

The personality characteristics of emergency nurses

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Background: With the ever increasing demands on emergency services and the difficulties in recruitment of suitably qualified staff,¹ it is necessary to consider how to enhance the recruitment and retention of emergency nurses in public hospitals. Personality influences occupational choice,²⁻⁴ yet there is a lack of research exploring the personality of emergency nurses.⁵

Methods: A standardised personality test instrument, the NEO™-PI-3 was used in a survey design inclusive of demographic questions to measure personality characteristics. Data were collected from 72 emergency nurses working at an Australian Emergency Department between July and October 2012. The scores of the emergency nurses were compared against general population norms in each of the five personality domains and their 30 associated facets.

Results: The sample of emergency nurses in this study scored higher than the population norm in the domains of extraversion ($p < .001$), openness to experience ($p < .001$) and agreeableness ($p = .001$), and in twelve facets, including excitement-seeking ($p < .001$) and actions ($p < .001$). There was no significant difference on the remaining domains of neuroticism ($p = .397$) and conscientiousness ($p = .153$) however, analysis of the facets for these domains found these participants' to be lower on vulnerability ($p < .001$) and higher on competence ($p = .003$) and impulsiveness ($p = .002$).

Conclusion: Emergency nurses are different to the general population - they are more extraverted, agreeable and open to experience. Emergency departments are stressful environments- busy, noisy and with a high patient turnover. Emergency nurses must possess the ability to care for, and develop a rapport with, individuals from all socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds, often in time critical situations. The results of this study would suggest that these nurses are well equipped to work in this type of environment. Assessment of personality and knowledge of its influence on specialty selection may assist in improving retention and recruitment in emergency nursing.

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Key Words

Personality characteristics; Emergency nurse; Retention

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