General practices as interprofessional communities: the contribution of the practice nurse

Christine Phillips
Overview

- Evolution of practice nurses in Australia
- The Australian General Practice Nurses Study
- What do practice nurses do?
- What supports advanced teamwork?
- Towards new models of nursing in general practice
Evolution of practice nurses in Australia

Nurse as small business assistant

From helpmeet to teammate
Nurses in larger practices, broadening of clinical and organisational roles (esp quality)

Practice nursing as distinct subdiscipline in nursing
Aims of this project

1. To define the roles of nurses in general practice
2. To identify local, structural, and individual factors which determine these roles
3. To identify processes to facilitate change and enhanced practice by nurses in general practice
Methods

*Rapid appraisal of 25 practices*

- Interviews (36 nurses, 24 GPs, 22 PNs)
- Observation (51 hours)
- Photographs
- Floorplans

*One year naturalistic study of 7 practices introducing change*

- Small financial incentive, support from Division
- Drivers
- Role of the team
- Role of the nurse
Nursing roles

- Patient carer
- Organiser
- Quality controller
- Problem solver
- Educator
- Agent of connectivity
Nursing roles

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Nurses and doctors as interdisciplinary community

• Nurses and doctors form fluid partnerships around instances of patient care or shared work
• The leadership of these partnerships can be invested in one party, or shared
• Doctor as “leader by definition” rarely articulated
Comparison of models of team leadership in two of the six nursing roles in the Australian General Practice Nursing Study

Patient care: Models of leadership in chronic disease

Quality control: Models of leadership
Drivers for interprofessional working

- Need to focus on nursing autonomy
- Need to focus on depth or scope of activities undertaken by nurses
- Need to support evolution in GP’s understanding of the role of nurses
Hierarchical, rigid practices

Risk to sustainability of team

Risk to safety

Adaptable practices, interprofessional work
Hierarchical, rigid practices

Risk to sustainability of team

Adaptable practices, interprofessional work

Risk to safety

Nurse activity

Autonomy

Rural

Urban
Number of practice nurse Medicare items charged per year 2004-2008

Immunisations: Item 10993; Wound care: Item 10996; Cervical screening: Items 10994, 10995, 10998 or 10999
Software can stymie collaboration by…

- Not allowing two people to access a record at the same time
- Not allowing intra-practice communication
- Focusing on doctors’ needs, not nurses
- Being unintuitive
Teach a nurse, teach a practice

• Nursing tradition of education in the workplace
• Viewed as a good for others
• Nurses provide on-the-job training to other nurses, and GP registrars
• Nurses educate senior GPs through covert means
A room of one’s own?
Ensuring sustainability

1. Training for nurses within the workplace
2. Ensuring breadth or depth of work
3. Managing income disparity within the team
4. Career paths for nursing in general practice
Conclusion

• Nursing in general practice encompasses roles from patient care to general practice connectivity and education
• Evolving interprofessional teams have fluid models of leadership
• Nursing autonomy is key to good interprofessional work
• Drivers are tools, funding, regulation and space, and need careful introduction
“I can honestly say that having a nurse is the single biggest thing that has changed my practice in 30 years”.
Australian General Practice Nurses Study Team

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