Stress, Coping and Resilience of Cancer Nurses at Two Hospitals

Professor Anne Williams

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Nursing a stressful career choice's

A survey has made official what the country’s nursing sector has known all along – that nursing is one of the most stressful career choices someone can make.

A national survey for Lifeline Australia found that people who work in the health and community services sector are the most stressed out in the country.

Exclusive: Stress levels at work making nurses ill, finds survey

More than 60% of nurses say they have stressors such as physical or mental health problems affecting their work.

Nurses more stressed than combat troops

15 January, 2013 | By Sarah Callin

Giving nurses protected time to discuss and reflect on practice can more than halve levels of stress and burnout, according to a clinical psychologist who is leading pioneering research into the area.
Causes of Stress in Nurses

• High workload (Purcell, Kutas & Cobb, 2011)

• Lack of control (Maben, Adams, Peccei, Murrells & Robert, 2012)

• Insufficient support (Bennett, Lowe, Matthews, Dourali & Tattersall, 2001)

• Co-worker conflict and bullying (Rocker, 2008)

• Emotional demands of caring and watching patients suffer (Kendall, 2007)
Signs of Stress & Burnout

- Irritability
- Exhaustion
- Poor performance
- Negative emotional reaction to work challenges
- Compassion fatigue
- Unfulfilling work experience
- More sick days
- High staff turnover
Stress and Psycho-Oncology

Nurse Stress

Psychos Oncology
Cancer Nurse Wellbeing Project: 2015/6

**Aim:** To develop a wellbeing educational program for cancer nurses intended to increase cancer nurses’ wellbeing, resilience and capacity to cope with workplace stress.
Method

• Action Research
• Two hospitals: one private and one public
• Nurse baseline survey
• Literature review
• Consultative groups
• Development of educational program
A Wellbeing Educational Program for Cancer Nurses in WA

- Effective
- Theoretical base
- Relevant
- Practical Format
- Sustainable
Baseline Survey

- Three instruments: **Perceived Stress Scale** (S. Cohen & G. Williamson), **COPE** (C.S. Carver), **Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale** (K. Connor & J. Davidson).
- Sample population = 234 nurses (x 2 hospitals)
- Response rate: 30.3% (n=71)
- IBM SPSS version 21 used for the analysis of data.
Results: Demographics (missing data 16.4%)

- **Gender**: 4.1% Male; 79.5% Female
- **Age range**: 22-64 years
- **Position**: RNs 74.3%; ENs 8.2%
- **Area**: Inpatients and Outpatients
- **Years as a nurse**: New-graduate-41 years
Results: Stress Levels

- The average stress level across both groups was **16.5**
- Previous research has shown that the typical stress level is about **13**, and that high stress groups record a value of about 20.
- Participants who worked a greater number of days reported lower levels of stress (statistically significant).
Results: Resilience Levels

• The average resilience level across both groups was 70.0.

• Previous research has shown that average resilience level is 80.4 for the general population, 71.8 for primary care patients, and 68.0 for psychiatric outpatients.

• None of the demographic variables were significantly associated with resilience.
## Results: Coping strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cognitive Type</th>
<th>Strategies</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Problem-focused</strong></td>
<td>Planning (11.5)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Active coping (11.0)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Instrumental social support (10.3)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Suppression of competing activities (9.5)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Appraisal-focused</strong></td>
<td>Positive reinterpretation (12.2)</td>
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<td>Acceptance (10.3)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Use of humour (8.4)</td>
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<td>Religious Coping (6.9)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Emotion-focused</strong></td>
<td>Use of emotional support (10.7)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Restraint (8.9)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Mental disengagement (8.7)</td>
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<td>Venting of emotions (8.6)</td>
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<td>Behaviour disengagement (6.2)</td>
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<td>Substance use (5.6)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Denial (5.4)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Range of scores 4 – 16
60 questions, 15 coping strategies
Results: Coping strategies

- Humour and planning were both significantly associated with higher levels of resilience.
- Increased use of social support and higher levels of acceptance were significantly associated with lower levels of stress.
- Higher levels of emotional venting and higher levels of denial were significantly associated with higher levels of stress.
Summary and Conclusions

• Nurses were found to have high levels of stress and substantial scope for improving resilience was indicated.

• The use of cognitive rather than emotional coping strategies, were indicative of lower levels of stress, consistent with the literature

• These results have confirmed the need for a wellbeing education program for cancer nurses at the study hospitals.
Work in progress ...

- Analysis of qualitative data from consultative groups
- Development of pilot education program for cancer nurses
- Trial of educational program within the hospital setting
- Exploration of opportunities to incorporate wellbeing education into undergraduate nursing program
Acknowledgements

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