

Professional competency profile of nurses working in emergency services

Perfil de competência profissional do enfermeiro em emergências

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Keywords

Emergency nursing; Professional competence; Clinical competence; Evidence-based nursing; Nursing administration research

Descritores

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Abstract

Objective: To develop the professional competency profile for the nurse working in emergency services.

Methods: A descriptive exploratory study based on a Brazilian Competency Matrix, aligned to the market trends, to the particularities of emergency nursing, previous studies and the opinion of experts who determined whether the actions were appropriate for satisfactory performance of nurses in the mentioned area.

Results: Based on the basic skills and their associated competences, as indicated in the Matrix, we described 56 attitudes/behaviors represented by actions that identified a satisfactory performance of emergency. These attitudes/behaviors, designated as identifying issues, generated the Professional Competency profile that was assessed as appropriate for nurses.

Conclusion: The Competency Profile that should be expressed by nurses working in emergency services allows describing their level of competence and helps them achieve the desired excellence with a high-level practice. The psychometric phase is related to assessing behaviors and focuses the principles to be observed in relation to the theoretical procedures.

Resumo

Objetivo: Propor o Perfil de Competência profissional do enfermeiro em emergências.

Métodos: Estudo descritivo exploratório balizado por uma Matriz de Competência brasileira, alinhado às tendências do mercado, às particularidades da Enfermagem em emergências, a estudos existentes e a opinião de *experts* que consideraram se as ações eram próprias ao desempenho competente do enfermeiro na área considerada.

Resultados: A partir das Competências Básicas e respectivas Competências Associadas indicadas na Matriz houve a descrição de 56 atitudes/comportamentos representadas por ações capazes de identificar o desempenho competente do enfermeiro em emergências. Estas atitudes/comportamentos, designadas de Questões Identificadoras, geraram o Perfil de Competência desse profissional avaliado como apropriado por enfermeiros.

Conclusão: O Perfil de Competência a ser expresso pelos enfermeiros que atuam em serviços de emergência permite descrever o seu nível de competência e contribui para que eles atinjam a excelência desejada mostrando uma prática de alto nível. A etapa da psicometria está relacionada com a avaliação de comportamentos e aponta os princípios que devem ser observados em relação aos procedimentos teóricos.

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Introduction

Among the various professionals working in emergencies, the nurse is one who must be ready to face new challenges and deliver the needed and expected care to patients and institutions, in a timely manner, in order to ensure high-quality service with proper competence.

Brazilian authors, considering these issues, developed a “Professional Competency Matrix of the nurse in emergency services” with eight basic competencies and 31 associated competencies.⁽¹⁾ In this matrix, the basic competencies refer to the ability of the nurse who is performing the work, and it is supported by a set of general and specific knowledge, reflected in competencies and attitudes that are capable of adding professional and social value to his/her actions, distinguishing them from the reality in which he/she operates. The associated competencies, on their part, are concerned with the minimum support necessary for the development of each basic skill for quality nursing performance.

For the relationship among skills to be consistent in this proposal, the Matrix defined each competency to clarify its meaning and justify the interdependencies allocated to each of the items. As the Matrix developed a model that meant to be reproduced in emergency nursing practice, it became necessary to establish a Professional Competency Profile. Thus, we understood this profile to be a set of essential attitudes/behaviors inherent to the skills needed for professional practice.

Therefore, this study questioned: Is the Professional Competency Profile for nurses working in emergency services, as proposed from a Brazilian Matrix, adapted to the current reality that aims for effective care for patients with a predetermined level of quality? To find answers to this question, we defined as objectives the proposal for the Professional Competency Profile for nurses working in emergency services, the description of the attitudes and behaviors that characterize the actions arising from the association of each basic skill, and its constant associated competencies in the Matrix; the development

of the Competency Profile with descriptive actions of the nurses’ attitudes and behaviors in professional practice during emergencies; the evaluation of the profile’s content with experts on the subject; and the adjustment of the content by incorporating the suggestions of the consulted experts.

Methods

This was an exploratory study developed at a public university in São Paulo during the year of 2013, aiming to define content able to express attitudes/behaviors of competent emergency nurses in daily professional practice. The framework used was the Professional Competency Matrix previously developed by the authors.⁽¹⁾

To define the object of this study, in addition to the Matrix, we used experience and deductive reasoning aligned to the following subjects:

- Brazilian market trends for emergency nurses;
- Special features of professional emergency nurses;
- Professional trajectory, through the grouping of functions and responsibilities;
- Focus on patients and delivery of care capable of valuing the business, the professional and the patient.

Thus, for the development of the Professional Competency Profile content in emergencies, we described essential attitudes/behaviors related to a nursing practice of excellence, based on the concepts of basic skills and their respective associated competencies, giving them the definition of Competency Identifying Issues. It should be noted that, despite the assignment of associated competencies to more than one basic competency, the content of the identifying issues does not repeat. Thus, this issue represented the type of action that nurses should express in order to manifest the considered competencies.

To relate the basic skill to its associated competencies, and to the identifying issues, we employed Arabic numerals. The basic and associated competencies were identified by whole

numbers, and the identifying issues were identified by the corresponding number of the basic competency, followed by the corresponding number of the associated competency, separated by a period, which defined the new number style format. Thus, the question was always identified by two numerals.

In the evaluation process of the content of the Competency Profile, we organized an instrument in the MS Word® Software. The evaluators were selected intentionally, in order to submit the profile to assessment of nurses related to the areas of emergency and management. The inclusion criterion considered were the following: experience in nursing practice with critical patients in emergency services and/or experience in nursing management, both greater than ten years. We chose those who worked with direct care and teaching, as well as researchers in the theme of competencies. For evaluator participation, we opted for shared electronic communication between expert and researcher, and the experts had up to a period of two weeks to provide feedback. It was left to the experts to consider whether the competencies and actions were appropriate for nursing performance in the considered area, including assessment of linguistic and spelling issues for the comprehension of the proposed content.

The development of the study met the national and international standards of ethics in research involving human subjects.

Results

A total of 56 identifying issues were formed to establish a profile resulting from the concepts of the eight basic skills and the 31 associated competencies.

With regard to the associated competencies, 14 were indicated only once and 17 were repeated two to four times, as they were indispensable support for development of the basic competencies.

The content analysis occurred in two steps with the participation of six experts, two in the

first phase and four during the second phase. In the first step, two experts considered that the content was relevant, clear and achieved the expected objective. To improve the objectivity of the text and reduce the time for the assessment of each question, they suggested a more concise description of the identifying issues. In the next step, four other experts reviewed the text with the incorporated suggestions, and found that it met its objectives.

The developed and evaluated profile was comprised of eight basic competencies and their concepts, 56 associated competencies, and 56 identifying issues, as presented in chart 1.

Discussion

In this exploratory, descriptive study, the Professional competency profile of the emergency nurses allowed for the identification of three main strategies that justified it: operational excellence, a patient-centered approach, and assistance capable of valuing the delivered service, the professional and the patient him/herself. Within these limits, the Competency Identifying Issues were able to recognize the Brazilian reality, by considering the grouping of emergency nurses' attributions and responsibilities, respecting Brazilian nursing specificities, and aligning the market's tendency, focused at its better comprehension and utilization.

During the research development process, we found dozens of national studies addressing the aforementioned elements. However, there are few studies published in journals dealing specifically with professional competence of emergency nurses, since most publications discussed skills without the desired specificity or exclusive use for the management area.

This lack of studies on emergency nurses' competencies was supported by the international literature.^(2,3) The few references identified, despite their relevance, should be analyzed with reservation due to their focus on different dimen-

Chart 1. Professional competency profile of emergency nurses

1. Basic Skill CARE PERFORMANCE - Ability of the nurse to provide care individualized to the needs and expectations of clients in order to ensure a care modeled on his own scientific knowledge and in technical procedures essential for a quality result.
Identifying Issues - Care Performance I
Associated Competency
<p>1.1 Attention</p> <p>1.1.1 He/she is aware of the incoming people/equipment/environmental signs in patient care, proposing adjustments to the identified deviances..</p> <p>1.2. Control of risk</p> <p>1.2.1 He/she identifies agents causing damage to patient care, analyzes the probability of their existence, and determines how to reduce them.</p> <p>1.3. Resolubility</p> <p>1.3.1 He/she chooses appropriate solutions to resolve problems/situations detected in patient care, putting them into practice in the shortest time possible.</p> <p>1.4 Responsibility</p> <p>1.4.1 He/she is responsible for his/her actions and for the health team in meeting patient needs, being aware of his/her social and professional role in work activities.</p> <p>1.5 Sense of readiness</p> <p>1.5.1 He/she performs the necessary activities for patient care in an easy and timely manner, using the correct technique and safe execution.</p> <p>1.6 Sense of urgency</p> <p>1.6.1 He/she performs timely activities, considering the health risks to patients; rates the degree of suffering, defines treatment, and minimizes care risks.</p> <p>1.7 Technical execution</p> <p>1.7.1 He/she performs basic to advanced level nursing procedures while caring for patient who require clinical, surgical and trauma care, executing a safe technique with appropriate resources.</p>
2. Basic Skill TEAMWORK - Ability to develop coordinated actions in the working group for the execution of work activities to achieve common objectives with an evident cooperative spirit.
Identifying Issues - Teamwork
Associated Competency
<p>2.1 Cooperation</p> <p>2.1.1 He/she provides help spontaneously to one or more people in the daily work routine, to reach common goals in carrying out activities with the team..</p> <p>2.2 Communication</p> <p>2.2.1 He/she guides, trains, clarifies and shares information among team members in the best way to transmit them, ensuring that they are received without distortion.</p> <p>2.3 Discernment</p> <p>2.3.1 He/she recognizes and differentiates the potential and the limitations of people in the execution of teamwork, with a view toward actions directed at the same goal.</p> <p>2.4 Efficacy</p> <p>2.4.1 He/she reaches the expected result with the staff, according to what was planned, when it comes to meeting the needs generated by the daily work.</p> <p>2.5 Efficiency</p> <p>2.5.1 He/she gets the best possible feedback in teamwork activities, with the available resources, reaching the objectives previously established in the plans.</p> <p>2.6 Emotional balance</p> <p>2.6.1 He/she has an attitude and empathic behavior with control of emotions in adversity, and changes it in the relationship with the team, keeping energy and efforts directed to the same goal..</p> <p>2.7 Respect</p> <p>2.7.1 He/she assures team members the right to express their opinions and desires in the performance of work, while respecting individual differences, to obtain collaborative actions and achieve the objectives.</p>
3. Basic Skill LEADERSHIP - Ability to influence the attitudes and behaviors of people for the execution of work tasks in a particular plan of action, with the best use of the proposed strategy to achieve business objectives.
Identifying Issues - Leadership
Competency Associated
<p>3.1 Autonomy</p> <p>3.1.1 He/she uses freedom of action in respect to the existent standards, and without prejudice to others, to make rational choices in the fulfillment of work strategies, aiming for the achievement of outcomes contained in the plans.</p> <p>3.2 Reliability/Credibility</p> <p>3.2.1 He/she has a transparent, honest and responsible attitude in relationship to the staff, providing credibility in decisions and coordination of work activities</p> <p>3 Communication</p> <p>3.3.1 He/she transmits messages using the available resources, aimed at reliable reception, acting within the limits of ethics required by the computerized world.</p> <p>3.4 Emotional control</p> <p>3.4.1 He/she leads the team with firm determination, and examples of attitudes and behaviors, by controlling emotions when facing adversities and daily challenges, ensuring a healthy work environment.</p> <p>3.5 Flexibility</p> <p>3.5.1 He/she adapts quickly to unexpected situations, solving current problems on a daily basis, without exceeding his/her physical, mental and emotional limits.</p> <p>3.6 Persuasion</p> <p>3.6.1 He/she uses coherent arguments and behaviors based both on reason and on emotion to obtain staff agreement with ideas/attitudes/actions, seeking to validate the strategies necessary to achieve daily work.</p> <p>3.7 Potential Negotiator</p>

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3.7.1 He/she obtains agreement through dialogue between the parties so that there is balance in meeting the legitimate interests of those involved, creating credibility of those who are engaged in the work, improving personal and professional relationships.
4. Basic Skill HUMANIZATION - Ability to give dignified attention to people in accordance with their culture, values and beliefs, in an environment with minimal conditions of attention and work.
Identifying Issues - Humanization
Competency Associated
4.1 Welcoming 4.1.1 He/she overcomes obstacles at work so as to deliver adequate care to patients and staff, showing that it is possible to seek appropriate solutions to situations that impact the environment around them.
4.2 Communication 4.2.1 He/she uses a communicative approach, supported by clarity of the message, and is open to patient and team member perceptions about patient vulnerabilities, individualizing the contact.
4.3 Dialogue 4.3.1 He/she exchanges ideas and shares meanings with the team and the patients in an environment favorable to this relationship, contributing to harmonious connection between them.
4.4 Resolubility 4.4.1 He/she finds appropriate solutions to patient and team problems, using actions which decrease the time to obtain solutions.
4.5 Respect 4.5.1 He/she accepts the culture, values and beliefs of patients and staff with attitudes and behaviors that manifest this acceptance, ensuring the expression of the will of each person.
4.6 Listening 4.6.1 He/she knows how to listen to patients and to the work team without prejudging their ideas and positions, paying attention to what is said to understand them and avoiding interruptions with phrases supplementing what is being said.
5. Basic Skill INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIP - Ability to interact with people on a daily basis, considering their needs and expectations and adding value to this relationship. It involves courteous, empathetic and professional contact.
Identifying Issues - Interpersonal Relationship
Competency Associated
5.1 Reliability 5.1.1 He/she demonstrates credibility for transparency of the behavior, providing interaction with patients and staff in a friendly manner.
5.2 Dialogue 5.2.1 He/she recognizes the role of the exchange of ideas for effective communication in patient and team relationships.
5.3 Emotional balance 5.3.1 He/she reacts to adversity in the interaction with patients and teams, managing emotions for achieving empathetic and professional relationships
5.4 Persuasion 5.4.1 He/she clearly and quickly recognizes there is an interaction between the surrounding environment and patients and work teams, and separates truth from error as way of minimizing conflicts.
5.5 Respect 5.5.1 He/she interacts cordially with patients and work teams, being open to their needs and expectations, according to their individuality, and consolidating the ties that bind the everyday relationships.
5.6 Listening 5.6.1 He/she is aware that learning to listen and understand patients and work teams is an essential factor for healthy connection, adding value to the relationship.
6. Basic Skill DECISION-MAKING - Ability to choose a course of action among several reasonable alternatives for action in daily situations/conditions, considering knowledge, practices, limits and risks involved in the decision-making process.
Identifying Issues - Decision-Making
Associated Competency
6.1 Autonomy 6.1.1 He/she makes rational choices, considering the alternatives to the team's daily work activities, using his/her freedom of action within the current professional legal provisions.
6.2 Courage 6.2.1 He/she is consistent with his/her principles when facing difficulty in determining individual and team actions, assuming the consequences of his/her actions, asking for help in complex situations, and correcting deviations from the resulting decisions.
6.3 Discernment 6.3.1 He/she determine his/her own everyday action plans, using a sensible and clear perception of the team's potential and limits, with certainty as guideline.
6.4 Flexibility 6.4.1 He/she avoids behaviors conflicting with the team when making decisions, adjusting quickly to the unexpected events at work, and valuing his/her physical and emotional limits.
6.5 Objectivity 6.5.1 He/she exposes impersonal ideas or positions based on reality and supported by knowledge, practices and research findings, improving team's acceptance of this decisions.
6.6 Resolubility 6.6.1 He/she uses the resolute action as a strategy in choosing the most legitimate options to make decisions, so that the team finishes the work and achieves patient satisfaction.
6.7 Sense of urgency 6.7.1 He/she considers the best possible alternative in choosing a course of action when planning, promptly correcting deviations and leading the team to do activities at the right time.
7. Basic Skill OUTCOMES ORIENTATION - Ability to perform the work focused on the outcomes and supported by action plans in which the objectives, tasks and responsibilities are previously defined and aligned to the availability of sufficient resources.
Identifying Issues – Outcome Orientation
Associated Competency
7.1 Accepting Challenges

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7.1.1 He/she overcomes work obstacles through clarity of purpose and emotional balance, providing the team with facilitating solutions to achieve the plan outcomes.
7.2 Time Management
7.2.1 He/she sets team priorities for actions by controlling the optimal use of time required when implementing the plans, avoiding waste and facilitating quality outcome achievement.
7.3 Efficacy
7.3.1 He/she gets the planned outcomes through team goal achievement, driving actions and giving quality and value to the work.
7.4 Efficiency
7.4.1 He/she presents increased work productivity in the team in a specific period of time, setting goals and tasks in connection with the outcomes
7.5 Commitment
7.5.1 He/she assumes and fulfills obligations and responsibilities in achieving the work plans for the team to get excellent outcomes through their actions.
7.6 Flexibility
7.6.1 He/she responds quickly to problems and adversities arising at work, adjusting and making changes, without transgressing physical and emotional limits.
7.7 Resolutibility
7.7.1 He/she offers solutions to problems that are resolved in less time, for better team satisfaction, using outcome-focused actions.
7.8 Potential Negotiator
7.8.1 He/she achieves agreement by using dialogue, giving a balance of ideas, thoughts and actions in response to legitimate interests of the team and the institution.
8. Basic Skill PROACTIVITY - Ability to maintain one's focus in situations/conditions linked to daily work activities that can that can actually be solved by one's interference, directing one's efforts to anticipate actions before problems occur. Encompasses awareness and responsibility in the decisions and considers possible consequences of one's choices. Aims to achieve the best possible outcome
Identifying Issues - Proactivity
Associated Competency
8.1 Accepting Challenges
8.1.1 He/she has an open mind to absorb ideas and make changes for overcoming obstacles found at work, taking responsibility and controlling risks in the actions that anticipate the emergence of problems.
8.2 Entrepreneurial Spirit
8.2.1 He/she uses opportunities to dare, transform and discover ideas applicable to what already exists, and at the same time avoids problems arising in this reality..
8.3 Flexibility
8.3.1 He/she acts easily in unexpected situations in the workplace that can actually be resolved by his/her interference, keeping focus on what should be resolved and quickly adapting to them
8.4 Initiative
8.4.1 He/she makes conscious decisions while being responsible to design and spontaneously put into practice one or more useful ideas, to avoid the appearance of problems at work
8.5 Innovation/Creativity
8.5.1 He/she creates new ideas and implements processes and activities with intrinsic value in their scope, making efforts to anticipate actions before problems occur..
8.6 Persuasion
8.6.1 He/she separates truth from error to perceive clearly the reality, understanding the surroundings and acting with anticipation and accuracy to reduce problems.
8.7 Responsibility
8.7.1 He/she is responsible for his/her actions and is co-responsible for making the team being aware of decisions, to avoid problems and consider the consequences of prompt action.
8.8 Sense of Urgency
8.8.1 He/she takes calculated risks to drive actions that anticipate the emergence of problems at work, so that work is performed at the right time and at the exact hour, with the immediate correction of the differences observed.

sions and specific realities.⁽²⁻⁶⁾ These studies raised aspects related to the context of professional practice standards in Brazil.^(2,6)

As it can be seen from the context of this discussion, no similar studies exist in the literature with the same perspective of relating attitudes/behaviors with competencies, so that the authors of this study proposed this profile based on theoretical knowledge, practice and extensive professional experience.

Therefore, the proposal aimed to provide a different perspective from what was previously studied about the theme of emergency nurse competencies, in order to be embracing and comprehensive. Thus, the study exposed a Competency Profile for nurses to

work with excellence at any level of emergency care. Still, it should be noted that there are limitations to the research because it was evaluated only by a small group of experts. Although all of them indicated that the profile is suitable for emergency nurses, it is necessary to check its validity and its reliability.

The practical applicability of the outcomes focused mainly on allowing managers and nurses to feel informed about which professional skills can be identified and which can be developed in short and medium terms for qualified emergency care performance. Furthermore, institutions and professional services could be supported by this information to direct resources, meet expectations and even develop career plans.

Conclusion

The Professional Competency Profile of nurses working in emergency services was developed based on a Brazilian Matrix. Our findings contributed to exposure, in a clear and objective way, of the attitudes/behaviors capable of expressing the desired excellence in nursing practice.

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Collaborations

Holanda FL; Marra CC and Cunha ICKO declare their contribution to the development of the Competency Matrix; manuscript drafting; critical revision

of the intellectual content; and, final approval of the version to be published.

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