

QUALITY MANAGEMENT AT A HOSPITAL'S NURSING SERVICE

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The study aimed to know the opinion of nurses in relation to the Quality Management implemented in a hospital service. This is an exploratory and descriptive study carried out with a sample of 17 individuals. The main results, among the 14 principles of quality, reveal that the seventh principle "adopt and institute leadership" received the highest score. On the other hand, the lowest scored principle was the third: "cease the dependency of mass inspection". The obtained results, coupled with theoretical knowledge on the subject and professional experience on the management of nursing services, lead us to the conclusion that nurses consider Total Quality a practical philosophy to be implemented in the services under their responsibility and accept the challenge of overcoming barriers related to tradition, going from discourse to practice.

DESCRIPTORS: quality of health care; nursing services; total quality; quality management

ADMINISTRACIÓN DE LA CALIDAD EN UN SERVICIO DE ENFERMERÍA EN UN HOSPITAL

El objetivo de este trabajo fue conocer la opinión del enfermero en lo que se refiere a la Administración de la Calidad implantada en un servicio hospitalario. Se trata de un estudio de carácter exploratorio y descriptivo, cuya muestra se constituyó de 17 sujetos y, como principales resultados, se puede citar que, entre los 14 Principios de la Calidad, el que recibió más puntuación de los enfermeros fue el séptimo, que se refiere a "adoptar e instituir el liderazgo". Por otro lado, el principio menos puntuado fue el tercero: "terminar con la dependencia de la inspección en masa". Los resultados obtenidos, aliados al conocimiento teórico sobre el tema y a la vivencia profesional en administración de servicios de enfermería, lleva a sugerir que los enfermeros consideran la filosofía de la Calidad Total como siendo viable en los servicios bajo su responsabilidad y aceptan el desafío de romper las barreras de la tradición, pasando del discurso a la práctica.

DESCRIPTORES: calidad de la atención de salud; servicios de enfermería; calidad total; gestión de calidad

GERENCIAMENTO DA QUALIDADE EM UM SERVIÇO DE ENFERMAGEM HOSPITALAR

O objetivo deste trabalho foi conhecer a opinião do enfermeiro a respeito do Gerenciamento da Qualidade implantado em um serviço hospitalar. Trata-se de estudo de caráter exploratório e descritivo, cuja amostra constituiu-se de 17 sujeitos e, como principais resultados, pode-se citar que, dentre os 14 Princípios da Qualidade, o mais bem pontuado pelos enfermeiros foi o sétimo, que diz respeito a "adotar e instituir a liderança". Por outro lado, o princípio menos pontuado foi o terceiro: "cesse a dependência da inspeção em massa". Os resultados obtidos, aliados ao conhecimento teórico sobre o tema e à vivência profissional em gerência de serviços de enfermagem, leva a sugerir que os enfermeiros consideram a filosofia da Qualidade Total como viável aos serviços sob sua responsabilidade e aceitam o desafio para romper as barreiras da tradição, passando do discurso à prática.

DESCRITORES: qualidade da assistência à saúde; serviços de enfermagem; qualidade total; gestão de qualidade

INTRODUCTION

Currently, organizations in several sectors are increasingly concerned with the quality of their services or goods. In this context, the health sector is certainly growing because of its increasing influence on the economy of several countries and also because its clientele has increasingly demanded quality in the satisfaction of its health needs.

The world has finally understood that, reined by the law of supply and demand, those who buy or use goods and services are the ones who really matter. Organizations or institutions from the most varied health areas have begun to provide goods/services that clients demand and not what they want to supply, increasing competitiveness among them and consequently, the excellence of each.

One of the pioneers in Total Quality Management (TQM) stresses that quality consists of meeting the needs of clients for a price they can afford. He adds that all people in an organization should do what they can, however, they should also know what to do⁽¹⁾.

A current literature review appointed some results achieved by Brazilian hospitals and nursing services that adopted TQM. After reporting the experience of four hospitals that decided to implement this philosophy, the study showed, among other aspects, satisfactory outcomes from the adoption of TQM in these health institutions. Gains in terms of human resources were perceived because emphasis on the perception that mistakes are more related to the system than to individuals yields the establishment of a new cultural pattern of relationship, of records and analysis of adverse events, verification and checking of results. Patients' satisfaction was another gain evidenced by the study, as well as society's acknowledgment through awards, dissemination in the local media and increased financial contributions from business and community in general. Changes in the hospital's statistical indicators were also highlighted, such as diminished mortality rates and average period of permanence, with a concomitant increase in occupation rates⁽²⁾.

Quality management involves questioning traditional values related to the management of people and also to the function of clients because, according to this philosophy, knowing and "enchanted" clients is a game everyone should get involved in. Facing this challenge is necessary because it is about guaranteeing the institution's survival⁽³⁾.

In this perspective, user satisfaction has been used as an instrument to evaluate the quality of health services as well as hospital accreditation⁽⁴⁻⁵⁾.

To manage a health service with a view to the quality of health actions, it is necessary to adopt changes, transferring the focus of action from the disease to the production of health focused on the individual. Therefore, care cannot be fragmented, individualized and hegemonic⁽⁴⁾.

Perhaps one of the aspects that might explain this fact is that customers are slowly getting interested in knowing health care and health promotion. People are getting increasingly aware of their rights and duties and, in general, are starting to strongly consider that health and quality health care are basic rights of everyone and not a privilege of few⁽⁶⁾.

In this perspective, the client is the one who really rules and people who deliver services to clients are those who hold the greatest power because the remainder of the organization seeks to provide resources and infrastructure to those in the front line so that clients get what they want⁽⁷⁾.

In a study on the nursing care delivered by the Pediatric unit at the William Beaumont Hospital, Michigan, USA, groups of families with hospitalized children were investigated. One group received special treatment compared to the control group with regard to the nursing professionals' attitudes when help was asked, amount of attention given to patients' personal needs and the degree to which nurses kept them informed about tests, treatments and equipments⁽⁸⁾. The authors concluded that, among other aspects, simply offering "sympathetic and understandable listening" as well as answering to patients' and families' questions had a salutary effect on their general satisfaction in relation to the nursing care delivered⁽⁸⁾.

Services that prime for quality are constantly in direct contact with their customers, seeking to know, understand, define and value them⁽⁹⁾. Nurses are leaders in the care delivered to clients and it is their main source of continued contact, which includes orientation regarding standards and rights, as well as providing complete, precise and truthful information regarding the procedures performed by the nursing team and other professionals⁽¹⁰⁾.

We believe that nurses are privileged professionals because they have the opportunity to directly interact with clients and become closer to their referential, which is unique, to understand their desires and expectations, improving care practice with quality.

On the other hand, there are increasing expectations in current health institutions for nurses to get involved with management of their sector. Thus, in addition to their role of being in constant contact with clients, these professionals also engage in care delivery management in Brazilian healthcare institutions.

Therefore, a question considered important is: What is the nurses' opinion regarding the Quality Management implemented in the nursing service they practice in, based on the 14 Principles of Quality proposed by Deming⁽¹⁾?

It is important to highlight that, even though the healthcare industry has undergone changes that led to important scientific and technological advancements, it still experiences situations like inhumane and delayed care, long queues, high rates of hospital infection, ineffective cost management, low level of training and lack of continued education for people who deliver health care, inadequate personnel dimension, among others.

This situation claims for adequate management models that optimize resources, improving productivity and satisfaction of both the care recipients and health service providers.

Despite the fact that not many hospitals have opted for quality management in Brazil, the number of institutions that make this option is increasing because managers perceive that clients are increasingly demanding quality care with lower costs, that employees need to be valued and they have to follow the changes observed in recent years⁽¹¹⁾.

For some experts on the subject, the Principles of Quality proposed by Deming have not been efficiently adapted to health services. Although they have been largely acknowledged in the service sector, industry and others, the health sector has not been fully capable of dealing with problems like low performance and quality in healthcare in the light of these principles.

Therefore, implementing Deming's approach to healthcare services is only attainable if some serious considerations are taken into account: team evaluation should replace individual evaluation, measures of performance should be focused on quality and training people should precede numbers and quotas. Additionally, the use of statistical data should base decision-making instead of personal opinions. All those involved in the process should know well the work system they are part of, including their own

and others' responsibilities. Mutual coordination and cooperation, instead of competition, should be encouraged. The authors believe that Deming's principles will remain a challenge for the current managers of this sector until these tools of quality are specifically developed for the management of health services⁽¹²⁾.

An important study presented a historical overview on the early assessment of the quality of health services in Brazil with the Hospital Standardization Program, established by the American College of Surgeons in mid-1924, until the creation of a Brazilian Accreditation Organization. This organization aims to implement an ongoing process for improving health care and encouraging services to achieve higher levels of quality. According to this study, data on the Evaluation Criteria for Nursing Services, which are used in processes of institutional accreditation, reveal that 36 out of 195 evaluated Brazilian health institutions were accredited between October 1999 and March 2002, from a total of 6,528 health institutions. Of the 36 accredited institutions, only 27 were able to maintain the level of compliance and, consequently, the Certificate of Accredited Hospital⁽¹³⁾.

It is necessary, however, to highlight that the assessment criteria for nursing services identified in this study mainly focus on structure and organizational processes instead of institutional results. The need was verified to change traditional mechanisms of evaluation focused on physical structure, billing service production and hotel services, with a view to valuing care outcomes originated in programs based on criteria that include epidemiological and quality standards, competence and performance with excellence, elaboration of more qualitatively and quantitatively equitable standards in terms of structure, processes and results⁽¹³⁾.

It is believed that nursing, an important component of the health system, has more recently implemented Quality Management in care services because of the growing understanding that optimal health care standards will only be achieved with quality.

It is expected that Total Quality Management is also successful in nursing, encompassing the role of leadership, planning actions based on indicators and standardized instruments, improving cost-benefit, education and training, and clients' satisfaction, encouraging people's development and valorization, and focusing on communication processes, among others⁽¹⁴⁻¹⁶⁾.

Based on the above, we acknowledge the importance of this subject to improve nursing services, which originally motivated this study. The theoretical reference framework was based on Total Quality Management, more specifically on the 14 Principles of Quality⁽¹⁾.

OBJECTIVE

To know nurses' opinion regarding the Quality Management implemented in a hospital service in the light of the 14 Principles of Quality⁽¹⁾.

METHOD

This is an exploratory and descriptive study, whose aim was to know relevant aspects related to nurses' opinion regarding the Quality Management implemented in the hospital service they worked in.

Experts use this kind of research to obtain precise information on the characteristics of individuals, groups, institutions or situations, or the frequency a phenomenon occurs. The variables of interest can be classified as opinions, attitudes or facts and data can be collected through questionnaires or interviews⁽¹⁷⁾.

This study was carried out in a hospital that has implemented Total Quality Management in its nursing service, located in the interior of São Paulo, Brazil.

The research project was submitted and approved by the research institution and the Research Ethics Committee at the University of São Paulo at Ribeirão Preto College of Nursing (Protocol No 0734/2006).

The study participants were nurses who agreed to participate in the study and had worked in the institution for at least six months. The questionnaire used in this study was adapted from an instrument based on the 14 Principles of Quality⁽¹⁾, elaborated and validated for nursing service⁽¹¹⁾. It was created to discover and know the opinion of nurses regarding the Quality Management implemented in the hospital service they work for in the light of the 14 Principles of Quality proposed by Deming⁽¹⁾. It is composed of 14 items that correspond to Deming's⁽¹⁾ 14 principles and also presents its definition, which Antunes⁽¹¹⁾ adapted to nursing services.

Data collection was carried out at the hospital after nurses were informed about the study objectives and signed the free and informed consent. The study participants were personally asked to answer the first part of the instrument, which referred to the time they had worked at the hospital and the sector they practiced in. Then, they were asked to score, from one to four, each of the Principles of Quality based on the nursing service they worked for.

To proceed with data analysis, scores attributed by nurses were defined as follows:

- 1 – the principle never corresponds to the reality of our nursing service;
- 2 – the principle hardly corresponds to the reality of our nursing service;
- 3 – the principle frequently corresponds to the reality of our nursing service;
- 4 – the principle always corresponds to the reality of our nursing service.

Then, the percentage of scores attributed to each principle and average of these scores by principle was obtained. Based on these results and on the 14 principles of Deming⁽¹⁾, we sought to know the opinions of nurses with respect to the Quality Management implemented in the service they work for. We also aimed to compare data from this study to those from previous research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research institution is a private hospital located in the interior of São Paulo, SP, Brazil, inaugurated in 1969. The Total Quality Program was officially implemented in 1998 and, since then, it has developed its activities with well-defined objectives and guidelines (verbal information)*.

One of the first items in the instrument refers to the nurse's time of work in the institution, which permitted characterizing the study sample. Of the 27 nurses working at the hospital, eight were trainees and one was on vacation, remaining 18 professionals. Of these, one did not meet the inclusion criteria (at least six months of work at the institution), which defined the study sample: 17 interviewed nurses.

Of these 17 individuals, 35% has worked at the hospital between six months and two years; another 35% between three and six years, 18% between seven

* Information provided in 2006 by the nurse responsible for the Quality Program at the studied hospital.

and ten years and 12% between 11 and 13 years. Time on the job ranged from 11 months to 13 years.

To achieve quality goals, 14 principles are proposed. These can be implemented in any organization, small or large, or yet in a single sector of an organization⁽¹⁾. These principles have already been adapted to nursing services⁽¹¹⁾ and are used here to base this research.

The nurses interviewed were asked to score, from one to four, the 14 Principles of Quality⁽¹⁾ adapted to nursing⁽¹¹⁾, with regard to the practice existent at the hospital they worked for.

Table 1 presents the scores the 17 (100%) interviewed nurses attributed to the 14 principles, according to pre-established scores, as well as the average of these scores.

Table 1 – Number and average of scores attributed by nurses to the 14 Principles of Quality⁽¹⁾

Principles	Number of participants attributing scores				Average
	1	2	3	4	
1. Constancy of purpose	0	0	6	11	3.6
2. Adopt the new philosophy	0	2	9	6	3.2
3. Cease dependence on mass inspection	1	7	6	3	2.6
4. Do not award business based on price tag alone	0	2	9	6	3.4
5. Improve constantly the system of production and service	0	0	8	9	3.5
6. Institute training	0	2	3	12	3.6
7. Adopt and institute leadership	0	0	3	14	3.8
8. Drive out fear	0	0	7	10	3.6
9. Break barriers among staff areas	0	0	11	6	3.4
10. Eliminate slogans, exhortations and targets	0	0	9	8	3.5
11. Eliminate numerical quotas	0	4	8	5	3.1
12. Remove barriers that impede people to take pride in their workmanship	0	0	7	10	3.6
13. Institute a program of education and self-improvement	0	1	7	9	3.5
14. Take action to accomplish the transformation	0	0	8	9	3.5

The principle most scored by the participants in this study is the seventh. It refers to *adopt and institute leadership* and 14 participants (82%) attributed the highest score (four). The average score for principle seven was 3.8.

The leader of quality should encourage the participation of everyone in the decision-making process, facilitate and participate with the staff in the process, help the group to define and achieve objectives, show

the importance of each member in the team because everyone can contribute, distribute tasks according to responsibilities and share the merit of achievements⁽¹⁴⁾. The philosophy of quality certainly requires a leader aware of what has to be done, committed to the service and sufficiently motivated to inspire all those under leadership with a common spirit of cooperation, teamwork and continuous search for quality.

In a study whose aim was to evaluate Deming's management model, the omnipresent importance of leadership to assure the success of a quality improvement program is appointed as one of the main findings⁽¹⁸⁾.

According to some experts, Deming appointed an interesting scenario when he had to be hospitalized after an accident. He observed that nurses did their best and were polite, but were discouraged and puzzled between their real functions and functions the system required from them. In addition, there were delays and some ministered treatments different from what had been prescribed. Deming acknowledged that the healthcare system was deficient but did not blame workers for that. For him, among other aspects, excellent leadership was in need⁽¹²⁾.

Another study, also based on the 14 Principles of Quality, carried out in a hospital located in the interior of São Paulo, SP, Brazil, shows that nurses attributed the lowest score to the seventh principle, which indicates that there are many things to change in this institution so that the program is adequately implemented⁽¹¹⁾.

The lowest score attributed in our study is the third one: *cease dependence on mass inspection*. Only three participants (18%) attributed the maximum score (four) and it was also the only principle that received only one (6%) attribution to the lowest score (one). The average score attributed to the third principle was 2.6.

Mass inspection is not reliable. In addition, it is costly and inefficient because, when it is carried out, the service or good has already been delivered⁽¹⁾.

Another research, also carried out in a hospital service, reveals that this principle, as opposed to the reality in which data collection was performed, is often applied in nursing services⁽¹¹⁾.

These aspects evidence that this philosophy should be adapted to the reality of each institution. Each hospital, as well as each nursing service, should trace its own way towards quality, based on its indicators, possibilities, values, characteristics and clientele.

It is important to stress that there will always be aspects unique to each service, which should be improved during Total Quality Management implementation, maintenance and improvement processes. This is particularly true if one takes into account aspects like different cultures, climate and socioeconomic conditions existent in the diverse regions of Brazil.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the obtained results and literature review on the topic, we believe that the initially proposed objective was achieved. The main results of this study, among the 14 Principles of Quality⁽¹⁾, appoint that the seventh principle, *adopt and institute leadership*, was the most scored by the interviewed nurses. The lowest scored principle was the third one: *cease dependence on mass inspection*.

We expect to contribute to the improvement of nursing services through the availability of an additional

source of literature, so that researchers, nurses and managers and others can count on a reference that relates theory and practice.

It is also important to stress that experts believe that the implementation of Deming's management model to the service sector, including the healthcare industry, is possible if the nuances that characterize this specific sector are taken into account. They also suggest that researchers include variables from this model in their studies on quality of services, such as: leadership, continuous improvement, work satisfaction and commitment, and clients' satisfaction, among others^(12,18).

Results from this study and related discussion can also serve as a reference source for the studied hospital, as well as for other nursing services that aim to implement the philosophy of Total Quality.

Finally, we suggest that nurses, especially those working with management, consider the viability of the Total Quality Philosophy for both private and public nursing services, and accept the challenge of breaking with barriers of tradition, moving from discourse to practice.

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