

An Exploration of Emergency Nurses' Perceptions, Attitudes and Experience of Teamwork in the Emergency Department (ED)

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ABSTRACT

Title

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Background

Optimal patient outcomes in the ED and minimisation of clinical errors are achieved through coordinated care by a multidisciplinary team (Risser et al., 1999). While it is understood teamwork can assist in facilitating increased levels of efficiency and safety of care delivered in the ED, the perspective of emergency nurses in relation to their experience of teamwork remains unrecognised.

Method

This qualitative study using a descriptive, exploratory approach was chosen drawing on principles from phenomenology and symbolic interactionism. The study was set in a major metropolitan Melbourne ED. Purposive, convenience sampling was used to recruit 12 emergency nurses to participate in semi-structured interviews. Data were analysed using thematic analysis.

Results

Three major themes emerged from the data; 'when teamwork works', 'back up behaviour' and 'no time for teamwork'. 'When teamwork works' was discussed in relation to the sub themes; teamwork works well in the resuscitation area, simulation helps team performance, participant's perceived teamwork may improve patient outcomes and increase job satisfaction. Leadership, team supportiveness, and team building were described in relation to another major theme 'back up behaviour'. Finally skill mix, resources and other challenges to effective teamwork were discussed in relation to the theme 'no time for teamwork'.

Discussion

Active teamwork in the ED was considered valuable and positive among the participants. However during peak and challenging periods teamwork was said to breakdown, information exchange became difficult, and

feelings of heightened pressure and isolation were described, causing increased stress and decreased staff satisfaction. This is an important finding, as it shows that when teamwork is most needed, teamwork practices tend to fail.

Conclusion

The study highlights that teamwork is about performance, and requires certain skill sets not necessarily naturally possessed in emergency nurses. Leadership and communication featured consistently in participants' descriptions of effective teamwork, although there were varying degrees of capacity among colleagues to perform these skills. As teamwork functioning is dependent on these and other skills it became apparent that great disparity existed between the descriptions of different individual's roles and their capacity to perform these skills. Building a resilient team inclusive of strong leadership and communication skills is essential to being able to withstand the challenging demands of the ED.

References

Risser, D. T., Rice, M. M., Salisbury, M. L., Simon, R., Jay, G. D., & Berns, S. D. (1999). The potential for improved teamwork to reduce medical errors in the emergency department. The MedTeams Research Consortium. *Ann Emerg Med*, 34(3), 373-383.