

NURSES' PERCEPTIONS OF THE PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE WORK ENVIRONMENT IN THE HOME CARE SETTING

BACKGROUND

A growing body of evidence suggests a relationship between healthcare work environments and organizational outcomes, including patient safety and care quality.^{1,2} A positive professional practice environment involves providing opportunities for staff development, such as orientation, education, and training, and opportunities to participate in decision-making within the organization.³ In addition, healthy work environments have been demonstrated to improve job satisfaction and retention of nurses.³ In the home care setting, adequate job orientation, educational and training opportunities, and access to resources have been shown to influence nurses' intention to remain employed.⁴

WHAT DID WE DO?

The purpose of this project was to explore home care nurse perceptions and evaluations of the professional practice work environment and to propose strategies to improve home care nurse retention. As part of a larger, multi-phase study,⁴ a survey was developed from six focus groups and existing literature about factors influencing home care nurse retention to test a hypothesized model of factors influencing nurses to remain employed in the home care setting.

Survey items were developed and adapted from the Professional Practice and Staffing and Resource Adequacy subscales of the Perceived Nursing Work Environment (PNWE) scale.³ A sample of Ontario home care nurses recruited through the College of Nurses of Ontario registration database responded to and completed the survey. These nurses indicated their level of agreement to various statements related to staff development, quality improvement and safety, as well as organizational and clinical support (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = moderately disagree, 3 = slightly disagree, 4 = neutral, 5 = slightly agree, 6 = moderately agree, 7 = strongly agree). Findings

are presented as the proportion of respondents who selected strongly agree or moderately agree to the presence of these professional and practice components in their work environments.

Descriptive statistics were performed using SPSS® Version 23.0 to summarize respondent characteristics and home care nurse perceptions regarding their professional practice work environment. Aspects of the professional practice work environment include professional development opportunities, processes to improve care quality, organizational support, decision-making authority, as well as access to adequate clinical support. Since the described analyses aimed to examine perceptions of nurses working in clients' home environments, only the sample of nurses who self-identified that their formal role was a visiting nurse, shift nurse, specialist, or consultant were included. Demographic information regarding the sample are provided in the illustration below.





FINDINGS

Nurses' perceptions regarding their home care agency or organization's professional practice work environments were evaluated according to the presence of staff development opportunities, such as education, training, and orientation programs; quality improvement programs; staff engagement; and organizational and clinical support.

Professional Development

- Less than half of all home care nurses (n=414, 49%) reported that active staff development or continuing education programs were available at their current employment.
- Only 28.1% (n=237) of nurses reported the presence of career development opportunities and 35.1% (n=297) reported that support existed for nursing staff to pursue further education.

Quality Improvement and Safety

- Only thirty-three percent (n=276) of home care nurses noted an active quality improvement program at their home care organization.

Staff Engagement

- Almost one-third of home care nurses noted the availability of support for new and innovative ideas about client care (n=262, 31.1%), which was also supported with their reports of opportunities to participate in working groups or committees at their agencies (n=331, 39.2%).
- Only one-quarter of all home care nurses (n=210, 24.9%) reported the availability of opportunities to participate in agency decision-making.

Adequate Staffing and Clinical Support

- Less than half of home care nurses (n=420, 48.7%) reported the presence of opportunities for nurses to consult with clinical nurse specialists, expert nurse clinicians, or nurse educators.
- Forty-five percent of home care nurses perceived that support services were adequate and allowed them to spend time with their clients (n=381).
- Less than one-third of nurses (n=252, 29.9%) felt that they had enough time and opportunity to discuss issues related to client care with other nurses.
- Thirty-six percent (n=304) of home care nurses' felt that there were enough nurses to provide quality client care and enough staff to complete their work.

How can you use this information?

This study presents several findings for home care agencies, healthcare administrators, and other key stakeholders to strengthen work environments in the home care setting.

Based on the descriptive analyses performed and findings presented on home care nurses' perceptions regarding the professional practice work environments, greater efforts should be focused on improving professional development opportunities, implementing quality improvement initiatives, engaging staff in organizational changes and processes, as well as increasing access to adequate clinical support and resources.

Home care agencies can improve professional development opportunities by providing appropriate orientation and in-service workshops and seminars.⁵ In addition, organizations can actively promote opportunities



to attend conferences, and provide funding and financial support for nursing staff interested in pursuing further education.⁵

A positive professional work environment involves strong leadership and staff engagement.¹ Healthcare administrators can engage and support staff in organizational changes and processes by providing opportunities for home care nurses to participate in agency decision-making and serve on agency working groups or committees.³ Facilitating collaborative opportunities between management and home care nurses can foster better communication channels to develop quality improvement programs and an organizational culture focused on providing high quality patient care.

Adequate staffing and access to clinical resources is imperative to providing high quality patient care and reducing patient adverse events in the home care setting. Home care organizations should address staffing shortages and staff mix to ensure a balanced workload for home nurses to provide appropriate patient care, and to avoid job burnout.^{5,6} Home care nurses should also be provided access to clinical experts and nurse educators to encourage mentorship and learning opportunities, as well as to ensure that the nursing care they provide is based on best practices.

The findings from the described analyses reflect suboptimal perceptions and evaluations of the professional practice environment by Ontario home care nurses. To improve home care work environments, it is important for key stakeholders to consider factors related to appropriate training and continuing education opportunities; building an organizational culture

dedicated to providing high quality patient care; eliciting staff input in decision-making; and ensuring sufficient nurse staffing and clinical expert support. Improving our knowledge and understanding of these factors will help identify areas for organizational and structural changes in the home care setting. By addressing areas of opportunity and improvements related to the professional practice environment, home care agencies and healthcare administrators can help transform nurses' attitudes, perceptions, and evaluations for a more sustainable and stronger home care nursing workforce.

About the Researchers:

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Where can you find more information about this project?

Information regarding this project and other resources is available on

www.tourangeauresearch.com and
www.nhsru.com



¹Laschinger, H.K.S. & Leiter, M.P. (2006). The impact of nursing work environments on patient safety outcomes. *Journal of Nursing Administration*, 36(5), 259-267.

²Tourangeau, A. E., Doran, D. M., McGillis Hall, L., O'Brien Pallas, L. L., Pringle, D., Tu, J. V., et al. (2007). Impact of hospital nursing care on 30-day mortality for acute medical patients. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 57, 32–44.

³Choi, J., Bakken, S., Larson, E., Du, Y., & Stone, P.W. (2004). Perceived nursing work environment of critical care nurses. *Nursing Research*, 53(6), 370-378.

⁴Tourangeau, A., Patterson, E., Rowe, A., Saari, M., Thomson, H., MacDonald, G., ... Squires, M.. (2014). Factors influencing home care nurse intention to remain employed. *Journal of Nursing Management*, 22(8), 1015-26

⁵Flynn, L. (2003). Agency characteristics most valued by home care nurses: Findings of a nationwide survey. *Home Healthcare Nurse*, 21(12), 812-817.

⁶Armstrong-Stassen, M., & Cameron, S.J. (2005). Concerns, satisfaction, and retention of Canadian community health nurses. *Journal of Community Health Nursing*, 22(4), 181-194.