication Errors
 - Nurse–Satisfaction, Burnout
 - Organizational–Length of Stay, Turnover

Purpose & Research Questions

- ▶ The purpose of this study was to explore and describe the nurse–patient assignment process.
- ▶ What do charge nurses perceive as the **purpose** of the nurse–patient assignment process?
- ▶ What **decision factors** do charge nurses consider during the nurse–patient assignment process?
- ▶ What are the **steps** of the nurse–patient assignment process?

Methods

- ▶ Exploratory study (semi-structured interviews)
- ▶ Not-for-profit 412-bed community hospital located in the Southeastern U.S.
- ▶ Purposive sample of charge nurses
- ▶ Institutional review board approval was obtained from the hospital and the university where the researcher was affiliated

Sample & Setting

- ▶ Currently involved in making nurse–patient assignments
- ▶ A history of making at least two nurse–patient assignments in the past two weeks
- ▶ Medical (MED)
- ▶ Surgical (EURG)
- ▶ Gynecology (GYN)
- ▶ Oncology (ONC)
- ▶ Surgical Intensive Care (SICU)
- ▶ Maternal–Infant (MB)
- ▶ Labor & Delivery (L&D)
- ▶ Special Care Nursery (SCN)
- ▶ Emergency (ED)
- ▶ Post–Anesthesia Care (PACU)
- ▶ Operative Care (OR)

Selection Criteria

The Units

Participant Characteristics (n=14)

	Range	Mean
Age (Years)	25-63	39
Years as a nurse	3.5-42	14.6
Years at Facility	3.8-29	10.8
Years on Unit	3.5-25	8.9
Years in Position	0.5-10.5	3.9
Years Making Assignments	0.8-24	6.8

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

▶ Purpose Questions

- What are your specific goals, or what specific outcomes are you anticipating when you make these assignments?
- How do you know whether or not the assignment process met your expectations?

▶ Factor Questions

- In general, what are the major factors you take into consideration when making nurse-patient assignments?
- What tools or information do you need to complete the assignment process?

▶ Steps Questions

- “Walk” me through the process, describing how and what you did along the way.
- Would you describe this assignment process as typical or atypical? Why?

Purposes of the NPA Process

Purposes (n=11)	Definitions	Example
Fair (n=7)	Employees are treated in the same manner. No one receives special treatment.	"One of the things for the nurses is that they want a fair assignment."
Best Care (n=6)	The patient receives the best care possible or has the most favorable care outcome.	"...give them the best care possible..."
Staff Wellbeing (n=6)	Take into consideration the psychological wellbeing of the staff by avoiding overly stressful situations and personality conflicts. Create a positive work environment.	"We do our best to keep people happy."
Workload (n=6)	Distribute the work of the unit evenly or equally amongst the staff. Make it balanced.	"I just to try to even out the workload."

Purposes of the NPA Process

Purposes (n=11)	Definitions	Example
Nurse/Patient Match (n=5)	Match the nurse's characteristics, for example, skills or experience, to the identified patient's needs.	"To have...the best nurse paired up with the best patient load for that nurse."
Workload Completion (n=4)	The work of the unit is completed during the designated shift.	"Being able to get the work finished."
Safety (n=4)	Keep patients safe. Do not expose them to dangerous conditions or practices.	"But it's always the safety of the patient."
Maintaining the Workflow (n=2)	Achieve the most efficient movement of patients through the unit.	"You keep the flow going."
Patient Advocacy (n=2)	Advocate for the patient by ensuring his/her rights are protected and supported.	"[Doing]...what's right for your patients"

Purposes of the NPA Process

Purposes (n=11)	Definitions	Example
Care Coordination (n=1)	The nurse collaborates effectively with other members of the healthcare team.	"You want that nurse to be able to work with the social worker, therapist, who comes in, the dietary, dietary department."
Continuity of Care (n=1)	The patient is reassigned to the same nurse when the nurse is available.	"[They are]...already familiar with the patient. They can tell if there's been a change, an improvement or a decline."
Discharge Planning (n=1)	The needs of the patient for discharge planning are met.	"We're always planning for their discharge."
Nurse Development (n=1)	Nurses' training and orientation needs are met.	"New nurses or...orienting new employees...they take priority over assignments."
Patient Quality/ Satisfaction (n=1)	Patients receive quality care and are satisfied with their experience on the unit.	"You want a good experience for the patient and the family."

Decision Factors

Patient	Nurse	Environment
Demographics (n=11)	Competence (n=10)	Current Staffing (n=10)
Acuity (n=10)	Nurse-Patient Relationship (n=8)	Nurse-Patient Ratio (n=10)
Workload (n=10)	Demographics (n=5)	Location (n=8)
Length of Stay (n=2)	Additional Duties (n=4)	Collegiality (n=7)
	Preference (n=3)	Support Staff Availability (n=2)
	Work Shift (n=2)	Time of Day/Week (n=2)
		Care Standard (n=1)

Steps of the NPA Process

	Pathway 1	Pathway 2	Pathway 3
Steps	-Assign nurse to area	-Assign nurse to patient	-Divide patients into groups
	-Assign patient to area	-Change assignment	-Assign nurse to a group
	-Change assignment		-Change assignment
Units Using Pathway	ED OR PACU L&D	L&D MB SCN SICU GYN	MED ONC SURG

Key Findings

- ▶ Patient, nurse and environmental domains
- ▶ Best care and safety are purposes of the nurse–patient assignment
- ▶ Purposes direct decision factors
- ▶ Purposes compete
- ▶ Three pathways to nurse–patient assignment process
- ▶ Unit characteristics direct pathways

Putting Research Into Practice

- ▶ Hospital-wide practice review and standardization
- ▶ Unit-specific policies and procedures for making NPAs
- ▶ Formalized hospital-wide charge nurse education and orientation
- ▶ Collect and track data, establish the link between the NPA and patient, nurse and organizational outcomes

References

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