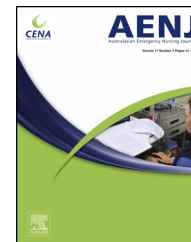




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RESEARCH PAPER

The personality of emergency nurses: Is it unique?



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KEYWORDS

Personality characteristics;
Emergency nurse;
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Summary

Background: With ever increasing demands on emergency services it is necessary to consider how to enhance the recruitment and retention of emergency nurses in public hospitals. Personality is known to influence occupational choice, yet there is a lack of research exploring how personality may influence the workforce decisions of emergency nurses.

Methods: A standardised personality test instrument, the NEO™-PI-3, was used in a survey design inclusive of demographic questions to measure personality characteristics. Data were collected from 72 emergency nurses working at an Australian Emergency Department between July and October 2012. The personality scores of emergency nurses were compared against general population norms in each of five personality domains and their 30 associated facets.

Results: Participants scored higher than population norms in the domains of Extraversion ($p < .001$), Openness to experience ($p < .001$) and Agreeableness ($p = .001$), and in twelve facets, including excitement-seeking ($p < .001$) and competence ($p = .003$).

Conclusion: The personality profile of this sample of emergency nurses is different to the population norm. Assessment of personality and knowledge of its influence on specialty selection may assist in improving retention and recruitment in emergency nursing.

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Introduction

There is a global nursing shortage that is predicted to worsen in coming years. This is secondary to increased service demands as a result of the ageing population, an ageing nursing workforce and a diverse range of professional

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What is known

Personality influences occupational choice, as individuals seek a profession that provides personal satisfaction and meets their own personal needs. Personality characteristics have been linked to stress and burnout, similarly some have been shown to improve an individual's ability to cope in stressful circumstances. The majority of the research undertaken in nursing does not involve defined specialty areas.

What this paper adds?

This paper provides a personality profile of a group of emergency nurses from the emergency department of a large tertiary referral hospital in Sydney. It is demonstrated that the profile of emergency nurses in this study is different to the general population.

opportunities for nurses that take them away from clinical nursing roles.^{1,2} The emergency department (ED) is the entry point for approximately 40% of all hospital admissions and the demands for emergency care within Australia are growing at rate exceeding population growth.³ Compounding the nursing shortage, vacancies in critical care areas such as emergency are amongst the most difficult to fill.³

In the past, a range of strategies including educational programmes, models of care, workplace leadership and flexible rosters have been considered to enhance recruitment and retention.⁴⁻⁶ While some of these strategies have demonstrated favourable results, it is recognised that no single approach will improve retention. Retaining experienced nurses within the hospital setting requires a combination of approaches to have a sustained impact.¹ The retention of emergency nurses not only has potential economic advantages, but also a likely positive impact on patient care and outcomes, as well as improved morale among the nursing workforce.⁷

The personality of an individual is one factor that has the potential to influence both their recruitment and retention in a role. Yet in nursing, there has been minimal consideration of the influence of personality on these choices. This is despite evidence to suggest that personality will influence career choice.⁸ Personality is the inner characteristics of an individual that influences their thoughts, feelings and behaviour.⁹ Occupational choice has been considered an expression of an individual's personality, as they will seek a profession or role that will provide personal satisfaction and meet their personal needs.^{8,10} Certain personality characteristics may place individuals at higher risk of burnout, while others may improve their ability to cope under stressful situations.¹¹⁻¹³ It is recognised that the ED is a highly stressful environment and staff employed within this area experience high levels of stress and emotional exhaustion.^{7,14}

There has been a considerable amount of research on personality types attracted to a nursing career in general, but there is limited research that explores personality within defined specialty areas.¹⁵ That which exists has

been carried out a long time ago, using a wide variety of personality instruments, and not consistently measuring the same personality characteristics. While the research is limited, findings have demonstrated differences in the personality characteristics of nurses working within different specialty areas.^{16,17} Personality testing enables the identification of individual personality characteristics, permitting a comparison of differences and similarities among and between people.¹⁸ Testing can provide information on how an individual is likely to respond or cope when exposed to different situations.^{19,20} Knowledge of the personality profile of emergency nurses not only has the potential to improve recruitment and retention, but also the ability to appropriately meet psychosocial needs addressing issues such as stress and burnout in the workplace.

There is some controversy around the use of personality testing in recruitment, however it is currently used in up to 20% of US companies.²¹ There exists a wide range of theories of personality and an even wider range of instruments to test personality characteristics and domains.^{18,22} The Five Factor Model (FFM) of personality adopts the basic principles of the trait theory of personality. This model has gained wide acceptance among those involved in personality psychology and is supported by an extensive body of research.^{18,20,23} The FFM provides a structure consisting of five broad domains of personality: Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness to experience, Agreeableness and Conscientiousness. For each domain there are six associated facets.²⁴ The FFM provides a comprehensive description of personality norms as well as the possibility of distinguishing personality differences between individuals.^{24,25} The NEOTM Inventories were specifically developed to test personality according to the FFM, and as such are one of the most widely accepted tools for this purpose.²⁶

Given the information available from previous studies, it is reasonable to hypothesise that one would find different personality profiles among nurses working within different specialties. The present study aimed to use the NEOTM-PI-3 to develop a profile of emergency nurse personality characteristics to establish whether clusters of common personality characteristics can be identified among this specialty nursing group.

Methods

Site and sample

The ED of a large tertiary referral trauma hospital in Sydney, Australia was the sole site for data collection. In 2012 this ED managed 66,507 presentations, approximately 20% of which were paediatric. The study used a convenience sample of registered nurses employed on a permanent basis within the ED between July and October 2012.

Instruments

Two questionnaires were combined to collect demographic, workplace and personality data. The first questionnaire collected participant demographics and information around personal and work related factors considered to influence

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