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Perspective

Imposing outstanding care through staff empowerment and engagement during the pandemic

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Abstract

Nurses and their leaders have gone through difficult times during this pandemic. They've suffered from finding the ultimate ways to provide the best care to their patients while the demand is increasing, the scope of service is changing and the circumstances are becoming tougher day by day. Although staff nurses are suffering physically and emotionally while doing their best to provide outstanding care to their patients, the nursing leaders are suffering as well. Nurse leaders working even harder than any time before to maintain adequate, healthy, and competent staff and making sure there are enough available resources to keep the process of care delivery going. During this presentation, there will be a highlight on the challenges faced by the nursing team and will share with peers the innovative approaches to meet the demand, prepare staff to deal with the changes in the scope of service and to cope with the increase in the turnover of the competent nurses. Moreover, strategies taken to keep staff alert, engaged, and informed will be shared. This presentation will also share with the audience how the staff nurses became the key player in the decision-making and how they had been empowered to work to their full potentials. Besides, this presentation will provide some recommendations to nursing leaders from a country that is depending highly on the expatriate nursing staff.

Empowerment is a multi-factorial concept and its relevance has led to a growing body of literature; despite this attention, there is still no agreement regarding the elements that define its expression. While several studies have already investigated the positive effect of empowerment interventions on the care process outcome, the aim of this study is to investigate which factors can foster an empowered management of the cancer condition from the patient's perspective. To examine patients' perception of empowerment enablers, we asked for participants' input on the role of three factors frequently cited as positively affected by empowerment: care quality, perception of direct control and relationships within the care context, during the care process. Three focus groups were conducted with 34 cancer patients. The results highlight the perception of direct control on their treatment as the least valued element (2.87, SD 0.566) when compared with care quality (3.75, SD 0.649) and relational support in the care context (3.91, SD 0.274).

Unlike traditional approaches to empowerment, patient's expression of empowerment does not mainly reside in the direct control of their condition as much as in an active role within the relationship with caretakers, such as the ability to choose the doctor, the care team or the health organisation in charge of their healthcare. Emerging aspects from this analysis of patient's perspective are central in order to adequately consider empowerment in the care process and to provide more effective care strategies

In the last decades, empowerment has gained importance in health care and its relevance has led to a growing body of literature [1]. Even though the majority of authors agree about the importance of patient empowerment in the healthcare context, there is no unique definition of this construct. In September 2012, the World Health Organization proposed to define empowerment as ‘a process through which people gain greater control over decisions and actions affecting their health’ which can be obtained through skill development, access to information and resources and influencing those factors that affect their health and well-being.

However, the complexity of patient empowerment and the wide scope of its effects across the care process induced several authors to investigate the different dimensions of this construct and to develop different ways to define and describe its components. A recent review of patient empowerment found 17 different definitions and described ten possible dimensions in which it may be expressed, such as participation in clinical decision-making, patients’ control over their condition and knowledge acquisition. These elements showed that empowerment can be framed both as an outcome and as a process: as a process, by considering all those elements that can influence the participation in the different phases of the care process and shift the decisional power towards the patient; as an outcome, by focusing on the results of this development. In other words, this means that empowerment may be seen as an enabling process in which healthcare professionals cooperate with patients to help them acquire knowledge and resources; its outcome is a patient with a greater ability to manage his/her condition and to make informed decisions (*ibidem*).