



Empathy - an essential virtue of a dialysis nurse

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Introduction

The empathic ability of health care professionals is considered an important factor in improving the quality of care.

Some studies conclude that empathy offers healthcare professionals the ability to improve patients health since the quality of their relationship, can affect the treatment progress and outcome. Empathy and empathic communication are key components that are now widely recognized for delivering good quality health care.

Naturally, patients prefer not only to be cared by a well-trained hemodialysis nurse but by a well-trained and empathetic nurse.

Objectives

To determine the empathic capacity of the nursing staff and evaluate the patients' satisfaction related to nurses knowledge and empathy.

Methods

To achieve these objectives, the study team of 2 dialysis unit of a large network, conducted a self-evaluation test in November 2016 with 10 questions regarding everyday working life and type of behavior of nurses among the nursing staff to determine their degree of empathy and, through introspection examination, provide individual improvement suggestions. Therefore, another questionnaire was provided to patients in January 2017. The goal was to determine whether patients consider their nurses to be well-prepared, competent, and above all empathetic.

In December 2016, a monthly nurse meeting was implemented in order to promote work efficiency and discuss project improvements. In May 2017, two meetings with a psychologist were integrated in the staff training to deepen the understanding of the nurse-patient relationship.

Finally, in order to evaluate actual improvements after six months, another test was conducted in June 2017 both with nurses and patients.

Results

In the first step, of the 22 nurses who completed the test, 8 were found to have a high and 14 a moderate empathy. 63.64% (n=14) of nurses with an experience of ≥ 10 years had a lower degree of empathy as compared to younger nurses (36.36%, n=8). Regarding the results obtained from patients, out of 102 patients, 96 completed the questionnaire and 85.8% perceived the nurses as being very empathetic and 85.54% of them considered nurses well trained and competent.

In the second step we observed that actual changes have taken place. In fact, of 22 nurses, 16 (72,73%) had a high empathic predisposition and 6 (27,27%) a moderate. In the overall improvement of all the results obtained, we note that nurses with ≥ 10 years of service have acquired a higher degree of empathy among younger nurses and 90.60% of the patients perceived them as very empathetic nurses and 96.70% of them considered nurses well trained and competent. These findings reveal an improvement as compared to the initial data.

Conclusion

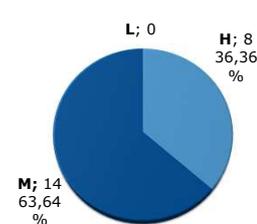
From the first collected data we can see how nurses' empathy can decrease over time; therefore it is crucial to re-raise their awareness for the necessity of empathetic care. By means of the self-evaluation test and subsequent corrective actions, we were able to achieve improvement in the empathetic behavior of all nursing staff which was confirmed by the patients' positive response. However, larger controlled studies are required to further investigate this topic.

In fact, empathy is an essential virtue for a dialysis nurse, because each patient is first and foremost an individual.

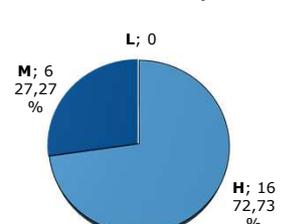
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Empathic behaviour of nurses, 1° Step

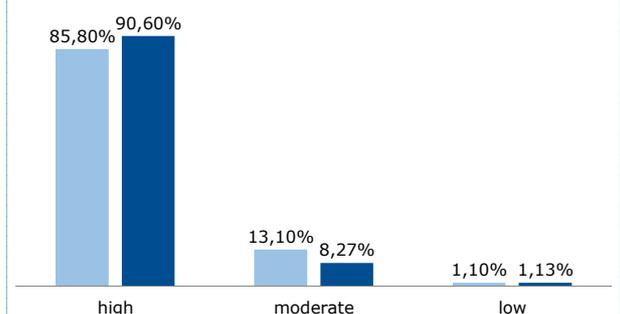


Empathic behaviour of nurses, 2° Step



Empathic level, self-evaluation of nursing staff:
L= low, M= medium H= high

Empathic level perceived by patients



Empathic level perceived by patients