

Exploring the job role of Heads of Nursing in NHS Tayside

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Background

Heads of Nursing plays a pivotal leadership role within the clinical setting, providing drive and leadership in key areas such as in care delivery and service redesign. This clinical leadership role is particularly important in maintaining a healthy working environment via their supportive actions, and has the potential to impact positively both on staff well-being and patient outcomes. The role of a Head of Nursing is clear and has alignment with the Leading Better Care role framework (Leading Better Care (LBC) Scottish Government 2008), yet there is clear tension between the professional, managerial and organisational demands placed on the postholder. This tension may result in role conflict, dissatisfaction and influence individual well-being. These tensions may be different in Acute, Mental Health & Community and CHP settings. These competing demands may also result in dissonance between the professional nature of the post in relation to patient care, staff support and development, and the managerial demands associated with patient flow and Government waiting time targets. Heads of Nursing may therefore be subject to the difficulties and challenges associated with a middle management role by having to respond to demands from the clinical staff and senior professional and managerial staff, and this in turn may militate against achieving the required post objectives and outcomes.

There is limited understanding of the day to day demands places upon Heads of Nursing and the time spent upon the different aspects of the role. The role components include staff support and development, human resource issues, delivery and development of patient services including maximising efficient patient flow, and dealing with complaints. Within NSH Tayside there are 27 Heads of Nursing who cover the medical and surgical divisions. Each has specific responsibility for designated clinical areas and the nursing and midwifery staff within, and divisional responsibility for organisational priorities.

There is a pressing need to review the daily work activities performed by the Heads of Nursing and therefore this exploratory study sets out to: 1) detail the relative amounts of time the Head of Nursing spends in each of the key areas of their role, and 2) examine the impact of perceptions of work environment and role clarity on their well-being and quality of their care provision, particularly in the area of support provision to staff. This study builds on recent behavioural diary studies in Tayside and other Nursing settings to examine real time accounts of role performance. This study will examine both the support that Heads of Nursing receive and detail the nature of the support that they provide to Senior Charge Nurses and others. This study will provide important information but from the dual perspectives of both providing and receiving support.

Aims of the study

To quantify the daily work activities of Heads of Nursing using real time data collection methods

Methods of working

This longitudinal descriptive study has a mixed design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches.

This study will combine three data collection approaches, including:

- a) A baseline questionnaire survey to target Heads of Nursing perceptions of their current activities, work environment, managerial and colleague support, both received and provided
- b) Repeated work-sampling of self-reports of Head of Nursing activity and work environment perception, mood, support provision using PDA electronic diaries. This self-report PDA will allow nurses to provide free text reports of the barriers and facilitators they face in undertaking their role. This will be undertaken in 2 phases, an initial diary collection phase targeting Heads of Nursing in Acute areas followed by those in Mental Health, Community and CHP settings.
- c) Qualitative analysis of the free text standard entry and end of shift reports from the Heads of Nursing, using two methods of qualitative data analysis, theoretical content analysis and more traditional thematic qualitative analysis.

Funding

The project is funded by NHS Tayside

For more information about this project contact Oliver Herber (o.r.herber@dundee.ac.uk)