

REVIEW

Presenteeism in Nursing: A reflection on the implications for health and the contribution of clinical governance

Presenteísmo en enfermería: una reflexión sobre las implicaciones para la salud y la contribución de la gobernanza clínica

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: the phenomenon of going to work sick is common in professions with high social and interpersonal demands. The prevalence of presenteeism has increased in nursing, leading to a deterioration in nurses' health, a decrease in the quality of care provided, and an increased risk for patients. The objective was to analyze the increase in presenteeism among nurses, its impact on the quality of care and the role of clinical governance.

Method: database research and critical analysis of selected articles.

Results: the prevalence of presenteeism in nursing varies between 30 % and 94 %, making it the most affected professional category among healthcare professionals. The consequences include compromising the physical and mental health of professionals, decreased productivity, decreased quality of care, and increased adverse events. Factors such as a sense of responsibility, scarce human resources, and unhealthy work environments contribute to this phenomenon. Clinical governance, by promoting a culture of safety and well-being, can minimize presenteeism.

Conclusion: clinical governance can reduce the impact of presenteeism by implementing strategies such as promoting self-care, psychological support, professional development, participatory management and resource optimization, thereby ensuring the sustainability of care and the safety of users.

Keywords: Nursing; Presenteeism; Clinical Governance.

RESUMEN

Introducción: el fenómeno de ir a trabajar enfermo es común en profesiones con altas exigencias sociales e interpersonales. La prevalencia del presenteísmo ha aumentado en enfermería, lo que se relaciona con el deterioro de la salud del enfermero, la disminución de la calidad de la atención prestada y el mayor riesgo para el usuario.

Objetivo: analizar críticamente el aumento del presentismo en los enfermeros, su impacto en la calidad de la atención y el papel de la gobernanza clínica.

Método: investigación en bases de datos y análisis crítico de los artículos seleccionados.

Resultados: la prevalencia del presentismo en enfermería varía entre el 30 % y el 94 %, siendo esta la categoría profesional más afectada entre los profesionales de la salud. Las consecuencias incluyen el compromiso de la salud física y mental de los profesionales, la disminución de la productividad, la calidad de la atención y el aumento de los eventos adversos. Factores como el sentido de la responsabilidad, la escasez de recursos humanos y los entornos laborales poco saludables contribuyen a este fenómeno. La gobernanza clínica, al promover una cultura de seguridad y bienestar, puede minimizar el presentismo.

Conclusión: la gobernanza clínica puede reducir el impacto del presentismo mediante la implementación de estrategias como la promoción del autocuidado, el apoyo psicológico, la valoración profesional, la gestión participativa y la optimización de los recursos, garantizando así la sostenibilidad de la atención y la seguridad de los usuarios.

Palabras clave: Enfermería; Presentismo; Gobernanza Clínica.

INTRODUCTION

Presenteeism, a phenomenon described since the 1950s, refers to the presence of professionals in the workplace despite being ill, which has an impact on their concentration, productivity and work performance.⁽¹⁾

The prevalence of presenteeism has increased in nursing, a very demanding profession in social and interpersonal terms.⁽²⁾ Nurses often show up for work despite being physically or psychologically weak, due to their sense of responsibility and commitment to their profession.^(3,4)

Presenteeism among nurses can jeopardize patient safety by contributing to an increase in adverse events such as medication errors, falls or the transmission of hospital infections⁽⁵⁾, causing an increase in healthcare costs and a deterioration in the quality of care, as well as significantly affecting the health of professionals.⁽⁶⁾

Clinical governance refers to the set of processes, structures and practices that aim to ensure that healthcare is safe, efficient and of excellence.^(7,8) It is through clinical governance that healthcare organizations strive to achieve transparency, drive continuous improvement in services and guarantee complete safety in patient care.^(8,9)

Therefore, and considering the premise of promoting an organizational culture focused on safety, quality and well-being^(7,8,9), how can clinical governance contribute to reducing presenteeism among nurses?

Based on this issue, this article aims to analyze the increase in presenteeism among nurses, the impact on the quality of care and the role of clinical governance in reducing this problem. To this end, based on the existing scientific literature, this theoretical-reflective article offers a critical reflection on the subject under study.

DEVELOPMENT

Presenteeism compromises physical and mental health and has a special impact on professions that are demanding in social, communicational and interpersonal terms, such as nursing.⁽³⁾

It can directly affect productivity, interfere with the quality of care and compromise patient safety.^(5,10) On the other hand, it leads to an overload of team members, which can contribute to the collective exhaustion of professionals and perpetuate cycles of poor work performance.^(2,10,11) What's more, minor health complaints can worsen significantly, conditioning the professional's actual absence and intensifying the impact on the team.⁽¹²⁾

A sense of responsibility, professional ethics, a feeling of lack of professional recognition and appreciation, a shortage of human resources resulting in excessive workload, the culture of the organization and possible institutional pressure associated with the fear of losing one's job, unhealthy organizational environments and a lack of mental health support are all factors that contribute to the prevalence of presenteeism among nurses.^(2,5,6,10,11,13,14)

In fact, several studies report a growing increase in the prevalence of presenteeism in nursing, with figures ranging from 30 % to 94 %, ^(2,10,11,12,13) being the professional category with the most alarming figures.⁽¹⁴⁾ The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted this phenomenon, (at a time of great social pressure) and a high workload.^(2,10)

Having explored the direct consequences of presenteeism on nurses' health and patient safety, it is important to analyze how clinical governance can be positioned as a strategic pillar to solve the challenges addressed.

In order to guarantee quality and efficiency in healthcare, clinical governance adopts a multifaceted approach that includes setting targets and indicators, systematically monitoring results, actively involving professionals and adopting practices based on scientific evidence.⁽¹⁵⁾

In addition, the clinical governance of health systems has a complex dynamic that requires balance and interaction between all the players involved. It depends fundamentally on the articulation between leadership and governance, human and material resources, scientific knowledge and sustained information, funding,

suppliers, infrastructures and the effective provision of services, the population it serves, always bearing in mind the underlying principles and values and, of course, the intended objectives and results.⁽⁹⁾

Various studies have shown that the occurrence of presenteeism is a phenomenon that reflects the influence of various institutional contexts, namely management policies, structural configurations, social and cultural environments, and the organizational culture itself.^(3,5,6,12,13,14,16)

It is clear that structural changes are needed within healthcare organizations. In the context of clinical governance, the way in which the team, leadership and organizational culture are structured plays a key role in minimizing presenteeism.⁽¹²⁾

Considering the aspects already discussed, it is imperative that the constraints associated with presenteeism are analyzed in depth, that the current challenges facing health systems are addressed in an innovative way, and that concrete strategies are proposed to drive structural and effective changes aimed at preventing and scientifically managing this phenomenon.^(17,18)

It is necessary to implement occupational health measures that promote well-being, encourage self-care, psychological support and the appreciation of rest. To this end, it is also essential to focus on training and professional development because, as nurses are the professionals with the highest health literacy, they are also the profession with the highest prevalence of presenteeism.^(2,16,17,18) In fact, clinical governance must begin at an individual level, with the training of professionals to identify presenteeism at an early stage. On the other hand, healthcare organizations must monitor and prevent this phenomenon, and it is advisable to use quality and safety indicators to identify and intervene with nurses in good time.^(14,15)

Professional development is also mentioned as a necessary strategy to mitigate presenteeism⁶. Effective recognition of the work done, guaranteeing decent working conditions and fair pay are motivational factors that maintain the satisfaction levels of professionals and ensure their retention in organizations.^(3,14)

Work overload is one of the main catalysts for presenteeism.^(2,10) To combat this overload, clinical governance must act to optimize human resources and team management. The adoption of a positive organizational culture and favourable working environments are described by various authors as essential, as they lead to greater satisfaction among professionals and lead to better results, excellent care and greater safety for the patient.^(3,14,19) On the one hand, it is essential to adopt participatory management measures, involving professionals in decision-making processes, seeking to increase practical autonomy, leading to greater satisfaction and motivation among nurses.⁽¹⁴⁾ An organizational culture within flexible structures, based on transformational and transactional leadership models, can be decisive.⁽¹⁴⁾

In addition, evidence shows that more participative leadership styles translate into transparency, effective communication and collective accountability, fostering a culture of safety and trust where the well-being of professionals is a priority.^(12,19) Nurses in leadership positions who adopt the aforementioned attitude can influence the retention of professionals and the maintenance of a positive working environment.⁽¹⁸⁾

User safety is a fundamental pillar of clinical governance. Every year, millions of people suffer preventable harm in healthcare, according to data from the World Health Organization⁽²⁰⁾, which underlines the importance of work environments that foster a robust culture of safety and professional well-being. The Directorate-General for Health corroborates this, arguing that a culture of safety should be inherent in clinical practice and that continuous learning should prevail. Thus, by fostering healthy environments that promote rest, emotional support and transparent communication, clinical governance actively contributes to reducing presenteeism and ensuring safer, high-quality care for users.^(15, 21,22)

Despite the clarity of the impacts of this growing problem, there is a need for more research exploring the relationship between clinical governance and presenteeism, assessing the relevance and applicability of different models. There are, however, few studies on this thematic area, which highlights the urgency of future research exploring the relationship between clinical governance and presenteeism.

It is crucial to assess the relevance and applicability of different clinical governance models, analyzing not only their effects on the safety and excellence of the health services offered to users, but also their ability to minimize presenteeism and its consequences for nurses.⁽¹⁷⁾

Only in this way will it be possible to change current health policies and minimize the effects of presenteeism on health professionals and quality of care.

CONCLUSION

Presenteeism is a highly prevalent phenomenon that has serious consequences for the physical and mental well-being of nurses, the quality of care and patient safety.

This critical analysis demonstrates that clinical governance is a fundamental strategic pillar for minimizing presenteeism in nursing and, consequently, its consequences for patient safety. Its multifaceted approach makes it possible to go beyond the individual causes of the phenomenon, framing it as an indicator of organizational health. The implementation of strategies aligned with the principles of clinical governance, such as participatory management and professional development, is crucial to guarantee the sustainability of the system, the safety

of care, and the enhancement of health and nursing management.

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