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## Evaluation of the Use of Standard Operating Procedures in the Professional Practice of Nursing

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### Purpose

The aim of this study was to evaluate the use of Standard Operating Procedures in the professional practice of the nursing team as well as to identify fragilities and potentialities after their implementation in health institutions.

### Methods

This was an evaluation research, with a quantitative approach, structured in two stages: documentary analysis and subsequent application of a questionnaire to nursing professionals who work in Public Health Units of a city in the State of Sao Paulo, Brazil, from April to June 2015 (the questionnaire had been previously elaborated and validated by a judges committee). The questionnaire applied was divided into two segments: sociodemographic characterization of the subjects and items referring to the use, potentialities and fragilities of the implemented protocols. Additionally, 14 operating procedures were implemented into the sites of study in mid-2012 (nasogastric and nasoenteral catheterization protocol, catheterization by cystostomy, bladder catheterization for relief and for delay, vital signs measurement, venous puncture, blood sample collection, capillary glycosimetry, intestinal and gastric lavage, tracheostomy cannula care, airway aspiration, medication administration and wound dressings).

The training process of the nursing professionals began in the same period. As for a theoretical reference, this study evaluated the selected health services using the evaluation triad, which consists of: structure, process and results. The study was applied to 247 nursing professionals (i.e. registered nurses, nurse technicians and nursing assistants) who worked in the so called "Basic Health Units", "Family Health Units" and "the Prehospital Care Service" and who were selected in order to meet the stipulated inclusion criteria: At least two years of prior contact with the protocols. It should be noted that those nursing professionals who were on vacation or on a sick leave during the period of data collection were excluded from this study. All statistical tests were performed with a significance level of 5% ( $\alpha=0.05$ ).

### Results

More than half of the interviewed professionals consulted the procedures protocols directory daily, reporting that they were used at least once in the twelve months preceding the survey. There was a statistically significant difference between the variables "professional category" and "daily use of protocols" ( $p=0.000$ ), as well between "professional category" and "consultation of protocols in the last 12 months" ( $p=0.000$ ), indicating the existence of an association between them.

The professionals reported changes in the execution of nursing interventions after the implementation of the operational procedures. Regarding the association between the improvement of the knowledge of the nursing professionals and the participation in the training related to the protocols, a statistically significant result ( $p=0.009$ ) was obtained, as well as the in the result obtained from the association between the interventions performed after the Standard Operating Procedures and the participation in the training related to the protocols ( $p=0.025$ ). This reinforces the importance of training actions in the area of care improvement because these actions generate positive results. The main fragilities of the implemented protocols pointed to the reduced number of professionals, inadequate physical structure and lack of materials. Among the potentialities were the standardization of materials and the concern for professional and patient safety.

Considering the contemporary health outlook, the triad model (structure, process and results) is intended to provide a basis for the systematic practice of evaluating the quality of the services provided. In this context, the process component of this study encompassed the potentialities and fragilities perceived by professionals in the services and procedures performed from the implementation, training and use of the protocols. Regarding the analysis of the results established by the same model, the incorporation and subsequent execution of operational procedures showed implications for the clinical competence of nursing professionals, compliance with patient safety standards, quality of care provided and customer satisfaction. Concerning to the structure, the research emphasized the importance of the structural preparation of the health units, emphasizing the need to adapt the facilities in terms of organization and resources for the training related to protocols and subsequent development of interventions in the daily practice of the nursing professionals.

### Conclusion

According to the results found in the study and based on the health service evaluation framework, the reassessment of the protocols is necessary as well the adoption of the strategy of permanent training of the professionals. The introduction of training actions may have improved the quality of nursing care evidenced by the detection of changes in the way interventions are implemented, the improvement of knowledge and the increase in the number of services offered by the health units.

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