AIR TRANSPORT: THE DAILY LIVES OF HEALTH PROFESSIONALS
TRANSPORTE AÉREO: O COTIDIANO DOS PROFISSIONAIS DA SAÚDE
TRANSPORTE AÉREO: EL COTIDIANO DE LOS PROFESIONALES DE LA SALUD

Carla Pena Dias¹, Cláudia Maria de Mattos Penna* 

ABSTRACT
Objective: to understand the daily life of work of health professionals in air transport of patients. Method: qualitative case study in which 22 health professionals, doctors and nurses who work and will act in a private company owned by the city of Belo Horizonte/Minas Gerais/Brazil were interviewed. The production data were collected by a semi-structured interview script. For analysis of the information, the technique of content analysis of Laurence Bardin was used. The research project has been approved by the Committee of Ethics in Research, opinion 092/92. Results: the main categories emerged 1. Construction together: the way of stones, 2. Teamwork; and 3. The work: each day a day. Conclusion: this study allowed understanding the influence of the environment on the actors involved, the experience and the different perspectives about work. Descriptors: Transportation of Patients; Emergency Medical Services; Human Resources in Health.

RESUMO

RESUMEN
Objetivo: comprender el cotidiano de trabajo de los profesionales de la salud en el transporte aéreo de pacientes. Método: estudio de caso cualitativo en el cual fueron entrevistados 22 profesionales de la salud, médicos y enfermeros que actúan y actuarán en una empresa privada de la ciudad de Belo Horizonte/MG/Brasil. La producción de datos fue realizada por medio de una guía de entrevistas semiestruturadas. Para análisis de las informaciones fue utilizada la técnica de análisis de contenido de Laurence Bardin. El proyecto de investigación fue aprobado por el Comité de Ética en Investigación, Parecer n.º 092/92. Resultados: surgieron las principales categorías 1. La construcción conjunta: el camino de las piedras, 2. El trabajo en equipo; y 3. El trabajo: cada día un día. Conclusión: este estudio permitió comprender la influencia del ambiente sobre los actores envueltos, la vivencia y los diferentes puntos de vista acerca del trabajo que realizan. Descriptores: Transporte de Pacientes; Servicios Médicos de Emergencia; Recursos Humanos en Salud.

¹Specialist Nurse of Intensive Care, Master degree in Nursing, Nurse Board of AeromedicalUnimed l. Belo Horizonte (MG), Brazil. E-mail: pena.carla@yahoo.com.br; ²Nurse, PhD in Nursing Philosophy, Post-graduation Professor in Social Science, Nursing School, Federal University of Minas Gerais/UFGM. Belo Horizonte (MG), Brazil. E-mail: cmpenna@enf.ufmg.br.
INTRODUCTION

Historically, air transport of patients began in the period of the wars, due to the need of removing wounded soldiers from the battlefields to an appropriate location to the service in a timely manner. This is because the ambulances often took long time to get to the hospital, considering the severity of patients transported. The wars were crucial to the development of air transport of patients. In the First World War (1914-1918), there were already large aircraft with doctors and nurses trained and with some knowledge concerning the physiology of flight.

The first health professionals acting in this scenario have experienced many difficulties and challenges for the lack of knowledge in an environment totally different from the normal one. In this context, the air transport to patients incorporated to the health scenario, becomes a constant challenge in the daily practice. Nowadays, it is known that the land transport is not enough, especially in severe cases.

Brazil is a geographically big country and long distances need to be traveled searching an adequate treatment. Then, there were an increase of the private area with health plans and consequently the need of expansion of public and private services in order to improve the inter-hospital transport assistance. In the beginning of the 90s, the first private companies specialized in air transport have emerged in the country and the need of health team training to work with this type of activity.

Air transport of patients has some particularities and can become unfriendly for those who transport, for the patients and for the health team, usually nurses and doctors. In this way, it is observed that the process of work has urgency and emergency situations. The difficulties found everyday life range from conditions of patients to flight environmental changes, that is, situations we can and cannot control. The health professionals acting in this environment, face stressor factors in their daily life caused by the flight.

Considering the stressor factors described in the literature, health professionals find difficulties in everyday practice. To overcome these difficulties, it is necessary the protocol knowledge, flight safety trainings and an adequate plan. If, on one hand, the protocols, the trainings and the technical processes guarantee the assistance in a sistematized way, during the flight, on the other hand, the subjective aspect experienced everyday are not approached in the same way, because they are not part of the discussions and periodic trainings. In this way, the professionals experience moments of doubt and anguish in daily practice.

In this vision to meet with the subjectivity, it is observed that is it necessary to discuss the practices and experiences of the health professionals about the work they perform. With all this issues, it is necessary to reflect about their daily practice. The aim of this study is to understand how the environment influences on the actions performed by the participants, their attitudes and their behaviors.

OBJECTIVE

- To understand the daily work of health professionals in air transport for patients.

METHOD

Article elaborated from the dissertation << The daily work of health professionals in air transport of patients >> presented to the Master degree course in Nursing of the Post-graduation Program at the Nursing School of the Federal University of Minas Gerais/UFMG. Belo Horizonte-MG, Brazil. 2010.

This is a qualitative study. This approach was chosen due to be applied in studies of relationships, beliefs, perceptions and opinions. Taking into consideration how the subjects experience the facts and phenomenon observed.

As research strategy, the case study was chosen, since it aims to the possibility of deepen knowledge the study object, allowing to meet the reality and also to know the meanings of the daily work by the health professionals. In this perspective, the comprehensive sociology allows a different vision in the everyday situations, being closer to the reality lived and aiming to the subjects relationships.

Throughout this study, the analogies of how na instrument can better understand the subjects’ everyday life was examined and it was noticed that it is a way of how people describe their experiences. The interviewees referred to the everyday life in an analogical way and in this sense, they have shown important meanings about the understanding of the work performed.

The choice of the subjects was intentionally, being interviewed twenty-two subjects, doctors and nurses acting and have acted since the creation of the company. The age range was approximately 24 to 55 years old, of both genders.
The participation of the interviewees was volunteered, without charge and the identity of the subject and the information that could identify individual health professional was protected. The research had the Opinion ETIC 092/92, according to the Resolution 196/96 of the National Council of Health. All participants agreed and signed an informed consent term, after a favorable opinion from the Committee of Ethics in Research (COEP-UFMG).

The scenario of this study was a private company specializing in air transport of patients, founded by the Federation of UNIMEDS in 1996, in the city of Belo Horizonte, Minas Gerais, and works continuously, with two teams on call composed by “doctor and nurse”. For air transport of patients, aircraft are used (helicopter squirrel, airplane King Air Turbo prop. Cheyenne, Jet Learjet) who are based in a hangar at Pampulha airport in the city of Belo Horizonte, MG.

The search technique used was the semi-structured interview. From a script by questions, the subject invited to report about the everyday experiences in air transport of patients; the perception of professionals on the work process, their own work and other's work; how patients transported and their family members feel and their feelings to each transport. The interviews were conducted individually, recorded in digital voice recorder with the prior authorization of the subjects and transcribed in full.

The interviews were conducted individually, recorded in digital voice recorder with the prior authorization of the subjects and transcribed in full. Because it is a qualitative research, the criteria used for the completion of the interviews was the saturation of data in which the process was interrupted when the information became repetitive.

In the twenty-second interview, it was possible to realize data saturation. For the analysis of the information, the technique of content from Laurence Bardin was used, based on the following steps: 1) pre-analysis; 2) exploration of the material; and 3) treatment of results and interpretation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Os dados foram selecionados em categorias e as principais categorias foram as seguintes: a construção conjunta: o caminho das pedras, o trabalho em equipe, o trabalho: cada dia um dia.

The data were selected in categories and the main categories were: construction together: the way of stones, teamwork, work: each day a day.

1. Construction together: the way of stones

This category deals with the way taken by health professionals at the beginning of the activities of air transport, the historical process and the difficulties to be overcome over time.

Then we discovered the way of stones. I didn't know what I was taken. We started from zero! (N14)

Health professionals who work in the air transport of patients, have experienced the foundation of the company, participated in the first transporations, many times performed without a proper structure. Thus, the protocols were built step by step and the initial difficulties were overcome.

The beginning of the activities of air transport meant that health professionals were in search of knowledge in an area unknown until then, because there was still no reference. Prior knowledge in other areas such as intensive care, pre-hospital and emergency were fundamental in the beginning, but needed to be adapted to another totally different environment.

The professionals were afraid to live with weather conditions and their influences on flights, the rains and the turbulences, the fear of flying and the ignorance of the possible reactions of the patient in this environment. Many of them thought of quitting at the beginning, because the pressure was great and there was a reflection on the human condition. Ties of friendship, fellowship and companionship among professionals were established, as if they were building something new, allowing a relationship open to dialogue.

The story was essential to understand the present moment, the human being, their actions, their values, this construction together. In this regard, the potential of each one of these actors, in this construction, expressed not only the right emphasized by the scientific knowledge, but imagination and creativity in the construction of this know-how in air transport.

Despite the air transport of patients or aeromedical transport is not yet recognized in this country as a specialty, there is a great concern of professionals to these aspects.

The professionals have learned, in practice, the meaning of the work they do today, in a together and integrated construction, because they experienced several moments of questioning for being a risk activity, but they
continue because they believe in the growth and strengthening of this area. However, there will always be a challenging situation, the commonplace of transport, to be faced every day by professionals that are present in everyday construction of air transport of patients.

2. Teamwork

In the scenario of air transport, the critical patients need a quick and effective assistance. Thus, this service requires an involvement of these health professionals for an effectively work.

The team is reduced, composed only by a nurse and a doctor. During the assistance, big attention is required in all directions, so there will not be any mistakes. Inside the aircraft there is no way to count with the presence of other health professionals, “they are the only two” during the flight, in addition to working in an airspace where there is limitation of movements.

The action together and synchronized among the health professionals, “nurse and doctor” is a possibility to improve the care provided in front of everyday work. The concurrence cited by the respondent becomes a form of work that requires collaboration, acting together and having involvement, because teamwork is not only passing information or being next to each other.6

I think the synchronicity with the partner is important. Because he can calm you down and not worsen this situation you are living, in a situation that you can lose that patient! (N7)

Regarding the synchronicity with the partner, respondents reported as something that permeates the work in air transport, the attitude of collaboration as his partner and this proximity which works, enabling care centred in patient, with goals that become a constant challenge in everyday reality, but the possibility of making it a reality, it does not mean having the same vision; the opinions may be different, it is possible to face and talk to each other, without restrictions. However, for the transport takes place, there is the involvement of other professional, an integral part of air transport. Although they do not share the time of transportation, they participate indirectly. The work then proceeds to be seen so interdisciplinary, since nobody works alone, it is necessary the other all the time. And maybe it is important to reconcile the care of the caregiver in order to preserve their health, especially those who work in critical sectors.11 Therefore it should be considered the subjective aspects of the people involved, claiming that teamwork is a reality, but the possibility of making it becomes a constant challenge in everyday practice.

3. Work: each day a day

For health professionals, the daily life of work revealed the presence of situations that almost never repeat themselves and make this scenario a unique place:

The day to day at work is exactly, every day a day! You never repeat a day equal to another, it is very different from a hospital, when you work in an intensive therapy. (N9)

The air transport of patients occurs generally, from a smaller center for a larger center. The patients, mostly, are in a severe situation. Thus, for the respondent, there is no routine, there are situations and new places to each transport, thus the source locations (where patients are located) and the destination (where they are forwarded) are rarely the same, except in the case of
The person to work in air transport, in addition to the qualifications that he must have and acquire as time, experience and agility. In addition to the responsibility and be very well prepared professionally. For the space of the aircraft there is not people to help you, we've only got two hands that end up turning into four, an Octopus! With various situations and several hands [...].

For the professional interviewed, two hands are not enough to handle so many demands at the same time, thus referring as an octopus, animal that has several tentacles with ability to act. In biology, the octopus is a cephalopod animal, considered it to be the most intelligent invertebrate animal, able to learn new behaviors, problem solving and memorize new paths.

Health professionals of air transport encounter various situations in everyday life such as: emergency intubation, cardiopulmonary arrest in which it is necessary to remove several materials from their bags, performing procedures, administering medications as soon as possible, having a “reduced team”. Thus, they need several hands like the tentacles of the octopus to handle many actions at the same time. It becomes essential that professionals learn to deal with this environment.

In transport, there is no way to predict the general state of the patient, the situations are of unpredictability, expectations are part of the unknown and, in some way, they represent a challenge for professionals in their activities, the sensation of discovery becomes a motivator on the situations experienced:

Work in air transport for me is a very great joy! (D18)

It is very nice to work in air transport. I like doing that! (N21)

Then it generates a whole stress we live all day [...] (D2)

In the daily work, it was noticed that stress is part of emergency calls and showed the anguish of the professionals on the different situations that happen in air transport. Aeromedical removal generates a high stress, much bigger than the stress of professionals working on the ground.

Health professionals characterize the work as stressful and are regularly exposed to a variety of conditions, called physical factors as: change of temperature, vibration, noises and others, so there is a relationship of pleasure overcome the suffering and the work becomes balancing. Health professionals feel useful in bringing hope for the treatment of patients that are transported.

On the relevance of aspects relevant to that category, it is concluded that the work of health professionals, in daily life, is complex because it involves factors that will influence directly on the motivation to work in this type of service and is an integral part of the daily reality experienced so, it is worth considering the most varied nuances on them.

CONCLUSION

The realization of this study allowed showing that health professionals of air transport have different interpretations regarding the work they accomplish, with
subjectivity. Their attitudes and actions reflect a daily life full of details.

Even in unpredictable situations and stress experienced in everyday life, the professionals revealed feelings and difficulties of living in a hostile environment. Thus, there is a need to give safety to the patient and the care it is essential at all levels of assistance. It was noticed that that care needs to be lived in the broader and integral sense by health professionals in air transport.

The speeches of the respondents showed a new dimension of work that goes beyond objectivity and rationality. It was also observed that the pre-established standards of training and protocols have an important role, but are not enough. Relations in the company require flexibility, since attitudes very rigid standards can mainstream these subjects, therefore they possess desires, beliefs, ideological positions and ethical choices in the discussion area. It is important to show that interaction and the link between the professionals make it a team effort and, at the same time, build a solid foundation of relationship.

Despite the unfavorable conditions, the risks and the proximity with the death in the daily life of work, it was observed that the professionals feel satisfied with the activity exercised. In this research, some relevant aspects in relation to occupational health professionals were evidenced that often, due to the objectivity of the work, are not addressed in the same way.

It was noticed that the frenetic pace of day to day work prevents us from making a reflection about our own activities, since many aspects go unnoticed, these are before our eyes and, often, do not give them due importance. Each situation experienced in the workplace becomes unique and incomparable.

Throughout this study, it was highlighted the role of the nurse flight attendant, considered a key element in air transport of patients or aeromedical transport. The success of the work played by this professional involves living and experience mainly in urgency, emergency and intensive care medicine. In this scenario, the nurse requires theoretical and practical ability, leadership skills, plus a quick decision-making in critical situations.

This is an initial study and many aspects found in this work are worthy of research and analysis. Facing the reality presented, it is expected to contribute to discussions on the subject and open the way to further research in this area.

REFERENCES


Submission: 2014/06/03
Accepted: 2014/09/14
Publishing: 2014/10/15

Corresponding Address
Rua Tenente Anastácio de Moura, 740/Ap. 502
Bairro Santa Efigênia
CEP 30240-390 – Belo Horizonte (MG), Brasil