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WIESŁAWA MOJSA

***The role of the nurse and cooperation models in primary health care
in the view of physicians, nurses and patients***

**Rola i modele współpracy pielęgniarek w podstawowej opiece zdrowotnej
– opinie lekarzy, pielęgniarek i pacjentów**

As declared by the International Council of Nurses in Geneva 2002, the nurse has adequate knowledge and skills to take decisions [7] concerning fulfilment of professional functions. These functions can be either dependent on other medical professions (e.g. a therapeutic function depending on the physician), interdependent (e.g. health promotion, prevention, rehabilitation) or independent (nursing care, tutorial) [2]. According to their functions, nurses undertake different professional roles [12], which are analysed mainly in the aspect of cooperation with the physician [1,3,4,5,7,8,11].

When nurses have little possibility of independent decision-making, it is doctors who totally predominate in the patient's care. This is described as a traditional and hierarchical model. Totally different is the complementary model of cooperation, in which doctors and nurses share their tasks, their roles complementing each other in overall responsibility for the patient. This model emphasizes education, mutual experience, distribution of independence and a common aim [1,6,9].

The purpose of the study was to identify the opinions of nurses and physicians working in primary health care centres (PHC), and those of care-receiving patients on the role of nurses and on cooperation models in the primary health care system.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The study was conducted in Podlasie Province, in PHC centres that signed a health service contract with Podlaski Division of National Health Fund in 2004. Three groups of respondents were involved in the study: nurses (109), physicians (114) and patients (91).

The method of diagnostic survey using an original questionnaire form was applied to find the respondents' opinions. For the needs of the present study only responses pertaining to the nurse's role in health care service and models of cooperation of nurses in the primary health care team were analysed. The evaluation criterion of the role of the nurse involved two options: indispensable and auxiliary in health care service. The cooperation model was defined as traditional, i.e. based on physician's orders or partnership, i.e. regarding the nurse as a professional in the overall care of the patient.

RESULTS

Responses collected from physicians, nurses and patients on the role of the nurse in health care service are presented in Table 1. The list shows that nearly the same proportions of patients assessed the nurse's role as indispensable (30.8%), auxiliary (32.9%) or neither (36.3%).

Straight majority (85.3%) of nurses referred to their role as indispensable in providing health care, 11% as auxiliary and 3.7% were undecided. Doctors' opinions resembled those of the nurses. Most physicians (79.8%) considered the role of the nurse to be indispensable, 16.7% - auxiliary and 3.5% had no opinion.

However, differences were observed in the responses obtained on the model of cooperation in the primary health care team (Table 2). The vast majority of doctors (81.6%) claimed that cooperation in

their centres is based on the partnership model, where the nurse is a professional in nursing care and the physician in treatment. The traditional model was acknowledged by 18.4% of physicians.

However, most of the nurses (61.5%) expressed the opinion that the traditional model, based mainly on doctor's orders, is the predominant one, with only 33% referring to the partnership-based model and 5.5% being undecided.

Most of the patients involved in the study (60.4%) believed that the nurse's job is not only the execution of the physician's orders. The traditional model was acknowledged by 22% of the patients; 17.6% were undecided.

DISCUSSION

The analysis of the study outcome indicates that the majority of physicians and nurses considered the nurse's role to be indispensable in the provision of care to patients. It can be thus assumed that both physicians and nurses share the opinion of complementary roles in health care service, taking into account the exclusive character of each.

Patients, who are the recipients of primary health care services, found it particularly difficult to define the role of the nurse [10]. Similar numbers of patients defined the role as indispensable, auxiliary and neither of them, which may indicate that patients have no definite and explicit opinion of the role of the nurse. On the other hand, patients may not be interested in the exact distribution of roles in the primary health care team and rather expect the optimum care from medical professionals in compliance with the most recent knowledge as well as an attitude full of respect and care [4].

There was no agreement between doctors and nurses with regard to the models of cooperation in the primary health care team, pertaining to nurses' professional duties. In the view of a great number of doctors, the partnership model is the prevailing one, with the doctor being a professional in treatment and the nurse in nursing care. Nurses, however, had a different opinion, acknowledging the existence of the traditional model, i.e. based on physician's orders and thus delimiting the role of the nurse to the doctor-dependent therapeutic function. The predominance of the traditional model causes that the present-day, independent, nursing process is pushed into the background.

CONCLUSION

The nursing process that involves taking independent decisions by nurses is a present-day method of their work. The range of decisions should depend both on professional functions of nurses and on patients' expectations, and be the result of the patients' biological, psychological and social status. This method conditions the provision of holistic medicine and precludes the predominance of one function over another. The supremacy of the therapeutic function favours the disease-based model of health care, which in the light of nurse-doctor cooperation means the predominance of physician's decisions over the nurse's ones.

The present study indicates different attitudes of doctors and nurses to the process of nursing. Therefore, there seems to be a need for interdisciplinary, nurse-doctor education in order to better understand the roles of doctors and nurses, improve cooperation and in consequence provision of complementary, optimum, holistic care to patients.

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Table 1. Role of the nurse in the primary health care system

	nurse's role				total
	indispensable	auxiliary	difficult to define		
physicians	91 (79.8%)	19 (16.7%)	4 (3.5%)		114 (100%)
nurses	93 (85.3%)	12 (11%)	4 (3.7%)		109 (100%)
patients	28 (30.8%)	30 (32.9%)	33 (36.3%)		91 (100%)

Table 2 . Cooperation models of the nurse in the primary health care centre team

	cooperation models of the nurse				total
	traditional	partnership	difficult to define		
physicians	21 (18.4%)	93 (81.6%)	0 (0%)		114 (100%)
nurses	67 (61.5%)	36 (33%)	6 (5.5%)		109 (100%)
patients	20 (22%)	55 (60.4%)	16 (17.6%)		91 (100%)

ABSTRACT

Nurses undertake different professional roles adequate to their functions and to the model of cooperation with physicians. The aim of the study was to find the opinions of nurses and doctors working in the primary health care centres (PHC) and of patients on the role of the nurse and on cooperation models in the primary health care system. The study was conducted in Podlasie Province, in PHC centres which signed a health service contract with Podlaski Division of National Health Fund in 2004. Three groups of respondents were involved: 109 nurses, 114 doctors and 91 patients. The diagnostic survey method using an original questionnaire form was employed. The analysis of the study outcome indicates that physicians seem to perceive the nursing process in a different way than nurses. Therefore, there is a need for interdisciplinary, nurse-doctor education in order to better understand the roles of doctors and nurses, to improve cooperation and eventually provide complementary, optimum, holistic care to patients.

STRESZCZENIE

Pielęgniarki podejmują różne role zawodowe odpowiednio do pełnionych funkcji i modelu współpracy z lekarzami. Celem pracy było poznanie opinii pielęgniarek i lekarzy pracujących w placówkach podstawowej opieki zdrowotnej (POZ) oraz pacjentów korzystających z usług opieki podstawowej na temat roli i modeli współpracy pielęgniarek POZ. Badania przeprowadzono na terenie województwa podlaskiego w placówkach POZ, z którymi Oddział Podlaski Narodowego Funduszu Zdrowia podpisał umowę na świadczenia zdrowotne w 2004r. W badaniu brały udział 3 grupy respondentów: 109 pielęgniarek, 114 lekarzy i 91 pacjentów. Aby poznać opinię badanych osób zastosowano metodę sondażu diagnostycznego za pomocą autorskiego kwestionariusza ankiety. Z badań wynika, że lekarze inaczej rozumieją proces pielęgnowania niż pielęgniarki. Istnieje więc potrzeba interdyscyplinarnej, pielęgniarsko – lekarskiej edukacji w celu lepszego zrozumienia ról lekarzy i pielęgniarek, lepszego współpracy, a w efekcie zapewnienia podopiecznym kompleksowej, optymalnej, holistycznej opieki.