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NURSING WORKER SATISFACTION IN THE OUTPATIENT CLINIC OF A UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL

A SATISFAÇÃO DO TRABALHADOR DE ENFERMAGEM NO AMBULATÓRIO DE UM HOSPITAL UNIVERSITÁRIO

SATISFACCIÓN DEL TRABAJADOR DE ENFERMERÍA EN EL SERVICIO AMBULATORIO DE UN HOSPITAL UNIVERSITARIO

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: to describe the concepts of nursing workers' satisfaction and relate their satisfaction to the work context in an outpatient clinic. **Method:** descriptive and exploratory study with a qualitative approach. The subjects of the study were 30 nursing staff members of the outpatient clinic of a university hospital. The data were collected using a semistructured interview and analyzed using the discourse analysis technique. **Results:** the data were organized into two categories: I - nursing worker satisfaction in the outpatient clinic; and II - the influence of the work context on the nursing staff satisfaction. **Conclusion:** most of the participants stated that they were satisfied with the work in the outpatient clinic compared to other hospital sectors. They also recognized the influence of the work context on their satisfaction. **Descriptors:** Nursing Staff; Work; Job Satisfaction.

RESUMO

Objetivos: descrever as concepções de satisfação dos trabalhadores de enfermagem e relacionar a satisfação desses profissionais com o contexto de trabalho no ambulatório. **Método:** estudo descritivo e exploratório, com abordagem qualitativa. Os sujeitos da pesquisa foram 30 integrantes da equipe de enfermagem do ambulatório de um hospital universitário. Os dados foram obtidos mediante a aplicação de entrevista semiestruturada e o tratamento desses dados se deu pela técnica de análise de discurso. **Resultados:** os dados foram organizados em duas categorias: I - a satisfação dos trabalhadores de enfermagem no ambulatório; e II - a influência do contexto do trabalho na satisfação da equipe de enfermagem. **Conclusão:** grande parte dos participantes disseram estar satisfeitos com o trabalho no ambulatório em relação a outros setores do hospital. Reconheceram também a influência do contexto do trabalho nesta satisfação. **Descritores:** Equipe de Enfermagem; Trabalho; Satisfação no Trabalho.

RESUMEN

Objetivos: describir los conceptos de satisfacción de los trabajadores de enfermería y vincular la satisfacción de estos profesionales con el contexto de trabajo en el servicio ambulatorio. **Método:** estudio descriptivo y exploratorio con enfoque cualitativo. Los sujetos de la investigación fueron 30 miembros del personal de enfermería del servicio ambulatorio de un hospital universitario. Los datos fueron recogidos mediante entrevista semiestructurada y analizados usando la técnica de análisis de discurso. **Resultados:** los datos fueron organizados en dos categorías: I - la satisfacción de los trabajadores de enfermería en el servicio ambulatorio; y II - la influencia del contexto de trabajo en la satisfacción del personal de enfermería. **Conclusión:** la mayoría de los participantes afirmaron estar satisfechos con el trabajo en el servicio ambulatorio en relación con otros sectores del hospital. También reconocieron la influencia del contexto de trabajo en esa satisfacción. **Descriptores:** Personal de Enfermería; Trabajo; Satisfacción en el Trabajo.

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INTRODUCTION

The focus of the present study was nursing workers' satisfaction in the outpatient clinic of a university hospital. The hospital context has certain characteristics in the work environment. In this sense, it is worth noting that nursing has been characterized by the division of work throughout its history, in which socially differentiated education levels and a division between intellectual and manual work are established.¹ The concepts originate from authors that deal with work relationships and subjectivity. They present a psychosocial perspective of understanding the work reality.

From the social perspective, according to the thought of certain researchers and thinkers, satisfaction has differentiated connotations with respect to its social value and its role in the lives of the individuals and society. Satisfaction implies considering the individuals in the working process. This way, it is clear that subjectivity is inherent in work relationships and deserves to be considered in its social context.²

The psychosocial dimensions at work refer to the interaction in the environment. They include the policies of the organizations and workers' skills and needs, in addition to cultural aspects and those related to external issues. The personal perceptions and experiences can influence health, performance and job satisfaction.³

"Satisfaction is a positive state or pleasure, resulting in the positive assessment of the individual's work".^{4:1297} All human behavior is directed toward the satisfaction of human needs. In this sense, the individuals are committed to constant attempts to satisfy their varied and complex needs, some of which are conflicting. Thus, "any behavior is a result of forces that originate from their inner self and the environment in which they live."^{5:132}

The two-factor theory is concerned with motivation at work and how workers express their satisfaction and the attitudes they have regarding work. The dilemma is how to respond to workers' motivation if the needs are in continuous rotation.⁶

According to the Dejourian thinking, the psychodynamics of work is characterized by the complex relationship between work, health and subjectivity, because the workers do not come to their work as new machines. They have a personal history materialized by their aspirations, motivations and psychological needs that interact with their past history. This fact gives unique and

personal characteristics to each individual.⁷ From this perspective, satisfaction is a psychodynamic condition connected to its social context, i.e., the state of satisfaction or dissatisfaction can change according to the general work conditions.

The pleasure at work occurs when it allows the workers to develop individual potentialities through the freedom of creation and expression, which builds cognitive-technical bonds that promote job satisfaction. In this context, healthy behavior implies confronting the challenges and pressures at work and resilience capacity to tackle the problems. However, it can cause psychological instability to the workers if the level it reaches is greater than the level they can endure.⁸ Therefore, the work and originary relationships never occur in a neutral subjectivity or social space, since the individuals' confrontation with the external challenges can either cause suffering or become a source of pleasure and psychosocial development.⁹

The concern about workers' social welfare is not a matter of organizations' philanthropy. The goal for the 21st century is to have a healthy workforce in order to promote a positive impact on the institutions, such as return on investment. Quality of life brings a worthwhile return to the company and the individuals, making them more healthy and becoming the work environment pleasant and creative.¹⁰

The nursing staff of the university outpatient clinic under study had mostly professionals who exhibited physical and/or psychological problems developed during the time of work in other sectors of the hospital. In those sectors, the nursing professionals were required greater effort and healthcare to patients. In addition, they experienced greater stress when providing care to patients at risk of death. In view of this issue in the workplace, the present study sought to delve into the workers' discourses addressing satisfaction in the outpatient service.

Outpatient nursing activities are required to have direct contact with clients and teams and the service needs qualified professionals who are motivated and satisfied to provide healthcare to the public. This way, the goals of the present study were: to describe nursing worker satisfaction in the outpatient clinic and relate the influence of the work context on nursing staff satisfaction.

METHOD

This is a descriptive and exploratory study with a qualitative approach.¹¹ The participants

were 30 nursing staff members of the outpatient clinic, namely: nurses; nursing technicians; and nursing assistants. Data collection was carried out from August to September 2013. In this period, the staff consisted of 12 nurses, 18 nursing technicians and 19 nursing assistants. Nine nurses, 12 nursing technicians and nine nursing assistants participated in the study. The participants met the inclusion and exclusion criteria and accepted to participate in the study.

The inclusion criteria included the the nursing staff members of the outpatient clinic who had been working for more than three years in this sector, because they had had a time of interaction with the issues experienced in the service. The exclusion criterion considered workers who were not performing the activities of the outpatient clinic.

The interviews were conducted before or after the work schedule of the workers with their acceptance to participate. The participants were informed that it was a study to assess the profile of workers' satisfaction at the outpatient clinic and that the answers would be anonymous and confidential. The meetings were scheduled in advance and the goals of the study were explained during the interviews.

The data were collected using a semistructured interview, which is a form of social interaction that provides a direct contact—face to face—between the researcher and the respondent. It can be directed and is based on a predetermined script. Certain authors consider the interview as the technique per excellence in social research. Due to its flexibility, it is chosen as the fundamental resource to find relevant information in the most diverse fields. It can be affirmed that this technique has been an important part of the development of social sciences in recent decades.¹²

The script of the interview in the present study consisted of two parts. The first included demographic data in accordance with the model of the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) and was answered in writing by the interviewees. The second part was audio recorded and guided by the script with conceptual clarifications of some topics provided to the interviewees. On average, the interviews lasted about 30 minutes. The statements of the nurses are represented by (Nur), nursing technicians by (NT), and nursing assistants by (NA), followed by the number of the interviews.

A text was produced using the data of the interviews. After a careful reading, the

contents were listed according to repetition and significance for the formation of categories in order to meet the goals of the study. The discourse analysis was performed after the data were organized. This type of analysis in qualitative research seeks to focus on the meanings of the discourse through which the subjects manifest themselves.¹¹

The discursive formation regulates the fact that the subjects of the same historical situation agree or not about the meaning to be attributed to the words, which allows the diversity of meaning in the same language. It can be affirmed that the discursive formation is not closed in itself, allowing or not the contradiction inherent in the discourses. It is precisely this contradiction that will provide mobility, possibility of change, and historicity to the discourse.¹³

The findings were organized into the following categories: I - Nursing workers' satisfaction in the outpatient clinic; and II - The influence of the work context on the satisfaction of the nursing staff.

The research was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the Fluminense Federal University Medical School under Opinion No. 311649 on 21st June 2013, CAAE: 13646813.5.0000.5243, submitted to Brazil Platform.¹⁴

RESULTS

• Category I - Nursing workers' satisfaction in the outpatient clinic.

The first category describes the reports of the interviewees regarding the satisfaction of the nursing staff with work in the outpatient clinic. Of the total of 30 participants, 40% were nursing technicians, 30% nursing assistants and 30% nurses. Most of the participants (76.67%) stated that they were satisfied with the work in the outpatient clinic compared with the other sectors of the hospital. The conceptions of satisfaction were expressed by the pleasure of doing what they liked, being in the work environment, working with colleagues, helping the patients, and motivating their colleagues at work.

Helping in the nursing practice excels as a satisfaction resource, which is enhanced and motivated when there is chance of qualifying through courses. There is also a search to find forms of satisfaction. There was no reference to income, despite having been affirmed that public service conditions were unsatisfactory. Some interviewees stated that they only thought about retirement. The following discourses express these findings.

I was mad about retiring, but now with the master's program I have more stamina, more

commitment, more satisfaction, I understand that this satisfaction will never be complete and having come to the outpatient clinic, especially with the nursing consultation, I wouldn't like to supervise. (Nur1)

The people of the work are well, it is reflected in the work and motivates me too, because I'm the manager of the sector, I always try to motivate these people, make things easy to these workers in terms of study, when they have problems with their families, help in some way, with a supportive word, if they are well, they work better and this brings me satisfaction in the service, because the service flows better. (Nur17)

The only thing I do to improve the motivation, the pleasure of helping in the treatment of that client and having the client's satisfaction at the end. (NT4)

I love helping people. (NA8)

I have already been working at the outpatient clinic for some time, we don't differentiate much, I'm happy to come here, I feel pleased with the multiprofessional coworkers, I think that my contribution is to stay and do always what I can, that's a fact. (Nur25)

If I like what I do, it's good enough for me in order to be motivated to work. (NA26)

To be honest, I'll wait for retirement. (NT30)

♦ **Category II** - The influence of the work context on the nursing staff's satisfaction.

The work environment in the outpatient clinic is a place that offers more peace of mind and flexibility, in addition to less stress. For most interviewees, these aspects increased the satisfaction in working in this environment. However, other respondents stated that the demands came from other categories and that the sector did not offer suitable conditions for a satisfactory work.

In this sense, satisfaction is related to a territory that generates tranquility to work. However, at the same time, it is possible to note the adverse conditions of the public service that discourage the workers. The following statements illustrate this synthesis.

Regarding stress, I'm more at ease in the place where I work. I used to work in the neonatal ICU, where there were many demands, there was an excess of children and few employees to work, today I have more peace of mind to deal with patients and my coworkers. (NT2)

I think it's always stressful, it's not more stressful here, but it's stressful. You provide healthcare to the public, with all their desires, the demands are great, there is staff shortage. (Nur3)

I found everything more flexible here.

(NA11)

With regard to stress, there's not much stress. (Nur12)

Regarding stress, it's something constant in nursing work. Because there are few workers and the demands must be met, there aren't substitutes and everyone has limitations. There are many demands, the demands come from other categories. (NA13)

We're like this, a well specialized outpatient clinic, procedures that the workers cannot perform due to their own limitations and because they have been working for a very long time. (Nur17)

I feel frustrated, the physical space doesn't provide suitable conditions, most of our work is adaptation. We seek the well-being of the patients, we get stressed and end up getting sick too. (NT21)

Being realistic, dark clouds are circulating in the hospital. (NT29)

DISCUSSION

The study sought to understand the meanings manifested by the nursing workers. Their statements express dreams, needs, desires, and conflicts facing the reality of work at the outpatient clinic. In addition, these statements transmit contents concerning the relationship with the coworkers and the way these professionals deal with the ambiguities of healthcare, which are common in the hospital environment. These issues refer to the workers' dilemma concerning satisfaction and dissatisfaction, as well as the psycho-affective implications inherent in the work context.

The first category described how the interviewees expressed themselves and their meanings relating to job satisfaction in the outpatient clinic of a university hospital. It is possible to observe expressions like the following: *the master's course provides satisfaction; helping people; if the people are well; this promotes motivation; liking what you do; and pleased to be with the team.* However, not everyone was satisfied, as evidenced in one of the statements: *I was mad about retiring.*

A study conducted in Pittsburgh, United States, found that the respondents were happy with their jobs when they described factors relating to their activities, their moments of success at work, and the possibility of professional growth.⁶ When dissatisfaction was manifested, it was associated with the conditions relating to the work, conflictive interpersonal relationships, dissatisfaction with the company's policies and administrative practices, safety at work, and

inefficient benefits offered by the company.⁶

As grounds for the team's satisfaction, a study highlighted: liking what they did; insertion into an innovative proposal; recognition for the work done; quality of the services provided; spiritual support; and relationships at work. Reaffirming the results of the present study, it was found that the greatest source of nursing staff's satisfaction consists of being able to help the patients, because, when the workers provide care, they feel useful and encouraged by what they perform. Other factors can also generate satisfaction at work, such as: personal fulfillment; recognition; the work itself; and responsibility.¹⁵ This result confirms what was observed by Herzberg in his work and in the present study.

Another study concerning job satisfaction found that the greatest index referred to satisfaction with the management, since the participants of the study were almost satisfied with this aspect. With respect to satisfaction with the tasks and the coworkers, they were between indifferent and satisfied. They were between dissatisfied and indifferent regarding satisfaction with the wages and dissatisfied with respect to promotions. Therefore, the participants of the study showed an experience of well-being at work that could be ranked as medium.¹⁶

A study conducted with occupational health nurses' work highlighted some psychosocial aspects relating to job satisfaction, namely: the relationship with other individuals of the company in which they worked; the contents of the work they performed; the degree to which they felt motivated by the work; the degree of job security; and the degree of flexibility and freedom they found to have at work. In the group of female professionals, job satisfaction demonstrated the importance and concern with the degree of job security, which is compatible with the social reality found in Brazil where a large number of women is responsible for the livelihood of their families.¹⁷

A study already referenced above, regarding the satisfaction of state and public workers, found that state workers felt more satisfied with the wages and promotions. A possible explanation for this result may be the existence of career plan only for state workers and greater job security.¹⁶

Regarding flexibility at work, the interviewees were satisfied with greater flexibility at work and more support from the managers. This factor contributes to greater autonomy in the performance of the work. With respect to job security, there was no

questioning, since all respondents were state workers. Wages were not mentioned, because everyone had a position and wage plan.

Pleasure at work also takes place in the through personal fulfillment and the possibility to provide individualized care. This fact strengthens the identity of the individuals as workers who have autonomy to rearrange the way of working. This way, they find activities and attitudes able to bring pleasure. The feeling of appreciation and recognition make workers feel pleased with their work, enabling the construction of creative arrangements to organize their daily activities in which they feel welcomed and valued for what they do and produce individually and collectively.¹⁸

The statements of the present study and the bibliographical survey show an identity with respect to what is proposed by the research work. The aspects that provide satisfaction are: the activity performed; success; promotion; responsibility; and the possibility of growth at the institution. In addition, they describe the agents who are responsible for this satisfaction, namely: the workers; supervisors; coworkers; clients; and the organization. All of them contribute to job satisfaction.⁴

Job satisfaction can influence attitudes relating to the other spheres of life. This means that work influences feelings of overall satisfaction in a person's life. One of the reasons for the importance of studies on job satisfaction is its relationship with individuals' physical and mental health. If democratic values are accepted in the institution, there will be relationships of trust, cooperation, autonomy, and effectiveness of their potentials, producing positive or negative sense in these professionals.³

The second category described the work context as an influential discussion space for nursing workers' satisfaction. From this perspective, it is worth noting that nursing has been characterized by the division of work throughout its history, bringing one characteristic from the past to the present day, i.e., being seen by society as a profession with a charitable connotation. Even today, there is much resistance toward movements in favor of social gains. In the health system, nursing does not control the production of services. It performs as middle or end activity and is guided by medical therapy.

Nursing care in public institutions deserves attention from managers and researchers. It has suffered from a deficiency of human and material resources, generating dissatisfaction in the teams and interfering directly in the

quality of services provided to the population.¹⁶

When the scenery of a public hospital is described, it is possible to note that the nursing work is performed in a vertical way. This fact causes dissatisfaction in nursing workers, either in functional and/or interpersonal relationship aspects. It is forgotten that the worker thinks, speaks, performs and, therefore, reacts differently.¹⁹

Since the university hospital in which the present study was conducted is an educational institution, it features some peculiarities that can generate other conflicts of power during the completion of the work. This fact is due to the greater number of individuals involved and different managers linked to teaching and healthcare.

It is known that many individuals start their activities in public services with expectations of a healthy work. However, most of them end up adopting a rigid form, in which the technologies determine the organization of tasks and workflow, without offering ways to support the workers.¹⁹

However, even the statements regarding a more peaceful environment compared with other sectors of the hospital, it is evident that it is not possible to eliminate the stress completely because it is a health service. The outpatient clinic is currently a very specialized sector due to the insertion of the hospital in high-complexity care of the Unified Health System (SUS) and also due to the fact that the nursing workers have an advanced age and many of them are at the end of their careers at the institution.

During the period of data collection, the hospital was going through a process of changes and conflicts in its management due to the outsourcing process in the health system relating to the Brazilian Company of Hospital Services (EBSERH). This was a concern of the workers.

In this sense, according to the discourse about public management inefficiency and high cost of federal hospitals, the EBSERH is considered as the "only" solution and has gained space and adhesion on the part of federal universities. However, there is a need of knowledge and deep thinking about this management alternative. The concern with this measure is that it might lead to a global non-democratic management solution with all the potentialities of submission to the health market.²⁰

Other studies describe the work context with important features for nursing workers. In a study conducted in a public hospital of

São Paulo, Brazil, the work context was characterized by autonomy as a satisfaction factor. However, work performance could have been better if the workers had had more training and improvement opportunities. In the face of this new reality, the workers have been going through major changes in work relationships. The expectation with respect to the profile of these workers has become evident and revealed that there is a need of continuous training and improvement.²¹

According to another study, the main factors that point to the well-being at work are: quality healthcare; prestige of the institution; concern about the prevention of accidents; sufficient amount of material resources for performing the work; and the issue of safety at work.¹⁶

It is worth mentioning that the result found in the outpatient service of Ribeirão Preto, São Paulo, Brazil. the nursing staff was not enough to meet the demands of the service. In the nursing practice, health requirements are not only geared toward the individual aspects of the users, but the collective aspect, considering that nursing has competence and responsibility with respect to the health team, the families, and the population.²²

Through the concept of "public health", the State regulates the organizations and the health of the population by means of the market economy, because an efficient production system depends on the health of their workers. In this way, capitalism continues controlling individuals. In contrast, the sectors of the organized civil society continue the struggle for democratization and improvement of essential health services for the population.²³ Other studies conducted outside the country report situations that are similar to those described by the Brazilian workers. Such situations are described below.

According to a study conducted at the University of Pennsylvania, United States, which assessed workers of five countries (United States, Canada, Germany, England, and Scotland), found that 40% of the nurses of four of those countries had claimed to be dissatisfied with their current jobs. The author of the study had affirmed that job dissatisfaction might be responsible for the worsening of nursing care quality. She reinforced that, if the individuals worked more satisfied, it would directly reflect on healthcare quality. In addition, another study conducted in Canada found that the nurses were leaving the profession as a result of high levels of job dissatisfaction caused by work conditions. To obtain organizational support

for improvements in the workplace, concrete evidence are needed to demonstrate the impact of the workplace on patient care.²⁵

A study conducted in the region of Murcia, Spain, calls attention to the aspects most valued by the nursing staff, namely: relationships among the team; work hours; tasks performed; and safety at work. At the same time, the management system was the most criticized aspect.²⁶

With respect to the sex of nursing professionals, it should be noted that the level of satisfaction is greater among women worldwide. However, the Brazilian literature reveals that satisfaction is greater among men.²⁷ According to the results of the present study, the majority of interviewees were female. However, there was no difference in the discourses of both sexes about job satisfaction.

Current evidence shows that job satisfaction is relevant for staying at work, motivation, and work productivity. However, the level of job satisfaction of the nursing staff is decreasing. The main sources of dissatisfaction include lack of personnel, pressure due to care provided, and lack of professional recognition.²⁸ Therefore, the most common effects of job satisfaction refer to productivity, performance, absenteeism, health and well-being of the nursing staff and, consequently, care quality. Currently, many institutions seek to enhance the human resources that constitute their main assets. They are also becoming aware of the need to invest in training and workers' quality of life, because it is necessary to keep employees happy, healthy and qualified for the work.

CONCLUSION

Job satisfaction has great influence on workers' quality of life and the determination of care quality. The nursing workers demonstrated satisfaction with the work, in which they recognized the factors that interfered in their satisfaction. Still, it seems that job satisfaction is influenced by both individual and social needs.

The main issue, then, is the complexity of the topic discussed, because it involves human and management issues. The institutions are not only a place for production. Like all human communities, they are also governed by unwritten rules based on sharing between individuals and groups.

The expected contribution of the present study is to foster work-related reflections, the appreciation of the workers by taking into consideration their wishes, the enhancement

of resources for the confrontation of adverse conditions, and efficient and humanized management.

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