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Full Length Articles

Perceptions of patient-centred care at public hospitals in Nelson Mandela Bay



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ABSTRACT

In South Africa, the quality of health care is directly related to the concept of patient-centred care and the enactment of the Batho Pele Principles and the Patients' Rights Charter. Reports in the media indicate that public hospitals in the Eastern Cape Province are on the brink of collapse, with many patients being treated in condemned hospitals which lacked piped water, electricity and essential medical equipment. Receiving quality care, and principally patient-centred care, in the face of such challenges is unlikely and consequently leads to the following question: "Are patients receiving patient-centred care in public hospitals?"

A qualitative, explorative, descriptive and contextual study was conducted to explore and describe the perceptions of professional nurses regarding patient-centred care in public hospitals in Nelson Mandela Bay. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a total of 40 purposively selected professional nurses working in public hospitals in Nelson Mandela Bay, Eastern Cape Province. Interviews were analysed according to the method described by Tesch in Creswell (2009:192).

Professional nurses perceive patient-centred care as an awareness of the importance of the patient's culture, involving the patient's family, incorporating values of love and respect, optimal communication in all facets of patient care and accountability to the patient. Factors which enable patient-centred care were a positive work environment for staff, nursing manager's demonstrating exemplary professional leadership, continuous in-service education for staff and collaborative teamwork within the interdisciplinary team. Barriers to patient-centred care were a lack of adequate resources, increased administrative work due to fear of litigation and unprofessional behaviour of nursing staff.

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Although the professional nurses had clear perceptions of patient centred care, there are barriers to rendering patient-centred care under the prevailing conditions, which posed a challenge.

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1. Introduction

The need for patient-centredness has become an important global issue, having been identified by the Institute of Medicine of the United States National Academies of Science as one of six attributes of quality health care (World Health Organisation, 2007:5). The essence of patient-centred care is an attempt at understanding the experience of illness from the patient's perspective. The International Alliance of Patients' Organisations' (IAPO) Declaration on Patient-Centred Health Care states that "the essence of patient-centred health care is that patients are at the centre of the health care system and therefore the system is designed around them" and "the required outcome of health care is a better quality of health, and/or of life, as defined by the patient (IAPO, 2007:12). The Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care (2010:5) supports the IAPO's description of patient-centred care, stating that understanding patient-centred health care will lead to improved health outcomes as health care is provided in a way that better meets the needs of patients.

In the South African context, the concept of patient-centred care is endorsed in the Constitution of South Africa Second Amendment Act, no. 3 of 2003 (South Africa, 2003) in which it is stated that all citizens have the right to health care that is caring, free from harm and as effective as possible. In addition to this, the White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery (Batho Pele White Paper no. 1459 of 1997) was published by the Department of Public Service and Administration (South Africa, 1997). "Batho Pele", roughly translated from the Sotho language, means "people first". The eight Batho Pele principles seek to introduce a new approach to service delivery that puts people first, and encapsulates the stated values of public service in South Africa, which directly relate to the concept of patient-centred care. Briefly these principles state that citizens should be consulted about the level and quality of the public services they receive and, wherever possible, be given a choice about the services that are offered; be told what level and quality of public services they will receive so that they are aware of what to expect; have equal access to the services to which they are entitled; be treated with courtesy and consideration; be given full, accurate information about the public services they are entitled to receive; be told how national and provincial departments are run, how much they cost, and who is in charge. If the promised standard of service is not delivered, citizens should be offered an apology, a full explanation and a speedy and effective remedy, and when complaints are made, receive a sympathetic, positive response. Finally, public services should be provided economically and efficiently in order to give citizens the best possible value for money.

Bearing in mind the reference to patient-centred care in the aforementioned documents, this study focussed on a critical aspect of quality health care, namely the provision of patient-centred care as perceived by professional nurses working in public hospitals in Nelson Mandela Bay.

1.1. Problem statement

In South Africa the public health sector delivers services to about 80% of the population, but institutions in the public sector have suffered poor management, underfunding and deteriorating infrastructure, which have negatively impacted the rendering of patient-centred care (Bulletin of the World Health Organisation, 2010: 797). As a result, a dichotomy exists between what is stipulated in the Batho Pele principles and the lack of effective service delivery in the public health sectors (Sebugwawo, 2012: 7).

Consequently, reports in the media indicate that the hospitals in the Eastern Cape, one of the nine provinces in South Africa, are on the brink of collapse with thousands of patients being treated in condemned hospitals where 168 clinics and 17 hospitals lacked piped water; more than 42 health facilities did not have electricity and operated via generators; 68% of hospitals did not have essential medical equipment, and the Provincial Health Department had a staff vacancy rate of 46% (Williams, 2012: 1). A report titled "Death and Dying in the Eastern Cape" released in September 2013 by the Eastern Cape Health Crisis Action Coalition [EHCAC] (2013), was the result of an investigation into the breakdown of the public health care system in the province, which was described as collapsing. The results showed that many of the state hospitals are in a state of crisis (Eastern Cape Health Crisis Coalition, 2013), with much of the public health care infrastructure in poor condition and non-operational as a result of underfunding, mismanagement, and neglect. In a more recent report by Mayosi and Benatar (2014: 1345), the authors stated that the national public health sector remains the sole provider of health care for more than 40 million people who are uninsured and who constitute approximately 84% of the national population. Hence the majority of South Africans are utilising public health care, fraught with all the challenges alluded to.

Receiving and rendering quality care and indeed patient-centred care in the face of such challenges, lead to the following question: "Are patients receiving patient-centred care in public hospitals?" The researcher contended that the nurse's role is pivotal in delivering patient-centred care and therefore gauging their understanding of rendering patient-centred care in the context of a public hospital is imperative.

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