An Integrative Review of Nursing Communication Patterns and Patient Safety
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Problem:
Each year over 200,000 patients die from preventable errors in our nation’s hospitals. Many of these errors involve communication (Pronovost, 2010). As a result, there has recently been a much greater emphasis on improving communication factors that contribute to preventable errors.

Evidence:
The culture of the organization in which nurses operate has an impact on their communication patterns related to patient safety. In effective safety cultures, patterns of communication are not hierarchical in nature and individuals feel empowered to communicate about systems or processes that can lead to poor patient outcomes. Alternatively, in hierarchical cultures, patterns of communication reflect the dynamics of real or perceived power that can negatively impact patient safety (National Research Council, 2004). Rodgers (2005) contends that the power culture that exists within healthcare impacts nurses and patient care. How this power culture impacts the communication patterns of nurses and ultimately patient safety is a key area for study.

Strategy:
The purpose of this integrative review was to summarize the current research literature regarding nursing communication patterns and patient safety.

Practice Change:
Within the healthcare setting, communication failures are often the result of differences in professional practices and patterns of collaboration across disciplines (Gillespie, Chaboyer, Longbottom & Wallis, 2010). As a result, the research question for this integrative review was: What is the state of the science on the relationship between nursing communication patterns and patient safety?

Evaluation and Results:
Studies in this review revealed several associations between nursing silence and speaking up behaviors and patient safety.

Recommendations:
Communication elements embedded in the organizational culture of healthcare play key roles in patient safety. Continued research focused on nursing silence, nursing empowerment and healthcare organizational structures can aid in understanding issues that directly impact patient safety.

Lessons Learned:
There is a paucity of academic research on the subject of nursing communication behaviors and the reasons behind them.

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Bibliography:


