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Nursing sensitive outcomes: identifying a definition, exploration of conceptual challenges and an overview of the literature

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Nursing sensitive outcomes: identifying a definition, exploration of conceptual challenges and an overview of the literature

Abstract

Introduction/background: A literature review on nursing sensitive outcomes has been conducted as part of a larger research project. The literature was reviewed to: - identify a definition of nursing sensitive outcomes - determine the conceptual models used to describe nursing sensitive outcomes - identify significant contributions made by researchers on the development and use of nursing sensitive outcomes in clinical practice. The overall aim of the research project is to develop a set of indicators that provides a balanced view of nursing care and its contribution to patient outcomes. It is anticipated that this research will broaden the debate on nursing sensitive outcomes so that the contribution that nursing care makes to patient outcomes is able to be identified and measured.

Keywords

challenges, conceptual, exploration, definition, literature, identifying, overview, outcomes, sensitive, nursing

Disciplines

Arts and Humanities | Life Sciences | Medicine and Health Sciences | Social and Behavioral Sciences

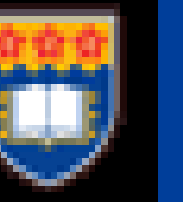
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Nursing sensitive outcomes: identifying a definition, exploration of conceptual challenges and an overview of the literature

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Introduction/background

A literature review on nursing sensitive outcomes has been conducted as part of a larger research project. The literature was reviewed to:

- identify a definition of nursing sensitive outcomes
- determine the conceptual models used to describe nursing sensitive outcomes
- identify significant contributions made by researchers on the development and use of nursing sensitive outcomes in clinical practice.

The overall aim of the research project is to develop a set of indicators that provides a balanced view of nursing care and its contribution to patient outcomes. It is anticipated that this research will broaden the debate on nursing sensitive outcomes so that the contribution that nursing care makes to patient outcomes is able to be identified and measured.

Literature Review

A systematic review of the literature was undertaken using Medline, CINAHL, ProQuest Central, Health Sciences and Wiley Interscience electronic databases.

Several key search terms were used, for example: nursing sensitive outcomes, nurse sensitive outcomes, nursing outcomes, patient outcomes, nurse, nurses, nursing, quality, evaluation, measurement, and research. Limits were applied to peer reviewed journals and only English language articles were retrieved. References that were deemed useful from bibliographies and texts were also reviewed.

The inclusion criteria were articles that used research methodology to examine the role of nurses and nursing care on patient outcomes. Literature review articles were also included if a comprehensive search strategy was described by the authors. Expert commentary, discussion papers and opinion pieces were excluded unless they made a significant contribution to defining or conceptualising nursing sensitive outcomes.

Definition of Nursing Sensitive Outcomes

Nursing sensitive outcomes aim to identify and measure the contribution that nursing care has on patient outcomes.

Doran's definition has been chosen as the most comprehensive.

'Nursing sensitive outcomes are those that are relevant, based on nurses' scope and domain of practice and for which there is empirical evidence linking nursing inputs and interventions to the outcomes'

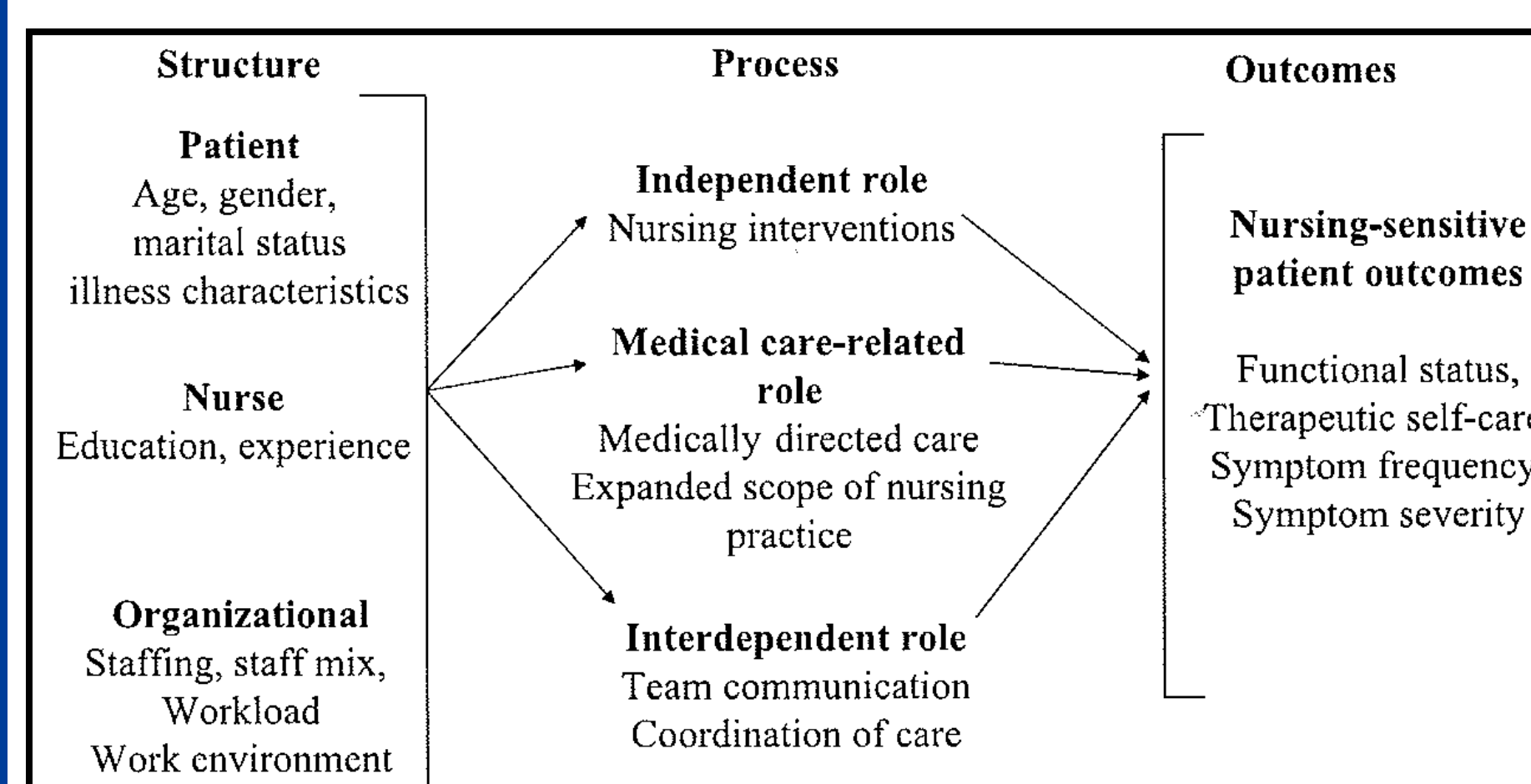
(Doran 2003, p. viii).

Conceptual Challenges

The predominant conceptual framework used to explore nursing sensitive outcome measures is the structure-process-outcome model of quality care developed by Donabedian (1986).

To identify the impact of nursing care on patient outcomes we must be able to describe and define the nursing actions to ensure that the outcome is a result of nursing care. This is a difficult task. Nursing is complex. It is not easy to define and it is not easy to separate from the hospital or health care experience.

The Nursing Role Effectiveness Model (NREM) provides a framework that can assist this process. The NREM provides a conceptual view of nursing practice in terms of the roles nurses assume in patient care (Doran et al. 2003). The NREM is illustrated in the diagram below.



The Nursing Role Effectiveness Model, originally published by Irvine, Sidani & McGillis Hall 1998, p. 59, and adapted by Doran et al. 2006, p. S76.

Results

There is a large volume of literature that explores nursing sensitive outcomes. For the purpose of analysis this has been broken into large multi-hospital / healthcare system research and small to medium scale unit or hospital studies.

Most large multi-hospital / healthcare system research use adverse events as the outcome measures. The adverse events are negative in orientation and this does not provide a balanced view of nursing care. They also use structure and outcome measures in isolation without linking process measures or creating a strong conceptual link between nursing actions and the outcomes being studied.

There are three notable exceptions to this:

- Kaiser Permanente Medical Care Program Northern California Region Project (Ditmyer et al. 1998)
- Nursing Staff Mix Outcomes research in Ontario, Canada (Doran 2003)
- Nursing Outcomes Classification (NOC) development research from a team at the University of Iowa (Maas & Delaney, 2004).

Each of these three projects use different conceptual frameworks but provide a balanced view of nursing care and measure patient outcomes from a variety of different perspectives.

Nursing sensitive outcomes research in small to medium scale unit or hospital studies has been prolific over the last 10 to 15 years. Many of these studies use unit level staffing, adverse event data and other quality indicators to measure the impact of nursing care on patient outcomes.

While the results of these studies are often varied and there is limited opportunities to generalise their findings, they provide significant information that can be used in identifying a conceptual framework for nursing sensitive outcome measures. They have also begun the important work of identifying and validating reliable outcome tools that may be able to be used collectively.

Conclusions

Nursing sensitive outcomes have the potential to measure the outcomes of nursing work. To do this they must focus upon more than adverse event data.

If a set of nursing sensitive outcomes are developed that are balanced and person centred, these indicators could be used to provide a snapshot of the quality of nursing care as is reflected in the impact that nursing care has on patient outcomes. This set of indicators could be used to evaluate the impact of changes in nursing hours, staffing and ratios within a health care setting. It could also be used to measure the quality of nursing care.

Empirical data on nursing care and patient outcomes should be available. Given that nurses make up the largest component of the healthcare workforce this empirical data should be used to make decisions about the future healthcare workforce in Australia.

Next steps in the research project

The next phase of the research involves development of a modified Delphi survey through use of:

- Consumer / patient focus groups
- Expert Nurses interviews

Recruitment of nurses from public and private healthcare services in NSW to participate in modified Delphi survey. The aim of the modified Delphi survey is to obtain consensus on a conceptual framework to describe nursing sensitive outcomes and develop a list of potential nursing sensitive outcome measures that provides a balanced view of nursing care.

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