

SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL CONDITIONS OF THE PRE-GRADUATION TRAINEESHIP AS A FACTOR IN THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF FUTURE NURSES

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Abstract The practical training of Nursing students ends with a pre-graduation traineeship which, according to the Unified State Requirements, is with a duration of 1600 hours. The organization and management of the pre-graduation traineeship require clearly defined and formulated objectives and tasks, expected results and opportunities for professional development of the future nurses. In this respect, the socio-psychological environment which is reflected in the relationships between the subjects of the pre-graduation traineeship is of great importance.

This study aims to determine and analyze the socio-psychological conditions and factors in the pre-graduation traineeship in view of the professional development of nursing students.

Material and methods: The opinions of two groups of respondents have been investigated: 106 mentors from the university hospitals: ‘St. George’ University Hospital, Plovdiv, Multi-profile Hospital, Haskovo, ‘Dr. A. Dafovski’ Hospital in Kardzhali, and 283 trainee-nurses studying at the Medical University of Plovdiv, and Trakia University of Stara Zagora.

Results: The findings from the survey show that 69% of the respondents are truly satisfied with the atmosphere in the medical team $P < 0,001$ ($r = 0,85$). To a great extent, this is connected with the opportunity for them to put their knowledge and skills into practice and to stand out $P < 0,001$ ($r = 0,74$) and to improve their skills $P < 0,001$ ($r = 0,72$). The better the socio-psychological environment, the greater the level of satisfaction of the trainee-nurses. A survey of the opinion of the students showed that not all students are happy with the attitude of their mentors to them. It was established that most mentors believed there was effective communication between them and their trainees – “yes” 58,70% and „mostly yes”-28,80%. According to 66,7% of the mentors, the most common factor disturbing the good relationships between them was the lack of interest on the part of the student, followed by “lack of trust”- at 21.7%, and the lack of communication skills on the part of the student.

All participants in the survey shared the opinion that in order for both parties to enjoy successful relationships, each one of them had to be acquainted with their rights and responsibilities during the traineeship.

Conclusion: The conducted survey proved that a supportive, creative and positive psychological environment is of vital importance; trust and partnership between the subjects of the training, as well as among the students themselves; support, cooperation, motivated and active involvement of the students in the practical training, are of equal importance.

Key words: socio-psychological conditions, pre-graduation traineeship, Nursing students.

INTRODUCTION

The practical training of Nursing students ends with a pre-graduation traineeship which, according to the Unified State Requirements, is with a duration of 1600 hours, and is done in their last year at the university. During their pre-graduation traineeship, students solidify their knowledge, develop and master practical skills, as well as job-significant values and qualities.

The organization and management of the pre-graduation traineeship require clearly defined and formulated objectives and tasks, expected results and opportunities for professional development of the future nurses. In this respect, the socio-psychological environment which is reflected in the relationships between the subjects of the pre-graduation traineeship – ‘trainee-trainee’, ‘trainee-tutor’, ‘trainee-mentor’, ‘trainee-patient’, ‘tutor-mentor’ - is of great importance.

The socio-psychological conditions of the pre-graduation traineeship affect the psychological environment, which is a socio-psychological phenomenon of a relatively stable nature of the relationships between the subjects of the pre-graduation traineeship and the prevailing tone of their mood, which has an impact on their communication and joint practical work.

The socio-psychological environment is a practically oriented concept that serves the need for evaluation of the group environment as a whole, and expresses in a generalized form the nature of the conditions, favorable or adverse, in which a human activity is carried out. It is a perfect mental reflection of the system of real relationships, and is a function of the joint activity and interaction between people. In fact, it is a dynamic and balanced system of predominant, relatively stable and typical of the members of the team, social feelings and mental relationships, mutual expectations and aspirations, which have a direct influence on the individual and team performance, on the creative abilities and achievements, on people's behavior [1, p.330].

According to S. Dzhonev, the psychological environment may be regarded as the prevailing type of interactions between the members of a group, vertically and horizontally, with regard to their joint activity [3, p.184]

The psychological atmosphere is one of the results of the interaction between people and the environment, and is influenced by both the character of the people involved and the environment. [4, p.479]

The positive socio-psychological environment is a function of the interaction and joint work of the medical team. In essence, it is a reflection of relatively stable social feelings and personal relationships, moral views and values, opinions and observations, mutual expectations and aspirations, which exert an immediate impact on the individual and group performance, on the creative abilities, achievements and conduct of medical staff. [2, p.246; 6. P.30-31]. The following may be considered main determinants of the psychological environment in the concrete professional environment of the pre-graduation traineeship: ethical relationships and culture in the work place; optimal working conditions, traditions and customs; interaction and interpersonal relationships.

Interpersonal relationships constitute one of the vital social functions of human society, since a significant part of the social image of the personality is the result of the multi-faceted process of human interaction and communication.

This study aims to determine and analyze the socio-psychological conditions and factors in the pre-graduation traineeship in view of the professional development of nursing students.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The opinions of two groups of respondents have been investigated: 106 mentors from the university hospitals: 'St. George' University Hospital, Plovdiv, Multi-profile Hospital, Haskovo, 'Dr. A. Dafovski' Hospital in Kardzhali, and 283 trainee-nurses studying at the Medical University of Plovdiv, and Trakia University of Stara Zagora. The survey employed questionnaires, interviews and a test to determine the level of satisfaction with their work, to analyze the opinions of the respondents of the socio-psychological environment in which traineeships are carried out.

The following software was used for the statistical processing and provision of data - IBM SPSS Statistics 16.0 and Microsoft Excel 2007.

ANALYSIS

The analysis of the responses of the group of students showed that most of the student-respondents were aged between 20 and 25. By gender, invariably, it was women who prevailed – 95.4% as compared to 4.6%

The average age of the mentors was $41,88 \pm 1,04$ r., and their average work experience $18,74 \pm 1,15$ r.

By position: 1% were head nurses, 16% were nurse managers, and 83% were registered nurses. According to their qualifications, the mentors were distributed as follows: the highest percentage of mentors had the qualifications of 'Specialist' – 31.0%, followed by the nurses with a Bachelor's Degree – 29.0%, with a Master's Degree in 'Healthcare Management' – 27.0%, and with a Bachelor's Degree in 'Healthcare management' – 13.0%.

The results of the survey showed that 69% of the respondents were truly satisfied with the atmosphere in the medical team $P < 0,001 (r = 0,85)$. To a great extent, this is connected with the opportunity for them to put their knowledge and skills into practice and to stand out $P < 0,001 (r = 0,74)$ and to improve their skills $P < 0,001 (r = 0,72)$. The better the socio-psychological environment, the greater the level of satisfaction of the trainee-nurses. In the course of their pre-graduation traineeship, students master the skill to communicate with the patients, their families and the medical team, and adopt certain models of professional conduct. In this respect, the role of the members of the medical team as role models is of great importance.

At the same time, the job of the nurse requires responsibility on the part of the trainees, and they are aware of that. The analysis of the responses to the statement from the test on the characteristics of the pre-graduation traineeship: “Great responsibility is required of me”, the students responded as follows: “to a certain extent” – 6.2%, “very much” – 25%, “extremely” – 68.8%, with an average evaluation of $3,49 \pm 0,07$. However, this fact was considered unsatisfactory by only 1.0% of the students, “to a certain extent” – 7.3% of the respondents, “very much” – 28.1%, and “extremely” – 63.5%. The average evaluation was high - at $3,41 \pm 0,07$. The correlation analysis showed a moderately expressed dependency $P < 0,01 (r = 0,48)$, that is, the greater responsibilities the traineeship involved, the more satisfied students were.

The professional competency of the nurses involves not only the mastering of knowledge, skills and routines, but also the development of personal and job-specific professional qualities. A nurse should have certain qualities and values without which she/he would be unable to do her/his job in compliance with the requirements of medical ethics. We have witnessed a series of negative trends in modern health care, such as alienation between the patient and the nurse, dissatisfaction of the beneficiaries of health and medical services with the quality of the services provided. The main responsibility and task of the nurse is the care for the patient, but the crisis in health care has led to the devaluation of this activity and to lack of values forming the moral image of the nurse.

The conducted interview about the most important qualities that a nurse should have, the respondents mostly stated qualities such as compassion, empathy, sympathy, respect for the autonomy of the patient, responsibility, fairness, humaneness. These are qualities which, to a great extent, affect the interaction and relationships between the subjects in the pre-graduation traineeship. To the question concerning the meaning of the concept of ‘humaneness’, the students replied it was the demonstration of compassion, love of people, care and sympathy with the problems of others, empathy, readiness and willingness to help those in need. The majority of students believed a nurse should possess all these qualities.

A high proportion of the trainees who took part in the survey shared they had mastered the communication skill to communicate rationally with patients. Apparently, the more experience students gain, the better their communication skills become, students think. This helps patients overcome their fears, and adapt more easily to the hospital environment. The interview also revealed that only some of the students perceive communication skills as an opportunity to understand the sick, to get become aware of their pains and suffering, as a reliable means which has a therapeutic effect on the personality of the patient as a whole.

The analysis of the responses to the question connected with the encounter of difficulties in communicating with patients showed that the majority of the respondents gave a negative reply – 77.0%, which means they have developed communication skills and find no difficulties in communicating with patients. 17.0% gave a positive answer (“yes”), and 6.0% could not decide. /Fig.1/

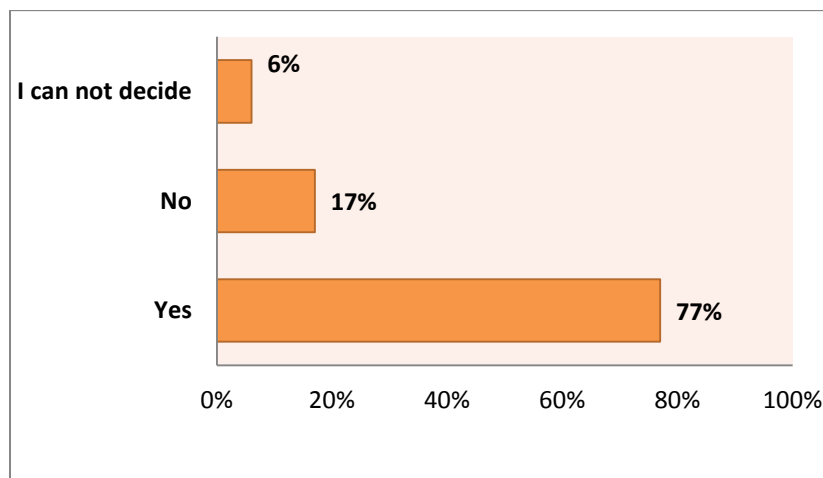


Fig. 1. Difficulties in communicating with patients

The next question, regarding the trust between the patient and the trainee-nurse, is closely connected with the question above. The fact that 89.10% of the trainees managed to build relationships of trust with the patients is really

impressive. This also proves our claim that communication with real patients during practical training, the traineeship in particular, is a prerequisite for future nurses developing communication skills as part of their professional competence and a favorable factor for a positive psychological environment. What is more, patients cannot evaluate the correct techniques in performing manipulations, but they can certainly assess the communication skills of the trainees.

The results of the survey showed that 73% of the students always obtained the patients' informed consent prior to performing medicinal manipulations. The rest of the students – 20% did that 'sometimes', and 7.0% - failed to obtain the patients' informed consent. The interview revealed that students perceive the 'informed consent' as a process of consistently informing the patient of his/her condition and subsequently obtaining his/her consent to the respective treatment. They theoretically regarded the patient as an autonomous person, yet in their work they did not always applied the autonomous model of relationships. It is of note that at the beginning of the traineeship some students violated this principle, which could be accounted for by the fact that they themselves felt uncertain and anxious whether they would cope with the manipulations. The survey proved that the autonomous model did not grow into a conviction and a permanent part of the approach of each student, which was a reason for the breach of the ethical relationships between trainee and patient.

The socio-psychological environment during the traineeship to a great extent depends on the relationships between mentors and trainees.

The majority of the respondents – 81.5% were happy with the assistance they received from their mentors, who exercised direct control and supervision of the work of the future nurses in the healthcare unit. According to most students, their mentor acknowledges their achievements when they coped with their assignments well ($3,24 \pm 0,07$) and respected their opinion ($3,0 \pm 0,07$). The more comradely and supportive the attitude of the mentor, the greater the satisfaction of the trainees with their pre-graduation training $P < 0,001$ ($r = 0,63$) and ($r = 0,85$).

The respondents gave similar answers to the other question concerning their satisfaction with the assistance and helpfulness of the medical staff. One fifth of the students – 19.64% were not happy with the attitude of the medical staff in the university clinics. They explained it with the lack of time, unwillingness to communicate and ensure independent activities for students. The findings of our survey in this respect are confirmed by those of a study made by S. Kichukova at 'Trakia' University of Stara Zagora, which identified certain negative aspects in the educational and training work of the medical staff and mentors at the university clinics. [5]

The attitude of the staff at the university clinics to the practical training and to the students has an impact on the students' level of satisfaction with their pre-graduation traineeship and the socio-psychological environment in the university clinics. In order to overcome the negative trends in communication, the connection between tutors and mentors has to be enhanced thus boosting the control of the pre-graduation traineeship.

The survey of the opinion of the students established that not all students were happy with the attitude of their mentor to them. That is why we decided to investigate the mentors' opinion on this issue. It was found that most of the respondents believed the rapport between them and the trainees was efficient – "yes" 58.70%, "rather yes" 28.80%. /Fig.2/

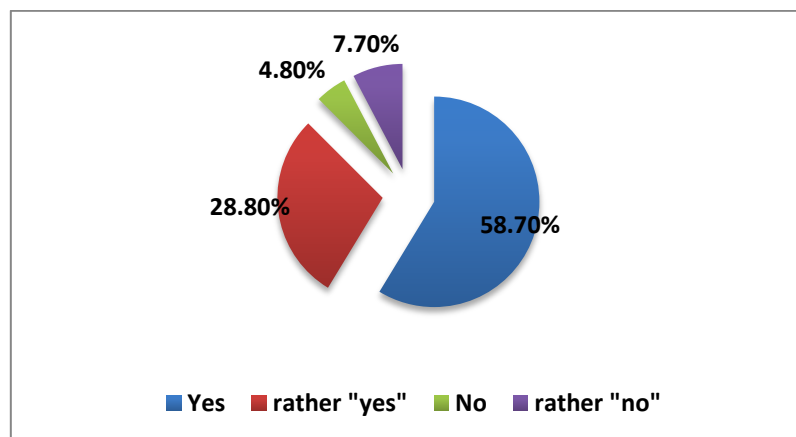


Fig. 2. Efficient rapport with students

For a good rapport to be established, both parties have to be acquainted with their rights and obligations during the traineeship. Students should be informed of and adhere to the rules established in the hospital ward, the ethical norms of conduct and confidentiality, perform the assigned tasks in strict compliance with the instructions of the mentor and using their theoretical knowledge and practical skills mastered during their training at the university. On the other hand, the mentor has to have a comradely and respectful attitude to the students as his/her future colleagues. The mentor has to be acquainted with the schedule and abilities of the students, to assign tasks that are consistent with the competences and abilities of the students, to exercise control of their individual work, to maintain efficient interpersonal relationships, vertically and horizontally, and to strive to serve as a role model for the trainees. In order to be able to accomplish all this, the mentor has to be strongly motivated and convinced to pass on his/her knowledge and skills to the future nurses.

Regardless of the small percentage of mentors /12,50%/, who did not believe there was efficient communication between them and their students, and this fact causes concerns about the efficiency of the pre-graduation traineeship. The findings of the investigation into the factors impeding communication, according to the mentors, are presented in Table 1.

Table.1 Factors impeding effective communication between mentor and trainee.

Factors	Number	%±Sp
Lack of trust	23	21,7±4,0
Lack of communication skills on the part of the trainee.	22	20,8±3,9
Lack of communication skills on the part of the mentor.	16	15,1±3,5
Lack of interest on the part of the trainee.	70	66,7±4,6
Lack of interest on the part of the mentor.	17	16±3,6

It is clear from Table 1 that according to 66.7% of the respondents, the lack of interest on the part of the students is a leading factor, followed by the “lack of trust” factor - 21,7%, and then by the inability to communicate on the part of the student. This fact should alert tutors that the identified inadequate skills have to be addressed from the first stages in the education and training of nursing students. Some mentors, although a smaller part, 15.1%, believed there could be a problem in communication on the part of the mentor or lack of interest on the part of the mentor /16±3,6%/.

For good relationships between trainees and mentors to be established, Rules for Pre-graduation Training should be compiled and introduced. Thus both parties will be acquainted with their rights and obligations, and dissatisfaction and conflicts that may occasionally arise in the process of training between students and mentors will be reduced to an absolute minimum.

The conducted survey involving mentors and students allows us to draw the following conclusions:

CONCLUSIONS

1. It is necessary to create a positive, supportive and creative environment, an environment of trust, partnership, cooperation, motivation and active involvement of the students in the practical activities.
2. Most trainee-nurses have already developed the skills to communicate rationally with patients and mentors, which is a positive factor in creating a favourable psychological environment.
3. The majority of the students express their general appreciation of their mentors and the latter’s ability to communicate with students and patients.
4. Both groups of respondents – students and mentors – acknowledge the need to maintain good relationships for the effective implementation of pre-graduation traineeship in a real hospital environment.

Conclusion

The conducted survey proved that the socio-psychological conditions of the pre-graduation traineeship are a powerful factor predetermining the professional development and future fulfillment and careers of the future

nurses, and have an impact on their motivation to provide quality care to the patients in need.

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