

Mutual Support: A Solution to Improve Patient Safety During Nurses' Work Overload

Dear Editor,

Nurses play an important role in promoting patient safety. However, in different healthcare settings, problems such as nurses' stress, work overload, and dissatisfaction along with factors like inappropriate work environment may threaten patient safety.^[1,2]

Poor communication and lack of teamwork are among the main causes of nursing errors.^[1] Mutual support, which is an important concept of teamwork, can be a solution to improve patients' safety during nurses' work overload. It means helping other team members to carry out their tasks and asking them to help whenever necessary. Providing timely and constructive feedback, effectively advocating the patient when something threatens his/her safety and using appropriate techniques to resolve interpersonal conflicts are other aspects of mutual support.^[3]

Findings indicate that the importance of mutual support in Iranian healthcare system is underestimated; as the attitudes toward mutual support is poor,^[4] and "seeking help from others" is considered a negative characteristic of team members.^[5] It may be argued that the lack of attention to seeking help from others can be rooted in Iranian cultural issues that make people less likely to do it. The same cultural issue can inhibit individuals from using another important aspect of mutual support, "effectively advocating the patient when something threatens his/her safety". Therefore, we should revise our perspective on these two issues.

In a professional view, "seeking help" and "advocating the patient effectively" are both recognized as requirements for patient safety. Therefore, beyond the existing cultural barriers, as their responsibility and commitment to protect the patients' safety, all members of the healthcare team should adopt these two behaviors, in addition to providing task assistance to others. Hence, if they feel that work overload may decrease the quality of their work, they should seek assistance, and when they suspect other team member's performance may compromise patients' safety, they should prevent that work from being continued. Furthermore, they must consider themselves responsible for protecting their teammates from work overload situations. Moreover, nursing managers should emphasize and define these important responsibilities of nurses, instruct nurses in this regard, and monitor their performance in this area.

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Conflicts of interest

Nothing to declare.

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