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How do long-term care nurses rate their work environments and their well-being?

What is this research about?

Existing research demonstrates that work environments and employee responses to their work environments influence patient mortality and patient safety. Work environments include the nature of leadership, management and supervision within a workplace. Work environments also include workplace empowerment, organizational climate, and work effectiveness. Responses to work environments are measured by self-reported health, missed hours from work, job satisfaction, emotional exhaustion burnout and desire to stay at their current job.

This existing research focuses mostly on acute care settings. There are few studies on work environments and responses to work environments in institutional long-term care settings. Institutional long-term care is also known as chronic care or complex continuing care. It provides care to patients who need more intensive care than nursing home services, but no longer need acute care hospitalization. Further, most research focuses on the responses to work environments of a single occupational work group, rather than the

responses of a multidisciplinary team. This study addresses these knowledge gaps.

This purpose of this study was to report how multidisciplinary health care employees at institutional long-term care settings in Ontario evaluated their work environments and their responses to these environments.

What you need to know:

This research assesses reports of work environments and responses to work by multidisciplinary staff in institutional long-term care settings. The findings point to numerous areas for improvement to strengthen work environments, improve employee satisfaction and retain staff members.

What did the researchers do?

In 2005-2006, researchers invited six hospitals with institutional long-term care units serving stroke recovery patients to participate in the study. Multidisciplinary staff members were invited to complete a survey asking them about their work environments and their responses to



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these environments. Survey content was organized according to three instruments and included self-report assessments of work environments, employment circumstances and demographic information. Statistical analysis was conducted.

What did the researchers find?

The researchers identified the following findings from the study:

Work environment

- No difference was found between staff in their ratings of the work environment.
- Staff members rated their work empowerment lowest on average (59.2 out of 100) and their own work effectiveness as highest (73.5 out of 100).
- Staff members rated their supervisory support relatively low (69.4 out of 100).

Responses to work environment

- Two indicators of staff response to work environment were different between job categories: reported missed hours and intention to remain employed.
- Unlicensed aids reported significantly more missed work than licensed nursing staff and allied health professionals.
- Licensed nursing staff and unlicensed aids reported being more likely to remain in their current job until retirement than allied health professionals.
- All staff members rated their job satisfaction similarly, between “neutral” and “somewhat satisfied.”

- All staff rated their self-reported health similarly.
- On average, the staff reported moderate levels of emotional exhaustion (burnout).
- More than a third of all staff, including two thirds of allied health professionals, planned to leave their current employment.

These findings suggest that retaining allied health professionals in institutional long-term care is a challenge. These findings also suggest that there are opportunities to improve job satisfaction.

How can you use this research?

There are four key implications for healthcare leaders in ITLC settings:

- Staff empowerment should be promoted.
- Efforts should be made to sustain and strengthen perceived work effectiveness.
- Supervisors and managers should foster and support effective relationships with staff.
- Staff should be engaged in discussions about what promotes job satisfaction and targeted strategies should be implemented to strengthen staff retention.

Original Article:

To learn more about this study, we invite you to read the original research article:

Tourangeau, A., Widger, K., Cranley, L.A., Bookey-Bassett, S., Pachis, J. (2009). Work environments and staff responses to work environments in institutional long-term care. Health Care Management REVIEW, 34(2), 171-181.

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