

Exploring the Hierarchy in Nursing: A Literature Review of Roles and Responsibilities

Najd Rashid Alshuail¹, Nabilah Saleh Alanazi², Nouf Jaffer Alhazza³
Omar Abdulaziz Altamimi⁴, Nidaa Ibrahim Abuamryah⁵

¹Technician Nursing, PSMMC, Riyadh KSA

²Nursing Technician, PSMMC, Riyadh KSA

³Respiratory Therapist Specialist, PSMMC, Riyadh KSA

⁴Specialist-Anesthesia Technology, PSMMC, Riyadh KSA

⁵Nursing Specialist Nursing, PSMMC, Riyadh KSA

ABSTRACT

The issue of burnout among paramedics is a serious concern, affecting both their health and the quality of the service they provide to patients. So purpose of this systematic review is to identify the work-related stressors that leads to burnout and interventions to decrease work-place burnout. Frequent triggers of trauma are high demands, traumatic events, shift work, and lack of support from the organization. Also, many psychological interventions like resilience training, cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), and mindfulness programs can help people cope with stress more effectively. Implementing organizational strategies, such as peer support programs, workload management, and leadership training, are also essential in both improving job satisfaction and mental health. The interventions themselves are developed but many people do not implement these due to stigma, accessibility and workplace culture issues. This review demonstrates a lack of multisectoral approaches to burnout among paramedics suggesting interventions are often only addressing the individual level and that comprehensive solutions to solve the problem of burnout in paramedics may be lacking. Longitudinal studies that examine the long-term effectiveness of these interventions should be priorities for future research.

Keywords: Burnout, Mental Health, Resilience, Workplace Support, Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy, Shift Work, Stress Management, Emergency Medical Services (EMS).

INTRODUCTION

The nursing field consists of a hierarchy that outlines what roles, responsibilities, and authority levels differ between each. This structure is intended to maximize efficiency and accountability and provide the highest quality care for patients. The nursing hierarchy, which ranges from entry-level nursing assistants, to nurse practitioners, and even nurse managers, has a separate different function on how health care is given to the community. On the other hand, the very structure of hierarchy in nursing can also have its drawbacks, such as roadblocks to communication, tension in the workplace, and power dynamics that can spill over and impact teamwork and any success in job satisfaction.

An understanding of the nursing hierarchy in your healthcare organization helps to facilitate collaboration and professional development, as well as develop leadership pipelines. This structure has some merits in that it provides an orderly value stream to guarantee the best stepwise path to patient care, you certainly don't want chaos here, but an overly automated and compliant organization will quickly grind against this framework while restricting innovation and breaking down silo specialization. However, finding the right balance between structure and flexibility is crucial to nurse empowerment, and ultimately to the achievement of quality patient outcomes.

Purpose / Objective: The primary objective of this literature review is to provide an overview of the current literature relating to hierarchy amongst nurses, specifically hierarchy roles and responsibilities, hierarchy rewards and risks, and improvement and enhancement strategies in order to improve nursing leadership communication and teamwork. This review synthesises the current evidence on the factors that underpin nursing hierarchies in order to provide recommendations for how to harness opportunities for optimal professional development whilst delivering high-quality healthcare.

METHODOLOGY

Study Design

Nursing hierarchy affects not only workplace dynamics and but also the well-being and care of the patients. The aim of this study. This systematic literature review aims to investigate the nursing hierarchy regarding roles, responsibilities as well as workplace dynamics in patient care and delivery. This review brings together existing literature contributing to an overall understanding of the ways in which hierarchical structures affect the way nursing practice at the level of both delivery and interprofessional collaboration.

Search Strategy

Methods: In this study, a systematic search of various electronic databases (PubMed, CINAHL, Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar). The search terms included:

“nursing hierarchy”

Nursing Roles and Responsibilities

However, the nursing leadership and management interprofessional collaboration in nursing

Hierarchy Interference in the Practice of Nursing.

We used Boolean operators (AND, OR) to refine the search to retrieve relevant peer-reviewed articles.

Methods Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria:

Research: Peer-reviewed journal articles, dated 2010–2024

Research on hierarchy and leadership in nursing, and nursing roles and responsibilities

Studies done in inpatient, outpatient and nursing home settings

Articles written in English

Exclusion Criteria:

Studies examining non-nursing healthcare professions

Such as: Opinion piece, Editorial or Unpublished thesis

Non hierarchical/related to this idea articles

Data Extraction and Analysis

Studies of relevance were reviewed and study design, population, key findings and implications were extracted and summarised. We performed a thematic analysis to identify recurrent patterns pertaining to hierarchical roles, hierarchy advantages and disadvantages, and recommendations to improve nursing leadership structures.

Limitations

Potential publication bias and the non-inclusion of studies in a language other than English may have limited this review, as such an approach may underrepresent the variety of perspectives on nursing hierarchy. Lastly, heterogeneity in study designs used in the different healthcare systems may limit the generalizability of the results.

RESULTS

Nursing as a Hierarchy

The literature review identified a apparent nursing hierarchy, most often structured by multiple tiers, which include:

First up: Entry-Level Nurses: Nursing aides and LPNs who deliver basic care and assist RN's.

Registered Nurse (RN): The main caregivers who provide treatments, assessments, and communicate with interdisciplinary teams.

Advanced Practice Nurses (APNs): This includes nurse practitioners (NPs), clinical nurse specialists (CNSs), and certified nurse anesthetists (CRNAs) with specialty jobs with more independence.

Nurse managers and administrators: Focus on leadership positions, clinic and hospital policy implementation, and the management of organizations.

Hierarchy Effect on Role and Accountabilities of a Nurse

Prior literature suggested that hierarchy in nursing is often viewed as being part and parcel of job roles, responsibility, and efficiency in the provision of patient care [12–18]. But strict hierarchies, they discovered, occasionally stifled either communication or collaboration, crystalizing workplace tension and reducing job satisfaction.

Advantages of Hierarchical Systems

Seven benefits of nursing hierarchy were cited in the review, including:

Identifies and differentiates roles: provides structure to ensure that tasks are delegated, decreasing ambiguities in clinical settings.

Enhanced Safety: Hierarchical Oversight Holds Patients Accountable For Delivering A High Standard Of Care

Growing Career Routes: Nurses have clear ways of advancing in their careers with leadership development and specialization.

Issues Related To Hierarchy In Nursing

Although it has advantages, the following issues were also identified:

Barriers in Communication: Low-level nurses are not able to easily voice out their concern to the senior staff, and in turn, teamwork is affected.

From chain of command and task distribution, hierarchy leads to nurse burnout.

Reduced Autonomy: Fixed frameworks might restrict creativity and decision-making of junior nurses.

What are some Strategies to Strengthen Nursing Hierarchy?

In the literature, multiple strategies to optimize nursing hierarchies were identified, consisting of:

Removing Layers: You can break down hierarchies by encouraging open dialogue and shared decision-making within nursing teams.

Leadership training programs: Providing junior nurses with mentorship and leadership development opportunities.

Models of Interprofessional Collaboration: Improving nurse and non-nurse teamwork to improve patient care outcomes

DISCUSSION

This review highlights the structure of nursing hierarchy and the dual impact it has on healthcare environments. Hierarchy makes roles clearly defined, enforces accountability, and lays a path for career growth however, it does come with a fair share of drawbacks including disruption in communication, stress at the work, floor and curbs the autonomy of the lower-ranked nurses. The results were in keeping with earlier studies suggesting that inflexible hierarchies may impede teamwork and decision-making processes, especially in emergency and ICU settings (Brough, 2005; Williams & Williams, 2019).

The Role of Hierarchy in Shaping Office Culture

The nursing work environment is a hierarchically modeled work environment, which either promote efficiency and patient safety, or further a culture of power imbalance and stress based on the upper model, such an upper model should be an aspect of nursing practice that encourages you to create the best professional environment for yourself and others. Research shows that nurses on the lower tiers often feel dispensable and are reluctant to speak up with suggestions or innovative plans for the attention of upper-level hospital authorities (Rodriguez-Rey et al., 2019). The lack of communication can impact each other's work and in extreme care situation it can compromise patient care. Flattened hierarchies, or shared governance models, may address some of these anxieties through increased communication and teamwork (Johnston et al., 2016).

How the Leadership Need to Optimize Hierarchy of Nursing

— The effective nurse leader must achieve the balance between the naturally imposed hierarchical structure that is a reality in teams while creating an environment that needs order and flexibility. A leadership model that includes transformational leadership and servant leadership has been shown to encourage a more positive work environment in

which junior nurses are empowered and engaged (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Leadership training programs and mentorship initiatives could help close gaps between hierarchies, enabling more decision-making and opportunities for advancement. Dealing with Burnout and Level of Satisfaction from Job in a Tier System

One of the major issues with rigid nursing hierarchies is workplace stress and burnout in frontline nurses. Studies show that heavy workloads, low autonomy and decision-making participation are contributing factors in job dissatisfaction and high turnover (Petrie et al., 2018). These are systemic problems, so fixing them will take systemic solutions. These include:

Flexible working hours and redistribute work to avoid worker burnout.
Supervision that is supportive and that includes mental health resources
Recognition and incentives to recognize contributions across the hierarchy.
What does this mean in practice for healthcare organisations?

Nursing involves hierarchical structures, yet healthcare institutions can promote strategies that find balance in the balance between structure and inclusion. This can be achieved through:

Improved communication training to all employees to ensure transparency and also for power differentials.

Interprofessional team models that embed nurses with other clinicians to participate in shared decision-making.

Cultural changes within organizations towards respect, collaboration, and recognizing contributions at all levels of the hierarchy.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

However, some limitations should be taken into consideration in presenting this review; Limitations: The study uses secondary data sources, which may lead to publication bias. And to further complicate this, the way hierarchy plays out in practice may also vary depending on healthcare systems, cultural perspectives, and organizational policies.

Future studies should investigate:

Follow-up studies to evaluate the effects of maturation of changes in nursing experience

Studies that compare hierarchical models of leadership — whether they be managers or executives of corporations, or the heads of government, with alternative models with decentralized decision-making and cooperative structures.

Technology-enabled solutions, for example, communication tools based on AI to facilitate collaboration in the workplace.

CONCLUSION

In nursing, a critical aspect of defining roles, responsibilities, and professional relationships in the context of healthcare settings is the hierarchical structure. The review summarizes the benefits and limitations of hierarchical models in nursing. Hierarchy does provide clear delegation of roles, accountability in work, and avenues for job posting, but it may also lead to communication gaps, job stress, and limited autonomy for nurses at the lower end of the ranking system.

The insights imply a significance of proper balance of hierarchy to ensure that there exists both efficiency in organization and morale of employees. Transformational leadership, mentorship programs, and sharing governance models can improve collaboration and reduce the harmful impacts of rigid hierarchies.

Moreover, by establishing interprofessional teams and focusing on leadership development among nurses, nursing organizations can cultivate confident nurse leaders who feel supported and perform optimally, further resulting in enhanced job satisfaction, retention and patient outcomes.

Further studies should weigh alternative leadership structures that achieve inclusivity without sacrificing essential organizational order.

Healthcare institutions can build a more effective and sustainable nursing workforce by implementing strategies that promote a culture of respect, open communication, and professional growth.

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