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Cultural influences on workplace safety: An example of hospital workers' adoption of patient lifting devices

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Abstract

Aims

A sociological and anthropological view of culture was used to investigate how work culture, independent of “ safety culture ” , may affect safety in the workplace. We explored how work cultures of nurses and physical/occupational therapists (PT/OTs) in two acute care hospitals are related to the adoption of patient lifting devices.

Methods

Focus groups were conducted between 2006 and 2009, seven with nurse staff ($n = 39$) and two with PT/OT staff ($n = 17$), to explore issues concerning a Minimal Manual Lift Environment policy, initiated in 2004, and subsequent use of patient lift equipment. Audio recordings of the sessions were transcribed; text data were analyzed using N6-QSR. Cultural facilitators and barriers to the adoption of patient lift equipment were examined.

Results

Data revealed cultural similarities and differences between these healthcare professions. Both displayed a “ patient first ” approach to care-giving which may promote lift device use for patients' benefits, not necessarily for staff safety. Also, the implied purpose of patient lifting devices clashes with the nurses' cultural emphasis on compassion, and with PT/OTs' cultural emphasis on independence except when use increases patients' independence.

Conclusions

Cultural expressions regarding the nature of care-giving among healthcare professionals may affect the propensity to adopt safety measures in complex ways. The workers' understanding of the purpose of their work, and acceptable means of conducting it, should be understood before implementing safety interventions. The utilization of lift assist teams, who are not socialized into the cultures of nursing or PT/OT, may be one means of circumventing cultural barriers to lift equipment use.

Highlights

- Explored culture of healthcare workers as a barrier to patient lift use.
- Focus groups revealed similarities and differences between nurse and PT/OT culture.
- Occupational culture may promote or interfere with intervention measures.
- Safety intervention efforts should heed occupational cultures.
- Qualitative methods can be used to identify and compare occupational cultures.

Keywords



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