

GUEST EDITORIAL

Education and Training on Rationing of Nursing Care: A Joint Responsibility for Educators and Practitioners

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Nurses as the largest professional group in the healthcare sector are the professionals who spend most of the time with patients (1) and, therefore, are central in providing safe patient care. Nursing care is influenced by circumstances in direct patient care, but also by organizational factors and political decision-making. In the current times of scarcity, especially nowadays when we are confronted worldwide with the corona crisis, resources are either explicitly or implicitly rationed (2). Rationing affects the planning of required nursing care that will be prioritized, rationalized or missed.

Missed care as conceptualized within the Missed Care Model is a universal phenomenon generalizable to multiple clinical situations (3). Missed nursing care (MNC) is a process measure directly related to patient outcomes; when necessary nursing care is not completed, quality of care is compromised (3). The research reports that fundamental care is often omitted (4). In a recent study (5), the following and most common elements of MNC have been recognized: communication, dental health, education, documentation, mobilization, supervision, update of care plan, personal care, medication, preparation for discharge, and psychological support. Rationing of nursing care affects patient outcomes, such as patient satisfaction, an important measure of the quality of care, immobility, falls, dyspnoea, incontinence, pneumonia, delirium, urine infection (5), and causes higher mortality rates.

MNC occurs in a poor work environment with, for example, low staffing levels, lack of materials, intensification of care due to increased demands for care and more as well as new treatment options. Other factors of influence include team culture, management style, availability of required knowledge and experience (6–8). Rationing of nursing care affects the job satisfaction of nurses, who often complain about work pressure, workload, working overtime, absenteeism and the high rate of nurse resignations (9). In daily practice, nurses often lack support in decision-making and have no other choice than to prioritize, limit or not implement

care or to miss care. This causes stress and burnout, as well as ethical problems and conflicts with professional and personal morals and values. Feelings of guilt arise because it is difficult or even impossible to meet patients' needs (4). These are reasons for nurses to leave the profession.

The Role of Education and Workplace Learning

Because of nurses' responsibilities in patient safety, the role of continuing education and training is very important. Training and planning coaching facilities *at the workplace* are opportunities to support professional nurses and the team in the continuing process of learning, awareness and reflection in daily practice in the field of patient safety and missed care. It will stimulate an open safety culture and learning on the work floor and support the handling of, for example, moral questions and dilemmas. Nurse managers and professional nurses as team members and also as mentors of nursing students are role models. They, therefore, need to be critical, open minded and willing to discuss questions, remarks or dilemmas in this matter.

Undergraduate nursing education is ideally placed to prepare future nurses. Nurse educators have an important role in developing knowledge, skills and attitudes among nursing students related to patient safety (1). In accordance with European regulations, student nurses spend more than half of their education in clinical practice. It is in real practice where students learn to integrate theory with practice and to reflect critically on clinical decision-making processes and ethical dilemmas.

Research (10) shows that 28.8% of 621 student nurses experience high-risk situations during their clinical placement. Moreover, the majority of students do not feel safe enough to discuss their experiences. It is evident that student nurses (and obviously students of other health sciences) need to feel confident and safe in critical situations, and dare 'to speak up'. However, the study indicated that although students had confidence in what they learned at school, they were less confident with the sociocultural aspects of patient safety in the real practical environment (11, 12).

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A safe and supportive learning culture is of great importance. Students must be able to learn in a safe environment, with a good pedagogical atmosphere in which clinical reasoning, dialogue and reflection are stimulated and mistakes are seen as a base for learning but not for critique. This is only possible within positive relationships between the student, the mentor, the team and the teacher. Finally, it is beyond dispute that rationing of nursing care affects student nurses during their clinical placements, when students are often 'thrown in at the deep end' (9). They regularly have to deal with obstacles such as insufficient guidance or inappropriate practical placement where it is impossible to learn and, therefore, leave the programme (13).

The education of nursing students is a joint responsibility of school and practice. Integrating and sharing knowledge has to start either from a classroom or, vice versa, from daily practice! Teachers and mentors together should actively discuss and reflect on students' practical experiences with the learning environment and consciously focus on care rationing, patient safety and missed care.

This will contribute to the development of new nurses who show a self-evident, positive critical attitude as colleagues within the team and other disciplines, and the organization and society in general. In other words, a professional nurse can, in a natural way, contribute to an open 'healthy' safety culture in all areas, where students and colleagues in practice, such as professional nurses, mentors and managers (17), can work and learn together.

Nursing is an international profession and it is important to use, wherever possible, worldly accepted standards as a base for nurse education and training. This will contribute to standardization and 'speaking the same language internationally'. The goal should be that nurses become or remain professionals who can practice collaboratively in a social way and who can provide safe nursing care in a complex and international context (14).

Within this context, good examples are widely used standards such as the ICN code of Ethics and the Patient Safety Guide from the WHO (15), which is unfortunately underutilized in Europe (16).

Considerations Up-to-date

In these difficult times when the world is struggling with the corona crisis, it is very clear that nurses have a core role in healthcare and are indispensable. The effects of rationing of nurse care are extremely present and visible worldwide. Handling corona, along with the growing economic crisis and shortages of the nursing workforce, is a huge problem. More than ever it can be expected that nurses have to deal with rationing and decisions that are related (coupled) with ethical and moral choices. They will not be able, or are not in the position, to practice according to their professional and personal standards and ethical values; moreover, they will have no time for adequate reflections and discussions, which will expectedly cause feelings of stress, guilt or discomfort.

We encourage nurses and student nurses to keep 'speaking up'. More and more European nurses and student nurses worldwide make their experiences in this corona crisis visible in the social media, television, journals and newspapers and amongst politicians! They present not only their sad emotions but also dare to explicitly articulate and openly discuss the criteria and conditions for a safe work environment for both nurses and patients. In this way, nurses show their professional role as leaders. A nurse who takes responsibility upholding the standards of professional nursing, who stands up for patients, undoubtedly is a role model for colleagues and a critical and self-confident professional and ambassador for the profession. Let us hope that the corona crisis will be over on short notice. Nothing will be the same anymore, but lessons will be learned. Hopefully, the nursing profession will be even stronger and nurses will be proud of their profession and core position in healthcare.

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