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Nurses as Social Fabric: Role of Nurses in the Implementation of Health Information Systems

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Abstract

The social fabric of healthcare can be seen as a set of cultural ideas and practices and the social patterns and organizations by which they are interpreted. (Janzen, 2002). Nurses are now expected to function well within a technologically advanced healthcare environment, carry out higher-level, complex activities, and are held responsible and accountable for the systematic planning of humanistic nursing care for patients and their families.

Keywords:

organizational culture; nursing informatics; nursing care management

Background

Nurses provide the social glue that holds the organizational culture of a hospital together. The social fabric of healthcare can be seen as a set of cultural ideas and practices and the social patterns and organizations by which they are interpreted. (Janzen, 2002). People interact with each other with elements of trust and meaning that is embedded. These embedded social layers have special consequences in the context of implementation. They are the communication coordinators. The successful implementation of health information systems depends on the weaving and social interplay between nurses and other clinicians.

The role of the nurse is not fully understood in light of implementation of health information systems. The nurse's role in the delivery of patient care is intensified by refinement and modification of the practice of nursing (Hannah, Ball & Edwards, 1996). Nurses are now expected to function well within a technologically advanced healthcare environment, carry out higher-level, complex activities, and are held responsible and accountable for the systematic planning of humanistic nursing care for patients and their families. They are expected to keep abreast of technological implementation within their work environment.

Health information technology functions within a social fabric interacting with other individuals in an organization. Nurses are learning to integrate technology into their respective organizational culture. (Richards, 2001). Nurses shape organizational culture through their actions, bearing, conduct, attitudes, narrative and interactions in relation to others (Cronin & Rawlings-Anderson, 2004) Wolf (1988) delineated two main issues regarding nurses and their work environment. One was the underlying notion of doing good and avoiding harm; the second was that the transfer of cultural knowledge was mainly transmitted by word of mouth and demonstration.

Methods

We have utilized a purposive sample of chief nursing officers from across the US. Then we conducted a series of key informant interviews and focus groups with nursing leaders. These organizations were selected for the sample based on actual productive use/deployment of HIS. Multiple interview formats were used with the key informants. We utilized member checking and peer review to corroborate our findings to help ensure trustworthiness of our analysis. (Crabtree & Miller, 1999).

Observations from interviews.

"Involving nursing in the process allows them to understand, use, and value the technology tools that make a difference between safe care and risky/harmful or work around care."

"Our nursing staff was part of the initial phased roll out of HIS. This built in support system has been a critical factor in driving physician adoption. "The reality is at 2 am who are you going to turn to for answers to the questions… nurses are at the center of care for the patient and can provide the insight to those questions".

Conclusion

Organizational culture is the backdrop for all change processes. Nurses can help implement constructive organizational cultures by weaving a complex social fabric (Wooten, 2003).
Constructive cultures create high-performance work environments, increasing both nurse and patient satisfaction. A constructive culture emphasizes people-centered values through a collective mission and a compassionate patient service-oriented philosophy. Furthermore, constructive organizational cultures create work environments where nurses have positive colleague interactions and approach tasks in a manner that helps improve organizational performance.

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