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Perceptions of nurse educators regarding the implementation of the occupational specific dispensation at a selected nursing college in Limpopo Province

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to explore and describe the perceptions of nurses regarding the implementation of the occupation-specific dispensation (OSD) in a selected nursing college in Limpopo province. A qualitative approach was used with a purposive sampling method for the selection of 12 voluntary participants who had worked for more than five years and been subjected to the implementation of OSD. In-depth interviews were conducted and data analysed according to Tesch's method. The perceptions of nurse educators were shared through participants' responses to a central research question. Participants expressed different responses, both positive and negative. The findings of this study demonstrated: high expectations, unfair treatment in relation to the implementation, and reactions to introduction of OSD. Participants also identified envisaged ways of improving the situation through the identification of ways to correct the problems. This study recommended that management ensure that nurse educators' remuneration packages are competitive with those of similar professions in the clinical setting. Recognition of nurse educators' additional qualifications, long-service experiences and rural allowance reviews in nursing education should be taken into consideration urgently.

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1. Introduction and background

Occupational-specific dispensation (OSD) refers to revised salary structures that are unique to specially identified occupations in the public service. According to Moleketi (2007, p. 2), OSD was a government strategy aimed at recruiting and retaining qualified professionals through improved remuneration and influencing the psychological process that brings about motivation and job satisfaction. Satisfactory

remuneration may bring about self-actualisation, and so result in economic growth for nurse educators. Egerdahl (2009, p. 32) cites poor remuneration and lack of job satisfaction as two of the reasons why nurses leave the country in search of greener pastures. According to Kelly (2005, p. 59), South African nurses were not remunerated according to their experience, skills and specialities, which caused frustration, stress and job dissatisfaction and high staff turnover.

The South African Public Service Co-ordinating Bargaining Council (PSCBC), Resolution 1 of 2007, resulted in the

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implementation of OSD for professional nurses, staff nurses and nursing assistants with effect from 1 July 2007. Moleketi, the then Minister of Public Services, pointed out that this would ensure a fair, equitable and competitive remuneration structure that would provide for longer salary bands and substantial overlaps between salary levels to facilitate adequate salary progression (Moleketi, 2007, p. 2). Moleketi further stated that through OSD salaries of certain occupational categories would be aligned with the market and thus nurses' salaries should be adjusted to be in line with the inflation rate and enable nurses to earn a living wage.

The introduction of OSD raised expectations among nurses, as they perceived it as a means to meet their individual needs, while nurse educators at a selected nursing college viewed it both positively and negatively. Most educators assumed that OSD will enrich all of them as stated by Renchbauer and Sams (2006, p. 2) The assumption was that wages and fringe benefits are needed to satisfy basic needs. Nurse educators in the selected nursing campus were expecting to earn salaries commensurate with their personal needs as a result of the OSD process.

According to Ferguson (2000, p. 2), expectancy theory is related to positive reinforcement. Both expectancy and reinforcement theories hold that a reward should be meaningful to employees. In addition, Cash, Daines, Doyle, von Tettenborne and Reid (2009, p. 384) argue that for employers to recruit and retain nurse educators, salaries and work conditions should be improved.

According to International Labour Organizations (ILO) Convention (C149) on remuneration. People should be rewarded according to their qualifications, specialties, experiences and competencies. Salaries play a significant role in determining job satisfaction and constitute an important determinant of job satisfaction as they are instrumental in fulfilling individual needs for food, shelter and clothing, for example. Salaries also provide the means to enjoy the valued interest of work and motivation. Motivation in turn may bring about self-actualisation and thus can encourage nurse educators to render quality service (Mokoka, 2007, p. 32).

According to Ashraf (n.d., p. 159), job satisfaction can be defined as an individual's overall attitude towards their work. Job satisfaction incorporates both general attitude and satisfaction with specific dimensions of the job, such as pay, the work itself, supervision and co-workers. The degree of satisfaction may vary with how well outcomes fulfil expectations.

This study is based on the researcher's observation as a nurse educator working on one of the selected nursing campuses in Limpopo College. After the implementation of OSD, the researcher heard different views from nurse educators including negative remarks passed by senior nurse educators who were dissatisfied with the implementation strategies. Nurse educators who were in managerial positions ended up remaining within the same bracket as their subordinates, especially those with long experience. For example, the heads of departments or subject heads are only managers by name and position, and still earned the same as any other nurse educator, which created tension and hostility between supervisors and subordinates.

2. Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study was to explore and describe the perceptions of nurse educators regarding the implementation of OSD at a selected nursing campus.

3. Definition of concepts

3.1. Nurse educator

A nurse educator is a person registered with the South African Nursing Council (SANC) as a qualified nurse educator and appointed as a senior professional nurse, chief professional nurse or deputy director of a nursing college (Makhuvha, 2005, p. 13). In this study, a nurse educator refers to a professional nurse who has acquired a nursing education as a specialty, who develops and trains student nurses in theory and practice to produce competent professionals who will be able to provide total quality patient care at all levels.

3.2. Nursing campus

A nursing campus is an educational institution that provides nursing science programmes (Makhuvha, 2005, p. 13). In this study a nursing campus refers to a branch or one of the five nursing campuses including satellites that form the Limpopo College of Nursing.

3.3. Occupational-specific dispensation

The occupational-specific dispensation (OSD) refers to the revised salary structures that are unique to each identified occupation in the public service (South African Communication Information, 2007, p. 1). OSD is a unique remunerative structure introduced into the public service by which all nurses were to be moved from the old salary structure to new scales (Nehawu info, 2008, p. 2). In this study OSD refers to the South African government's strategy to recruit and retain skilled employees, including nurse educators, through improved remuneration.

4. Research design and method

A qualitative, exploratory and descriptive design was used in this study, which Burns and Grove (2009, p. 717) define as a systematic, subjective approach. The researcher used this method to explore the perceptions of nurse educators regarding the implementation of OSD by collecting rich narrative data (Polit & Beck, 2008, p. 763). The population comprised 65 nurse educators, from which a target population was selected comprising 12 who had more than five years' experience and had been subjected to the implementation of OSD. Purposive sampling was used in this study to choose particular individuals who the researcher believed would be able to provide relevant information on the topic.

Unstructured interviews were used to collect data from the 12 participants in order to elicit their perceptions on the

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