

Symposium D4: Culture, Context and Policy: Nurses in Action

Trickled Down Policy: Impact on Patients and Family Caregivers

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Purpose: To explore how nurses, functioning within one of the spheres of cultural influence, made profound differences in the patients' and family caregivers' experiences of illness

Background: Formal care settings are influenced by policies adopted by the organization. Ideally, policies reflect the shared values of the organization, the unit, and ultimately, of the clinicians who provide care.

Methods: Ethnographic methods as described in Paper 1.

Results: As the nurse asserts varied role across different interactions in the clinical setting, there is a subtle shift in the culture of care. Over time, through repeated efforts, nurses dynamically shaped how the belief system of the unit was expressed to patients and family caregivers. Nurses moved into distressed situations, providing information and referral services. Nurses interpreted messages delivered by other disciplines in an effort to allay anxiety or to clarify meaning. Nurses presenced with troubled families to allow them time to process bad news or complicated procedures. Yet, in many cases, nurses were outside of the role prescribed by policy.

Conclusions and Implications: Nurses must recognize their power in shaping a culture of care. Subsequently, a shift in the culture of care calls for a re-focused organizational policy that is congruent with prevailing shared values. Nurse must act thoughtfully and proactively to enhance their role in order to better serve critically ill patients and their family caregivers.