

Paper Session C3: Reflections on Clinical Practice

Managers' Views of Communication in Healthcare Setting

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Purpose: This qualitative study described nurse managers' views of their communication practices in relation to their leadership roles within healthcare settings. Research was initiated to provide insight into the less tangible aspects of communication and workplace health.

Background: Current initiatives on best practices underscore the importance of communication and healthy work environments. Ineffective communication can be harmful to patients and demoralizing to employees. Previous studies correlated management style with worker productivity and retention; but, few studies focused on managers' opinions about their impact on communication.

Methods: A qualitative emergent design was used to decipher the viewpoints of those under study. The research question was: How do nurse managers view their impact on communication within the workplace? Operations Managers (unit nurse managers) at a central Pennsylvania tertiary care center were invited to participate. The sample included 12 in-depth interviews of six Operations Managers. Data collection included audio-taped interviews, transcripts, demographic information and field notes. Linguistic and hermeneutical analysis with QDA software identified communication themes.

Results: Qualitative analyses mapped processes that promoted or hindered communication, e.g., "believing in the message," "making self visible to staff" and "keeping communication focused on the patient or team." Consequences inherent in the manager's role that impacted the workplace were identified, i.e., being 'sandwiched' or caught between staff and management. Managers viewed their roles as instrumental for setting the unit tone, ensuring effective communication, and maintaining positive teamwork. Communication patterns were also described that hindered the managers' abilities to stay connected with staff, and thus could be obviated.

Conclusions and Implications: This study established multiple venues for disseminating information and promoting positive communication in healthcare settings. As the first phase of research in this area, this study provides data to support changes in communication policies in institutions that are crucial to maintaining a healthy workplace. Future research into generational differences may identify additional communication patterns within the workplace.