

https://dspace.org/

Nurse's satisfaction with their working environment in a public sector hospital

Selebi, Ogorogile Clement

2006-11-01T09:56:16Z
http://hdl.handle.net/10539/1567

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

CHAPTER ONE

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

In this first chapter a broad overview of the study is presented. The background and the general effects of the shortage of nurses and nurses' satisfaction in South Africa and worldwide are discussed. Nurses have to provide patient care, and it is therefore imperative that nurses are satisfied in their workplace. Staff turnover is also costly to the hospital and thus the intention of this study is to explore job satisfaction and the intentions of nurses to stay in their workplace at a specific hospital.

1.2 Background

The conditions in public hospitals have reached a crisis level. According to Seshoka (2005: 32), public hospitals are hounded by a dire shortage of nurses, with a reported staffing ratio of one nurse to forty one (1: 41) patients at one of the clinics in Ekurhuleni, Gauteng, South Africa. This terrible shortage has resulted in a high number of 'negligence' cases reported to the South African Nursing Council, such as a baby being stolen while under nurses' care in a Mpumalanga hospital, a schizophrenic patient attacking another patient, a post-operative patient dying after being raped in a ward at Pretoria Academic Hospital and another patient who was shot and killed at Rietvlei Hospital (Seshoka, 2005: 32). Staff shortages lead to poor patient care and low staff

morale. The nursing profession has lost nurses, with some going abroad looking for greener pastures and others changing their career options.

The hospital where the study was undertaken has failed to *recruit* and *retain* skilled nurses. Such a situation leads to a reduction in the pool of nurses. Due to increased *recruitment drives* by private practices and overseas-based companies, the hospital under study lost *skilled* and *experienced* nurses. Previously this hospital, with seven hundred and eight (708) beds, in the Gauteng Province used to acquire nurses from its nursing school. Most of the nurses worked in this hospital after completion of their nursing training. Through the process of training nurses, this hospital could retain most of the neophytes after qualifying as nurses. Experienced nurses would mentor newly qualified nurses and nurses with differing experience, while various generations imparted knowledge to the newly qualified nurses. This Public Hospital was a supply stream for other institutions. It stopped training nurses in 1999 when nursing training was moved to Anne-Latzky and Chris Hani Baragwanath Nursing colleges. Currently, newly qualified nurses have a broader option of serving their contract period in an institution of their choice. The intake of nurses was further affected by the "Moratorium on appointment of staff" which was put into place by the Gauteng Department of Health during the year 2001. The poor response from nurses to post advertisements once the moratorium was lifted after a motivation from the hospital in April 2003 further impacted on the staff shortage in this hospital. The intake rate for the period from1 March 2003 until 29 February 2004 was two (2) nurses whilst the resignation *median* is five (5) nurses per month. The voluntary service termination of nurses from 1 March 1999 to 29 February

2004 was thirty one (31) registered nurses, seventeen (17) enrolled nurses and fifteen (15) auxiliary nurses.

During exit interviews and informal interviews with nurses who were leaving the institution nurses cited various reasons for the voluntary termination of their services, as follows:

- **Financial reasons:** the nurses are in too much debt so they use resignation as a means of withdrawing their pension funds to pay their debts;
- **Ill health**: for example, they may transfer out to an area or institution where their state of health is unknown. This could be linked to HIV and AIDS among nurses in South Africa;
- **Family matters:** moving to live nearer family and friends especially after marriage;
- **Migration**: working abroad in pursuit of better working conditions;
- **Salary inequity:** to earn a salary compatible with level or rank. For example if a senior auxiliary nurse trains to become an enrolled nurse on completion she would still earn the same salary and lack opportunities for promotion;
- **Co-worker relations**: poor interpersonal relationships among employees, doctors, and management; and
- **General**: to pursue new business ventures, change of career or to study further in different nursing programmes.

For the reasons stated above the hospital has lost most of its skilled and experienced nurses. The hospital has failed to retain skilled personnel who had worked for a long

period before they voluntarily terminated their services. The shortage of staff has led to increased sick leave taken by the remaining members. The number of patient complaints about nurses' negative attitudes increased over the previous five years. There was an increase in negative patient incident reports in the previous year. All these problems could be linked to work overload because the remaining nurses have to cope with the increased workload with a lower number of staff. The few nurses remaining have to continuously orientate new staff members, therefore compromising service provision which leads to higher costs. Newly employed personnel cannot cope with the workload due to inexperience and lack of mentoring and very soon leave the institution, resulting in additional problems and costs. Newly qualified registered nurses serving their contract period also find it difficult to learn since there is insufficient manpower to provide mentoring and guidance in the patient care units, partly because the institution has lost its academic role, as mentioned above. Through this period of mobility and change certain staff members remained in their posts at this institution.

1.3 Significance of the study

It was important to address the shortage of nurses and to attend to the nurses' turnover rates. It was also important to measure nurses' satisfaction with their working environment, and how the satisfaction level could be improved and nurses be retained in the service. The recommendations about retention strategies formulated in this study might help prevent further voluntary service termination by nurses. Once the skilled and experienced nurses are successfully retained, the quality of the service provision might improve. In the year 2000, nearly half a million (500 000) registered nurses in the United

States of America chose not to work in the profession for which they were trained. There is a negative relationship between nurses' staffing levels and poor patient outcome: the higher the staffing level the better the patient outcome and vice versa (Zondagh, 2004: 38).

1.4 Problem statement

Recently, the South African nursing profession has been experiencing a loss of experienced and skilled nurses. This regional hospital in Gauteng experienced a loss of experienced and skilled nurses over the last five years at the rate of sixty seven (67) nurses per year. There are currently five hundred and seventy eight (578) nurses working in this hospital. The institution has failed to retain skilled and experienced nurses and therefore there is a need to establish ways of retaining nurses. The staff turnover is due, among other reasons, to the working environment, the working conditions, and individual needs. The turnover in nurses has contributed to a decreased quality of nursing services in this hospital since there have been increased "negative incident" reports regarding patient care issues. One example involved a nurse who negligently failed to prevent and report a break in the continuity in the skin of a patient resulting in pressure sores, and another was a case of wilfully or negligently failing to record the nursing activity that a patient received. Furthermore, nurses have been taking sick leave for trivial conditions such as backache, reflected on the medical certificate, without any further investigation by the doctor.

Although this institution has lost experienced and skilled nurses, there are a number of nurses who still remain behind. The aim of this study was to investigate nurses'

perceptions about their working environment and conditions, and their intention to stay in the workplace in this regional hospital.

1.5 Research objectives

The research objectives are divided into primary and secondary objectives, as follows:

1) The primary objective is to describe professional and sub-professional nurses' (Staff and Auxiliary) satisfaction, in terms of the intrinsic and extrinsic factors of their jobs in a health service.

The secondary objectives are to:

2) Compare the satisfaction of the professional and sub-professional nurses.

3) Identify the reasons for nurses staying in this specific hospital.

1.6 Research question

1) How satisfied are nurses with their working environment?

2) What are the reasons for nurses staying in their positions and how could nurses be retained in a certain hospital?

1.7 Definition of terms

Work environment: the surroundings, especially the conditions or influences under which an employee performs his job (Onions, 1973: 667).

Job satisfaction: a multivariate human attitude in response to experience on the job and its congruence with nurses' values or expectations.

Nurses' turnover: the ratio of nurses who leave their work in one year to the number of budgeted full-time equivalent nursing posts, including involuntary and voluntary employment termination (Larrabee, Janney, Ostrow, Withrow, Hobbs and Burant 2003: 272).

Retention: a process where an employer manages to keep employees in his/her workplace beyond the contractual period/obligation.

Nurse: People trained to take care of the sick, injured, or aged, and assist surgeons, and so forth (McKechnie, 1978: 1228).

Professional nurse: a person who meets the educational requirements and is competent to practise comprehensive nursing independently, assumes responsibility and accountability for such practice, and is registered and licensed as professional nurse in terms of the Nursing Act (South African Nursing Council's Draft Charter of Nursing Practice, 2005: 47).

Staff nurse: a person who meets the educational requirements and is competent to practise basic nursing independently, assumes responsibility and accountability for such practice, and is registered and licensed as a staff nurse in terms of the Nursing Act (South African Nursing Council's Draft Charter of Nursing Practice, 2005: 47).

Auxiliary nurse: a person who is educated to practise elementary nursing independently, and is registered and licensed as a nursing auxiliary in terms of the Nursing Act (South African Nursing Council's Draft Charter of Nursing Practice, 2005: 47).

Sub-professional nurses: for this study, the sum of staff nurses and auxiliary nurses.

1.8 Overview of the study

In Chapter 2 the literature review and the framework of the study will be presented, while Chapter 3 concerns the methodology of the study. In this chapter, the research design, questionnaire, validity, reliability, data collection, population, sampling method and sample size, pilot study and the results of the pilot study, and the ethical considerations are discussed in detail. Chapter 4 presents the results of the study according to the sections of the questionnaire, namely, biographical data (Section A), job satisfaction: intrinsic and extrinsic satisfaction (Section B) and intention to stay (Section C). Finally, in Chapter 5 the results of the study are discussed in detail, and recommendations and conclusions are made.

In this chapter the broad overview of the study was discussed. Nurses' reasons for termination and the effects of these voluntary terminations were outlined. The significance of the study, problem statement, research objectives, research question and definitions of terms were identified. In Chapter 2 the literature review and framework of the study is set out.