Conflict Management in a sample of the Nursing Staff of Surgical Departments

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Abstract

Health sector demands inter-occupational co-operation, which increases the degree of interaction between health professionals, and thus the possibility of conflicts arising. Hospitals are a natural space in which conflicts might develop, in part because of the complexity of their structures, and partly because they include many different collaborative and interactive professional groups. The aim of this study was to evaluate the behavior of nurses as well as their knowledge regarding the handling of conflicts in the workplace. A cross-sectional study was conducted in a sample of nurses working in surgical domain of a university hospital in Greece. The researchers used the Greek version of the Questionnaire of Handling Conflicts for the nurses as research tool, after written permission for use. For the analysis of the data the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 24.0 was used, while the level of significance was set ≤0.05.

Introduction

Health sector demands inter-occupational co-operation, which increases the degree of interaction between health professionals, and thus the possibility of conflicts arising. Hospitals are a natural space in which conflicts might develop, in part because of the complexity of their structures, and partly because they include many different collaborative and interactive professional groups. In other words, health care is a complex system requiring effective teamwork and collaboration to accomplish the main goal which is patient’s safety. Literature supports that there is a positive correlation between patient’s health outcomes and effective conflict management.

Broadly speaking, some would argue that conflict has negative consequences, while on the other hand there is a theory supporting that conflicts may have beneficial results. Conflict among health-care personnel is considered to be a global phenomenon is evidence showing that personal factors and organizational factors comprise the main sources of conflict most common sources of conflict. Frequent causes of conflict comprise different expectations or goals, poor communication, personality differences, conflicts of interest. In detail, lack of professional role clarity, burn-out syndrome, stressful work environment and high workload are some of this factor influencing health professionals’ interaction. Recent studies highlight that conflicts and conflict management are strongly associated with job satisfaction, workers’ quality of life and stress levels. Expandingly, studies show that personnel’s work-related stress is linked with high rate of job absence and high turnover. Notably, conflict is associated with significant cost for the health organizations, as recent evidence from a study conducted in a sample from nine countries reveals that there is important time lost in conflict management leading in low productivity and increased cost for the organization. In the field of nursing, researcher investigating the conflict management have to take into account that they deal with a female-dominated profession. Theories based on A gender perspective state that gender affects the way we interact and the method of conflict management that a nurse selects. It is worth noting that scientists stated that ‘most definitions agree that conflict is a process involving two or more people, where a person perceives the opposition of the other. The theory of management and experts in this field state that there are five types of conflict management: competition, collaboration, compromise, avoidance, and accommodation, while literature describes a large number of conflict-handling methods. The aim of this study was to evaluate the behavior of nurses as well as their knowledge regarding the handling of conflicts in the workplace.

Methods

A cross-sectional study was conducted in a sample of nurses working in surgical domain of a university hospital in Greece. The researchers used the Greek version of the Questionnaire of Handling Conflicts for the nurses as research tool, after written permission for use. For the analysis of the data the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 24.0 was used, while the level of significance was set ≤0.05. The Ethics Committee of University Hospital of Heraklion in Crete and the Department of Nursing, Faculty of Health Sciences, Hellenic Mediterranean University.

Results-Discussion

The sample of the study consisted of a convenience sample of 120 nurses working in surgical units of the university hospital. The majority was female (83.2%, n=94 and 13.3% (n=10) hold a Master’s degree, while only 4% (n=3) hold a Doctorate Degree. 73.3% (n=88) of the sample had never received any education regarding conflict management, since high school. Half of the participants highlighted the high overload in combination with a low salary as a reason for conflict (50%, n=60), as well as a moderate level of job satisfaction (35.8%, n=43). As a result, conflicts among health professionals are inevitable and the best way to manage this problem is reducing its frequency and its intensity through educational interventions.

The results of the present study revealed that the participants prefer avoidance and compromise than competition as conflict-handling strategy and, additionally, they seem to face conflict problems mainly with their colleagues and with physicians. The majority of the
nurses stated that they had no previous training and they had never attended an educational course regarding conflict management and interprofessional interaction. Also, results revealed a link between female gender and number of conflict incidence, as in the present study women were involved in more conflict events than men. Moreover, female participants choose diverse conflict management methods and deal with conflict in a different way. Female participants also express different aspects regarding the causes of the conflicts in their department (p=0.041). A high percentage of the participants stated a moderate satisfaction regarding their work-related role, while they believe that their personal expectations do not match with the goals of the organization (39.5%). Besides, it is worth noting that the participants identified the heavy workload (69.2%) and the low salary as some of the main causes of conflicts. Some participants seem to be unhappy in the present professional role (71%), state low job satisfaction and believe that maybe in another new job their need will be met (60.1%) (p=0.035).

As for the organizational factors the results highlight that the main obstacle towards the effective interaction among the team is the unbalancing workload (35.8%), the unequal rewards (50%), the absence of role clarity and the ineffective organization leadership. 41.2% of the same has a moderate independence in decision making, while 12.6% state that they don not have any kind of independence in decision making. Only 2.5% believe that the organization leverages in the best way the sources. 29.2% of the sample strongly disagree that management acknowledges their contribution and their offer in the organization, while only 2.5% strongly agree with this statement.

Conclusion

Interventions such as effective leadership and human resources motivation should be of major priority in a healthcare organization as in this way job satisfaction, productivity, stress relief and cost-effective methods would be provided. Conflict management education is able to immerse healthcare professionals in new methods of conflict resolution and make them interaction effectively in their workplace.

References