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Review article

The continuing education on personal work values of general nurses working in hospitals of the Czech Republic: A Euclidean distance-based measure

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ABSTRACT

Aim: The aim of our research was to find out the position (and its changes over a period of time) of continuing education on the personal work values scale of general nurses working in hospitals in the Czech Republic.

Methods: The research was designed as a comparative study (comparison of results from the years 2006, 2011 and 2016). The data were obtained through a questionnaire using Herzberg's two-factor theory of motivation. However, the theory was adapted to reflect current conditions of care-givers who work within a multidisciplinary team. The questionnaire aimed at distinguishing the order of the selected factors of working environment, which subsequently created the scale of personal values. 3081 respondents took part in the research in 2006, 1992 respondents in 2011, and 1751 respondents in 2016. The comparative analysis data were processed with the Euclidean distance model and non-parametric tests.

Results: In 2006, the possibility to engage in continuing education occupied 8th place on the scale of personal preferences (out of 16), in 2011 it ranked 10th, and 12th in 2016. The research results reveal a long-term tendency towards a decrease of personal preferences regarding continuing education. The decrease was statistically significant between the years 2006 and 2011 and the year 2016 ($p < 0.001$). The results indicate that with an increasing age the preference for continuing education decreases ($p < 0.001$). A statistically significant reduction in the preference for continuing education was found in nurses aged approx. 45 years.

Conclusions: Highly professional, effective and good quality education (and subsequent continuing education) is essential for the provision of safe and good quality care. A nurse in a managerial position should encourage staff nurses to continually learn irrespective of their age. Only this may lead to a high quality care for patients.

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Introduction

Advancements in health literacy, medical services, drugs, medical devices and equipment have resulted in the fact that people live longer than before. In 2012, the life expectancy in the Czech Republic was 80.9 years for women and 75.0 years for men. Thus, in comparison with 1991, the life expectancy extended by 5.5 years in women and by 7.5 years in men [1]. However, higher age brings the potential of health issues and age-related complications. A number of diseases that used to be fatal have become chronic, which means that they require permanent attention. Healthcare professionals are faced with more demands. Patients expect to be treated according to the latest scientific knowledge and procedures. To be able to meet the requirements, healthcare professionals have to be well educated and engaged in continuing education. Lifelong professional education is considered the essential factor contributing to good-quality healthcare [2]. Lifelong education can improve knowledge as well as skills [3]. Continuing education leads to higher professionalism of nurses and to improved nursing care [4]. With regard to the fast changes in patient/client care due to advancements in knowledge and skills as well as in technologies (procedures, methods, guidelines, etc.), further education has become vital for this non-medical profession [5,6].

Lifelong education of healthcare professionals and its legal status in the Czech Republic

Lifelong education (also referred to as continuing professional education, continuing professional development, lifelong learning, further professional training, continuing nurse education and continuing education) [4,7] is generally seen as a positive thing by nurses. However, there are some negative aspects connected with it [8]. When nurses feel a lack of support from their employer, they pay for their education and/or participate in various educational events in their free time [9,10]. The possibility to be involved in lifelong education is related to satisfaction at work [11] and the retention of nurses [12]. Barriball et al. [13] divide professional nursing education into two categories: formal and informal. Formal education involves taking part in conferences, seminars and educational programmes (in the Czech Republic this is stipulated by the law) [13]. Informal education involves various activities, e.g. reading, self-study, or working in committees/associations (i.e. similar to the situation in other professions) [13]. The aim of continuing education is to enable non-medical healthcare workers to perform well and in accordance with the latest findings (which is also their legal duty). Lifelong education of non-medical healthcare professionals in the Czech Republic is an integral part of Act No. 96/2004 Coll., on conditions for the acquisition and recognition of competences to carry out a non-medical healthcare profession and the performance of tasks related to health care provision, as amended (Non-medical Healthcare Professions Act) [14]. The Act defines lifelong education as the continuous increase and enhancement of knowledge, skills and competences in a given field according to the latest, state-of-the-art development. The Act also specifies types of lifelong education and legal

obligation to continuous learning (for all non-medical professionals). With healthcare professionals working under supervision or direct management, the supervision and provision of this obligation is up to the employer or quality accreditor (if a healthcare provider is accredited). There are no sanctions for not meeting the provision. The situation is different with non-medical healthcare professionals working without supervision. These employees are legally bound to obtain the certificate of qualifications enabling them to work without supervision. To get the certificate, one has to be engaged in lifelong education. The employees either achieve 40 credits for taking part in education, specified by Decree No. 423/2004 Coll., which establishes a credit system for obtaining a certificate for the performance of a healthcare profession without direct supervision or professional supervision of medical personnel [15], or they prove they have studied professional literature on their own. They are examined by an examination board appointed by the Ministry of Health of the Czech Republic. The employee awarded the certificate is referred to as "registered". In 2004, the registration was valid for six years. In 2011 the period was extended to ten years, yet the number of credits one has to obtain over this period of time for lifelong education remained the same [16].

Educational activities and events designed for nurses are various. It is possible to collect credits, e.g. for attending four seminars (each lasting 2 h), one day of a professional conference, or by co-authoring a poster. Other forms of continuing education include, e.g. e-learning, seminars, professional training courses, accredited conferences, etc. Recognition of other forms of education lies in the competence of a professional association of the given healthcare workers, or of the Ministry of Health of the Czech Republic. The number of credits serves as an instrumental regulatory method, and should not reduce the education to "a hunt for credits". The obligation – legal as well as ethical – of each healthcare professional is also stipulated by Act No. 372/2011 Coll., on healthcare services and the conditions of their provision (Healthcare Service Act) [17]. Provision of *lege artis* care is the responsibility of the healthcare provider as well as of every individual healthcare worker (e.g. the Code of Ethics for nurses and non-medical healthcare professionals). It is the manifestation of professionalism, continuing self-improvement, responsibility for the care provided, and indicates respect to patients/clients. It is the commitment to provide the best and safest care possible; a highly professional and holistic one. Lifelong learning (with minor exceptions) is seen as qualification enhancement specified by the Act No. 262/2006 Coll., the Labour Code, as amended [18], which specifies the worktime for qualification enhancement, which is subsequently in the employer's interest to have qualified personnel. Therefore, the employer is obliged to enable workers to take part in educational events and reimburse their salary or wage.

European Union and continuing education of nurses

Free movement of persons is one of the pillars of European integration. The 2005/36/EC directive of the European Parliament and of the Council of Europe on the recognition of professional qualifications [19] stipulates it is the member

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