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The Effect of Uninterrupted Breaks on Quality of Care Delivered by Bedside Nurses

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Abstract

The purpose of this evidence-based practice project is to evaluate the effects of ensuring an uninterrupted 30-minute break during each shift on the quality of care delivered by inpatient nurses working 12-hour long shifts. An uninterrupted break constitutes a complete absence of patient care including answering work-related calls and watching patient monitors. Nearly half of nurses report that they are not fully free of patient-care responsibilities when taking breaks at work [6] and continually miss meal breaks, often getting only a few minutes of break time each shift [1, 3, 5, 6]. Nurses physically exert themselves every shift by turning, lifting, and ambulating patients as well as leaning over the bedside to administer medications and perform nursing cares. Emotional stamina is further needed daily to communicate with vulnerable and sick patients alongside their worried families during health crises. This exertion combined with heavy workloads, long hours, short breaks, and low staffing are all factors faced by nurses that increase levels of fatigue and create a challenging environment to provide safe patient care. Fatigue has been shown to be negatively correlated with break time taken by nurses [6] and negatively impacts physical and mental well-being. Opposingly, nurse performance is positively correlated with the amount of break time taken [3]. In this project, uninterrupted 30-minute breaks will be guaranteed for nurses during their shift report upon arrival to work. Each nurse will take report for one additional patient whom they will only provide care for during another nurse's break. This ensures that a full report is given rather than a traditionally brief report given when a nurse begins their break. Quality of care will be measured by occurrences of medication/medical errors, patient safety incidences (falls, catheter-associated urinary tract infections, central line-associated infections), and self-reports of staff physical/mental well-being. This data will be collected over 6 months.

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