



## Research Article

## Problems of Clinical Nurse Performance Appraisal System: A Qualitative Study



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## SUMMARY

**Purpose:** The purpose of this study is to explore problems of clinical nurse performance appraisal system. **Methods:** This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach. The participants were purposively selected from clinical nurses working across all of the hospital units in a large metropolitan teaching hospital in Tehran, Iran in 2012. Data were collected using five focus group interviews, which were audio taped. The number of participants in each group ranged from 7 to 10. The semi-structured interviews were guided by a set of nondirective questions, and continued until the data reached saturation. Data were analyzed using framework analysis.

**Results:** Four major themes regarding the problems of clinical nurse performance appraisal system emerged from the analysis of textual data. These themes were contextual problems, problems related to performance appraisal structure, problems related to performance appraisal process and those related to performance appraisal results.

**Conclusion:** The findings of this study reveal that the nurse performance appraisal system confronts with various problems. Some of these problems are related to organizational context while the others concerned structure, process and results of the performance appraisal system. In order to achieve high quality of patient care as the final goal of performance appraisal, changing and revision of this system is necessary.

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## Introduction

Performance appraisal is a required process in healthcare organizations to ensure that the quality of care is met. This process uses methods to provide employees with the information necessary to determine whether they are meeting expectations or can do better to improve their performance (Huber, 2006).

Some of the purposes of nurse appraisal include the following: determine professional competence, enhance staff development, motivate them toward higher achievement, improve communications between managers and personnel and encourage better relationships among nurses, determine training and developmental needs of nurses, select qualified nurses for advancement and salary increases (Tomey, 2004).

Today, managers have found that employees are the most important capital of an organization and play a valuable role in achieving strategic goals of their organization. Improving staff efficacy and effectiveness is only possible in light of their performance appraisal (Torabi & Sutodeh, 2010). Performance appraisal does not always increase productivity. It may be biased, not accurate and not accepted by users. Occasionally, performance appraisal system has been linked to increase in dissatisfaction, lack of motivation, resistance especially on the part of the appraiser/employees. This condition is due to either errors in the content of evaluation, biases in the process of evaluation, disharmony between employee needs and appraisal goals or the absence of clear and independent performance dimensions (Giangreco, Carugati, Sebastiano, & Tamimi, 2012).

For achieving effectiveness of the performance appraisal system, validation of appraisal tools is not only sufficient, but employees' reaction to this system is very important. Indeed, with dissatisfaction and feelings of unfairness in the appraisal process, any appraisal system will be doomed to failure (Basavanthapa, 2003; Ikramullah, Shah, Hassan, Zaman, & Shah, 2011). Spence and Wood (2007) showed that most evaluation methods were not

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effective due to the complex, ever changing and challenging nature of these methods.

Iranian studies on the nurse performance appraisal system show that it lacks the required efficacy. [Zaboli, Delgoshaei, and Haghani \(2005\)](#) mentioned that the major factors of inefficacy of the nurse performance appraisal system in selected hospitals in Tehran are staff unawareness of the performance appraisal objectives, disharmony between performance appraisal system and administrative, cultural and social realities and applying retrospective criteria. [Hamidi, Najafi, Khah, and Afkar \(2009\)](#) reported that the results of performance appraisal had little impact on increasing employee motivation. The most important reasons are the absence of fairness, objectivity, appropriate feedback, and staff participation in performance appraisal. [Pazargadi, Afzali, Javadzadeh, and Alavi Majid \(2005\)](#) showed that nurse appraisal was based on the relation not criteria, managers did not have encouragement power or communicate well with employees; the appraisal system was subjective and nonspecialized. [Hysong, Best, and Pugh \(2006\)](#) also reported that the absence of the trained managers is the greatest weakness of the employee appraisal system in hospitals.

It can be said that the performance appraisal system plays a vital role in overall success of an organization. An appropriate appraisal system could possibly increase nurses' motivation to provide better services to the clients. Studies to date have shown that nurses' appraisal system is not effective and nurses are not satisfied with this system. For this purpose, researchers tried to determine the problems of the nurse performance appraisal system and take advantage of the results as a basis for future research and next steps. Because little research has been done on this topic to date in Iran; we did not find a comprehensive tool for investigating the problems of nurse performance appraisal system, we chose a qualitative approach in an attempt to fully understand and explore the topic. Using this method, the researchers will answer the following question: What are the main problems of the nurse performance appraisal system?

## Methods

### Study design

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach. This method is used to address an issue or problem in need of a solution ([Grove, Burns, Gray, Behan, & Duvall, 2012](#)) and was selected for this study to describe and explore the problems of nurse performance appraisal system.

### Setting and sample

We used maximum variation sampling; the participants were purposively selected from clinical nurses working across all of the hospital units such as medical, surgical, pediatric, intensive care, operation room, emergency and oncology in a large metropolitan teaching hospital in Tehran, Iran in 2012. The inclusion criteria for this study were (a) registered nurses who had bachelors or higher degrees in nursing and (b) those who had participated at least once in annual performance appraisal. All of the focus group interviews took place in the meeting room at the selected hospital.

### Ethical consideration

This study was conducted after obtaining permissions from the Shahid Beheshti University of Medical Sciences and the affiliated educational hospital. A written consent was obtained from participating nurses who were informed of the aim and method of the study. They were also told that they could withdraw from the

study anytime they wanted, and that all personal information would be kept confidential. The sound files containing the voice of the participants, manuscripts and field notes were recorded and archived carefully.

### Data collection

Focus group was selected for data collection. Focus groups are used when information regarding a specific topic needs to be collected from individuals who share a common factor and that interaction among the individuals can result in better understanding of how others feel and think about a certain topic. Focus groups have previously been shown to be an appropriate method for data collection to evaluate knowledge and experiences in the performance appraisal field ([Gonçalves, Lima, Crisitano, & Hashimoto, 2007](#)).

Qualitative data were collected in May and June 2012, using five focus groups, which were audio taped. The number of participants in each focus group ranged from 7 to 10 and each group had a mixture of people from various units. Researchers and participants did not know each other previously. The semi-structured interviews were guided by a set of nondirective questions developed a priori from the literature on performance appraisal. For instance, participants were asked, "What is your judgment about the current nurse's performance appraisal?" As the interview progressed, more detailed questions were asked. Focus groups lasted approximately 63–93 minutes. Focus groups emphasized group interactions by encouraging participants to talk with one another, ask questions, and comment on experiences and personal perspectives in face-to-face interviews without any stress or anxiety.

After each focus group interview, the recordings were transcribed to paper verbatim. The recorded data were reviewed twice or more and were analyzed simultaneously. This process was repeated for all five interviews. A qualitative research study requires that the researchers embrace data ([Speziale & Carpenterer, 2011](#)). Therefore, to ensure data accuracy, the researchers reviewed all the data transcribed to paper while listening to the recorded interviews. During the focus group interviews, field notes were taken by a research assistant. Data collection continued until it reached saturation.

### Data analysis

Framework analysis method was used to analyze the data. According to [Ritchie and Lewis \(2003\)](#), this approach gives rise to a hierarchical thematic framework which is then used to classify data according to key themes and emergent categories. Framework analysis is composed of five steps: (a) Familiarization. During this step, the researcher listens to the recorded interviews as many times as needed, studies the manuscripts and field notes and tries to reach a general viewpoint. (b) Identifying a thematic framework. After the completion of the first step, the researcher acquires the necessary concepts, themes and major issues. (c) Indexing. Some parts of data related to indexing are recognized and encoded. (d) Charting. During this step, the previously encoded indices are tabled so that the rows refer to the sessions of the group and columns are allocated to the main themes. Thus, the ideas of each group with regard to the main themes are depicted. (e) Mapping and interpretation. Here, the main themes are described as pictures and each main theme is elaborated separately.

### Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of data was evaluated by credibility, dependability, conformability and transferability. Credibility was

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