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Research Article

Relationships between Personal Traits, Emotional Intelligence, Internal Marketing, Service Management, and Customer Orientation in Korean Outpatient Department Nurses

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SUMMARY

Purpose: Current increase and complexity of medical tests and surgical procedures at outpatient department (OPD) require OPD nurses to have customer orientation focusing on various customers' interests and needs. The purpose of this study was to identify the factors associated with customer orientation in nurses working at OPD of hospitals.

Methods: The study used a descriptive correlational design with cross-sectional survey. The study settings were four general hospitals in Seoul and its metropolitan area. Data were collected from 138 OPD nurses from general hospitals. Study variables were personal traits, emotional intelligence, internal marketing, service management and customer orientation.

Results: Factors associated with customer orientation were identified as conscientiousness from personal traits ($\beta = .37, p < .001$), emotional intelligence from individual characteristics ($\beta = .21, p = .032$), and internal marketing from environmental characteristics ($\beta = .21, p = .001$).

Conclusions: Hospital administrators should support OPD nurses to cultivate sincere and sociable personal traits and emotional intelligence, and to consider employees as internal customers to improve patient-oriented services and satisfaction.

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Introduction

Quality management system of hospitals has changed quickly with the development of health technology and the increase of customers' service expectation as well as the variety of employees' needs and various activities required for health care quality improvement [1,2]. Most hospitals are trying to renew strategies and systems for patient-centered care, and to emphasize customer orientation considering customers as the first priority [3–5].

Currently in Korea a lot of medical procedures such as endoscopic surgeries and chemotherapy are taken at outpatient department (OPD), while surgeries under general anesthesia or intensive treatments are taken at inpatient department. Therefore,

the role of OPD nurses has become more complicated [6,7]. Because the OPD nurses are the initial contact persons when patients visit hospitals, they need to have an attitude that seeks to understand patients' various characteristics, needs and service expectations, and to respond adequately, indicating an attitude of customer orientation [8].

Factors associated with customer orientation in nurses were identified and classified into two dimensions, individual and environmental characteristics through the review of previous studies (Figure 1). Personal traits are important individual factors related to customer orientation and their types are variable by person [9–11]. Another individual factor associated with customer orientation is emotional intelligence, which is an ability to identify, assess, and control the emotions of oneself and of others [12–14]. As general characteristics, age and clinical experience also are associated with customer orientation [8,15]. For the relationships among the individual variables, age is not related to emotional intelligence [16]. Although there were no studies conducted in nurses for the relationship between personal traits and emotional

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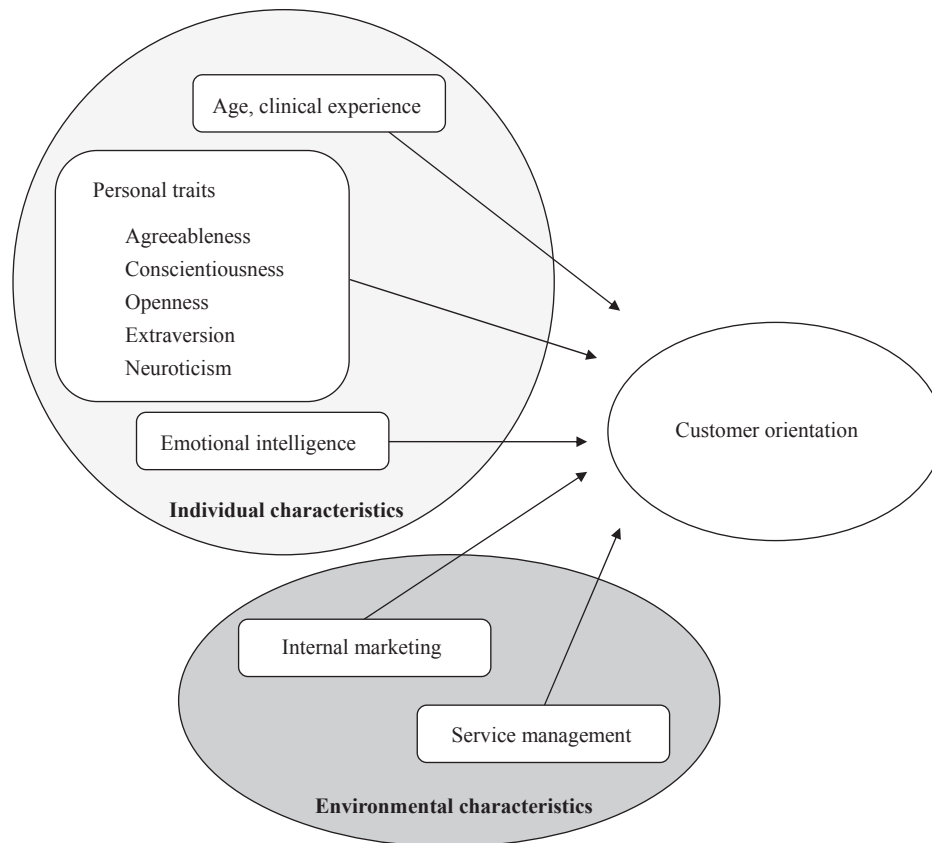


Figure 1. Conceptual framework.

intelligence, personal traits were associated with need for emotion, but not related to emotional exhaustion in retail managers [17].

For environmental characteristics, internal marketing is an increasingly important strategy, treating the employees as internal customers with deep communication and supports, so that they may feel customer experience and provide more satisfying services to customers with customer oriented attitudes [8,18,19]. Service management by hospital administrators is also an increasingly important issue at OPD for developing various service strategies and support systems for patient-oriented service delivery because the OPD is a connecting spot between hospitals and communities leading to more stressful and complicated environments [20,21]. Thus, OPD nurses should perform more complicated and various roles including patient education and consultation, customer management, staff education and management, various tests process, surgical procedures progress, medical examination support and so on [22]. However, most of the previous studies focused on hospital ward nurses from various departments, not OPD nurses [11,12]. Therefore, this study was conducted to identify OPD nurses' customer orientation and its correlates to developing successful hospital management strategies.

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of personal traits, emotional intelligence, internal marketing and service management on customer orientation in nurses working at OPD of hospitals. The specific aims of this study were as follows: (a) to identify personal traits, emotional intelligence, internal marketing, service management and customer orientation in OPD nurses; (b) to explore the relationships between personal traits, emotional intelligence, internal marketing, service management and customer orientation in OPD nurses; (c) to examine the effects of personal traits, emotional intelligence, internal

marketing, and service management on customer orientation in OPD nurses.

Methods

Study design

The study used a descriptive correlational design with cross-sectional survey to examine the effects of personal traits, emotional intelligence, internal marketing, and service management on customer orientation in OPD nurses (Figure 1). The conceptual framework depicts the independent variables from individual and environmental characteristics.

Setting and sample

The study participants were 138 nurses from four general hospitals located in Seoul and metropolitan area. The inclusion criteria were (a) working at OPD, (b) without active severe disease, and (c) able to fully understand the purpose and contents of the study.

Participants were calculated as 109 using G*Power 3.1.2 sample calculation program [23] with significance level of .05, power of 80%, medium effect size of 0.15 for multiple regression, and 8 independent variables (5 personal traits, emotional intelligence, internal marketing, and service management). All of the four hospitals had approximately 190 OPD nurses total. Considering the attrition rate of survey study, a total of 150 OPD nurses were approached and then 12 nurses dropped out. Therefore, a total of 138 questionnaire packets were analyzed in this study. The number of participating nurses for each hospital was 54 of 72, 42 of 67, 35 of 40, and 7 of 11, respectively.

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