C5-1: The impact of verbal abuse experienced by patient care nurses

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Abstract:
Introduction: Previous research shows the impact of verbal abuse on nurses includes negative emotions and a negative effect on care. Rowe and Sherlock (2005) found that nurses who experienced abuse consequently experienced stress. Cox (1991) found that work productivity declined for 71% and 87% believed medical errors were likely to increase after an abusive event. Oztunc (2006) learned that 88% felt it affected morale, 91% experienced emotional exhaustion and 63% agreed it affected care. The purpose of this study was to explore the potential existence and impact of verbal abuse on patient care nurses related to their emotional welfare, nursing care, job retention, and patient safety. It also explored opinions on possible solutions. The researcher believed verbal abuse would have a negative impact on patient care nurses.

Method(s): This was a survey design study using a modified version of Dr. Helen Cox’s Verbal Abuse survey and demographic questions including one open ended question developed by the researcher. Packets including the survey and an educational sheet, which included current hospital policies and resources, were mailed to the homes of 3,121 patient care nurses. The survey revolved around potential sources, emotional reaction, and the perceived impact of abuse on nursing and patient care. The open ended question asked for nurse’s opinion on possible solutions.

Results: There were 509 surveys returned with 1,069 responses when asked to check all sources of verbal abuse: doctors (30%), patient’s family (27%), patients (26%), and nurses (17%). Although 38% of the respondents continued to think about an incident for a few hours, 26% reported it still bothers them. Based on their experiences with verbal abuse, 72% believed it impacts morale, 79% believed it increases turnover, and 80% believed it contributes to increased medical errors.
**Discussion & Conclusions:** Verbal abuse continues to be a prevalent issue impacting nurses and their care. The next phase of this research project, starting November 2009, will be a qualitative look at the nurses’ individual experiences. It will be incorporated into a program that will be developed by the researcher, implemented and evaluated by the year 2010. The goal will be to assist in changing the culture of verbal abuse.

**Abstract History:**

**Financial Disclosure:**
No, I (or a member of my immediate family) have not received something of value* from or own stock (or stock options) in a commercial company or institution related directly or indirectly to the subject of my presentation.

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