

## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

# Nurses' Perceptions of Patient Care Continuity in Day Surgery

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**Purpose:** The increase in day surgery has brought about a significant change in patient care and care continuity. The purpose of this study was to analyze nurses' perceptions of the realization of continuity of care in day surgery. Continuity of care is examined from the perspectives of time; flow; co-ordination flow; caring relationship flow, and information flow.

**Design:** Descriptive study.

**Methods:** A questionnaire including demographics and questions about continuity of care was completed by 83 of the 120 eligible nurses (response rate, 69%) in one hospital district in Finland.

**Finding:** According to the nurses, continuity of patient care is mostly well realized. On the day of surgery, information flow was the domain that was best realized. In the opinion of the nurses, continuity of care was least realized at home before surgery and at home during the period after surgery.

**Conclusions:** Based on nurses' perceptions, continuity of care was relatively well realized.

**Keywords:** nurses' perceptions, continuity of care, day surgery, ambulatory surgery.

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**THE SIGNIFICANT INCREASE** in the number of day surgery procedures has brought new kinds of challenges to patient care and its continuity. To ensure the continuity of care, the development of day surgery practice calls for regional collaboration, such as between primary care and specialized care. Day surgical care provides clear benefits for the health care organization,<sup>1</sup> and patients and staff have also been satisfied with day surgical care.<sup>2</sup>

Nurses working in day surgery units need to know and understand the entire pathway of the day surgi-

cal patients to be able to improve, support, and confirm the continuity of care. However, based on previous studies, this is not always the case.<sup>3,4</sup> To ensure continuity of care, nurses and other health care professionals have to consider patient care as a whole throughout the day surgery experience.<sup>5</sup>

Nurses make up a large professional group with a significant task to ensure high-quality patient care and continuity of care. Studying nurses' perceptions of the realization of continuity of patient care in day surgery is therefore well motivated. In

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this study, continuity of care is the connectedness between different stages in the health care system among the patient, health care professionals, and the organization. Continuity of care is defined as a health care process taking place in time (time flow), requiring co-ordination (co-ordination flow), rapport (caring relationship flow), and information (information flow).<sup>3,4</sup> Time flow describes the treatment over time; it is the care process carried out within a certain time. Co-ordination flow describes the fluency of treatment and to that the care works well. Caring relationship flow describes the course of relationships in care. Information flow describes the flow of information and how the patient receives information.<sup>4</sup>

## Literature Review

A search for the relevant literature was conducted in the Ovid MEDLINE, CINAHL, and Cochrane databases with the search words continuity of care, nurses' perceptions/experiences, day surgery/ambulatory surgery/day surgical procedures, time flow, coordination flow, caring relationship flow, and information flow. The articles included had to be written in English and published in 1996 to 2014 period. In later paragraphs, the results are described according to the flows mentioned earlier.

Time flow is a patient care process carried out within a certain time frame.<sup>4</sup> When evaluating time flow from nurses' perspective, it is important that nurses understand and consider that waiting is not an activity well received in today's fast-paced society.<sup>5</sup> Nurses need to value patients' time and inform patients within admission of the expected surgical time and potential delays.<sup>6</sup> From the patient's viewpoint, the wish of getting the operation done as quickly as possible is emphasized in time flow. Patients have been dissatisfied with the waiting times for surgery.<sup>5,7</sup>

Co-ordination flow is the fluency of patient treatment during different phases. Day surgical care is realized among the patient, health care professionals, and the organization.<sup>4</sup> From the point of view of the organization, development of day surgery activities calls for regional and local collaboration between specialized care and primary care to ensure the continuity of care. From the perspective of health care professionals, previous studies

have underlined the importance of preoperative collaboration, for example, between nurses working in health care centers and the hospital in assessing patients before the operation<sup>8</sup> and in home care after surgery.<sup>9</sup> Because of the short time patients spend in hospital, the roles of nurses involved in day surgery co-ordination differ from those in traditional surgery. Because of the reasons given previously, from the patients' point of view, the role of self-care has also grown in importance both before and after surgery,<sup>10-13</sup> as has that of care provided by family and friends.<sup>14</sup>

Caring relationship flow refers to rapport between health care professionals and patients at different phases of care.<sup>4</sup> From nurses' viewpoint, continuity means that professional nursing care becomes visible and that the pre-, intra-, and postoperative dialogs that the continuity creates can give meaning to their work.<sup>15</sup> Caring relationship between the patient and the nurse requires that the nurse has had enough time on hand to build the caring relationship.<sup>16</sup> Because of the limited time that patients spend in the day surgery unit, barriers for developing therapeutic relationship between the nurse and the patient are present.<sup>6</sup> In caring relationships, the so-called unsatisfactory encounters focus on hurried interactions.<sup>5</sup> As evaluated by nurses who work in day surgery units, patients' and family members' expectations of the day surgery nursing relationships are not always met.<sup>17</sup> Shortcomings in the caring process can easily be mended by nurses and other health care professionals; by using perioperative dialog, they could create continuity for patients and themselves in the pre-, intra-, and postoperative phases.<sup>18</sup> Patients want to know the nurse who will look after them in the hospital before the day of surgery and to have an opportunity to meet the same nurse even after the operation.<sup>4,19</sup> According to previous studies, patients also value highly the relationship with the physician.<sup>20</sup> Patients want to meet the treating surgeon before the operation<sup>21</sup> and after it.<sup>4</sup>

Information flow involves patients' fluent receipt of knowledge on their care in different phases of day surgery.<sup>4</sup> Several researchers have studied nurses' perceptions of preoperative teaching.<sup>22</sup> In the study by Tse and So<sup>22</sup> a discrepancy was found between nurses' perceptions and caring practice in relation to the provision of preoperative information. Nurses' perceptions about

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