Perceived Stress and Coping Strategies of Newly Graduated Nurses

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Abstract

Background: With insufficient professional knowledge and limited clinical experience, recently graduated nurses entering stressful and fast changing medical environments often find role transition and adaptation highly challenging. Their stress and coping strategies are difficult to capture using quantitative studies.

Purpose: The present study used a descriptive phenomenological design to investigate perceived stresses faced by recently graduated staff nurses and related coping strategies.

Methods: Data was collected using several interviews and analyzed using the Colaizzi’s phenomenological method. Participants were recruited from a medical center in southern Taiwan. Ten recently graduated staff nurses still in their three-month probation period were interviewed individually.

Results: Findings showed newly graduated nurse stressors as (1) lack of confidence in being able to successfully transition into their new roles and in being able to develop clinical competency and professionalism, (2) lack of control over practice and work overload, (3) unfriendly senior staff, (4) accusations and misunderstandings after making mistakes, and (5) sense of isolation and burnout due to insufficient support from colleagues. Coping strategies for newly-graduated nurses included (1) applying various stress-releasing methods, (2) trying to make personal changes rather than trying to change others, (3) being more cautious when undertaking unfamiliar tasks, and (4) focusing their attentions on direct patient care, which offered a higher probability of reward through patient-given encouragement and gratitude that enhanced subjects’ sense of accomplishment.

Conclusions / Implications for nursing management: Recently graduated nurses face relatively high levels of work stress for which they develop coping strategies. Previous research suggests the beneficial effects of clinical counselor and administrative support on helping novice nurses overcome premature career burnout. This study described the lived experiences of junior staff nurses during their initial probation period. Findings suggest that the nurse executives in acute care hospitals should develop counseling programs for junior nurses during probation. Furthermore, on-the-job-training focusing on competency development should be strengthened to facilitate retention.

Key Words: newly graduated nurses, stress, coping strategies.