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Nursing Staff Retention in a Medical Ward of the Triangle Hospital

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Nursing Staff Retention in a Medical Ward of the Triangle Hospital

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The purpose of this study was to describe the nursing staff retention in a medical ward of the Triangle Hospital.

The study aimed to identify the factors that promote and improve nursing staff retention in a medical ward of the Triangle Hospital of Hospital district of Helsinki and Uusimaa, Finland (HUCH). The study was carried out as part of the collaborative project between Triangle Hospital and Laurea University of Applied Sciences.

The data collection was performed via a focus group interview. The interview was held in the hospital environment with five volunteer nurses, all of whom were required to have at least five years of experience on the ward. The data gathered from the interview was analysed using an inductive content analysis method. The analysis of the data consisted of three stages: grouping of data from reduced statements, reduction of statements and formation of sub-categories.

The findings suggest that three categories of factors promoting nursing staff retention exist: work satisfaction, working environment and nursing management accountability. Work satisfaction included work shift planning, promoting efficient orientation, encouragement of professional development, work empowerment, familiar routine and work-personal life harmonization. The dimension of working environment involved stable work community, work versatility and non-hierarchical teamwork. Finally nursing management accountability was connected to matters of equity and financial compensation, management of change and employee based working culture. Overall the nurses were pleased with their workplace. Retaining factors were found to be the matters of working community and work shift planning. Further attention the nurses expected on equity inexperienced based financial compensations and nursing management advocacy.

According to previous studies, retaining staff has had a positive impact on performance, good patient outcomes, success, and decreased willingness to change the workplace. The findings of this study provide information and considerations for the target organization to implement into their staff retention strategies. For instance, the participants of the study strongly suggested that attention to open an honest communication in the working community, an updated orientation manual and relieving nurses from other additional duties when orienting new workers as well as promoting leisure time activities with colleagues could improve staff retention. A future study could investigate a ward with concrete problems in nursing staff retention or be a comparison between an elderly people's home and a specialized nursing care wards' nursing staff retention.

Key words: Nursing staff retention, work satisfaction, working environment

Aida Isa
Liisa McDonald

Hoitohenkilökunnan työssä pisyvyys Kolmiosairaalan sisätautiosastolla

Vuosi 2011 Sivumäärä 48

Opinnäytetyön tarkoitus oli kuvailla hoitohenkilökunnan työssäpysyvyyttä Kolmiosairaalan sisätautiosastolla.

Tutkimuksen tavoitteena oli tuoda esille hoitohenkilökunnan työssäpysyvyyttä parantavia ja edistäviä tekijöitä Kolmiosairaalan sisätautiosastolla. Kolmiosairaalanhanke on Laurea Ammattikorkeakoulun sekä Helsingin ja Uudenmaan sairaanhoitopiirin (HUS) kehittämishanke ja osa Meilahden sairaala-alueen uudistusprojektia.

Tutkimus toteutettiin ryhmä-haastattelemalla laadullisen tiedonkeruun menetelmällä. Haastatteluun osallistui viisi (5) vapaaehtoista sairaanhoitajaa, joilla oli vähintään viiden vuoden kokemus kyseisellä osastolla. Aineisto analysoitiin iduktiivisesti sisällönanalyysin avulla.

Tutkimustulokset jakoivat hoitohenkilökunnan työssä pisyvyyteen johtavat tekijät kolmeen kategoriaan: työtyytyväisyyteen, työympäristöön ja hallinnon vastuullisuuteen. Nämä kolme sisälsivät kolmesta kuuteen alakategoriaa. Työtyytyväisyyteen kuuluivat työvuorosuunnittelu, riittävän perehdytyksen edistäminen, ammatilliseen kehitykseen kannustaminen, totutut rutiinit, työn ja vapaa-ajan tasapaino sekä työn voimaantuminen. Niinikään työympäristö käsitteli aiheita tasapainoiseen työyhteisöön, työn monipuolisuuteen ja ei-hierarkiseen tiimityöskentelyyn liittyen. Hallinnon vastuullisuus sen sijaan sisälsi tasa-arvon ja rahalliset korvaukset, työntekijä lähtöisen työkultuurin edistämisen ja muutoksen hallinnan. Tärkeimmiksi työssä pisyvyyttä parantaviksi tekijöiksi osoittautuivat työyhteisöön liittyvät seikat sekä työvuorosuunnittelu. Lisähuomiota sairaanhoitajat toivoivat tasa-arvoon kokemukseen perustuvien lisien myöntämisessä sekä työntekijöiden etujen ajamiseen esimiehen toimesta.

Aiempien tutkimusten mukaan työssä pisyvyydellä on positiivisia vaikutuksia organisaation menestykseen ja hyviin potilastuloksiin. Opinnäytetyön tulokset tarjoavat parannusehdotuksia kohde organisaation työssä pisyvyys strategiaan. Esimerkiksi avoimen ja rehellisen kommunikaation edistäminen työyhteisössä, päivitetyn orientaatio käsikirjan tekeminen sekä työyhteisön yhteisen virkistystoiminnan elvyttäminen voisivat edistää työssä pisyvyyttä haastateltavien mukaan. Jatkotutkimus aiheeksi ehdotamme haastattelua sairaala osastolla, jossa on ongelmia työssä pisyvyyteen liittyen tai vanhainkoti- ja erikoissairaanhoidon osastojen työssäpisyvyyden vertailua.

Asiasanat: Hoitohenkilökunnan työssä pisyvyys, työtyytyväisyys, työympäristö

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1 Introduction

The shortage of nurses is a widespread problem that is significantly influenced by work satisfaction and staff retention. Nursing staff retention is a core element for hospitals and the entire health care system. Hospitals that retain their staff avoid many unnecessary challenges and achieve healthier performance. Staff retention is a priority for hospitals since it plays a key role in successfully running the workforce, which directly impacts the patient outcome. Turning over staff is a costly process; excessive changes disrupt the working community and interfere with the continuation of patient care. Therefore nursing staff retention is a priority for hospitals aiming to improve overall performance. The aim of the study is to identify the factors that promote and improve nursing staff retention.

The topic was chosen due to an interest in supporting nursing staff retention. It was also proposed on a Project Forum Day in Laurea University of Applied Sciences and given an acceptance, as a continuation from a recently completed thesis by Ville Päivinen. The thesis would be part of the Triangle Hospital-project by Hospital district of Helsinki and Uusimaa (HUCH) and Laurea University of Applied Sciences, as a part of the renewal projects of the Meilahti hospital area. Päivinen (2010, 5,23) studied the factors that new nurses look for when deciding their first work place and suggested that another thesis could be completed with the same idea, but instead of interviewing graduating nurses the informants could be experienced nurses interviewed on how the healthcare organization is improving staff retention. This study describes factors that motivate five experienced nurses to stay in their jobs in a medical ward of the Triangle Hospital as well as their suggestions for improving the staff retention on the ward.

Often employees are happy with their work if they get to use their skills and have opportunities for advancement. Rewards or money are not necessarily the whole motivation, since job satisfaction relies on numerous factors. It is valuable if the workplace feels good to be at or is fun. Management, co-workers, working conditions, rewards and the job itself play a part in satisfaction. An open working culture where the staff are encouraged to share ideas, influence decision making and know how they contribute, impact job satisfaction in a positive way. The work should be inspiring and reassure advancement in work performance and the worker's personal development. Suitable resources should be provided and originality and innovation stimulated. Dullness should be disallowed for instance with job rotation and various projects.

2 Nursing staff retention

2.1 Definition of staff retention

Staff retention, is a management term referring to efforts by employers with a focus on keeping current and valuable employees in their workforce. (McCellan, Stringer & Barr 2009, 352.) A stable workforce is disrupted when a worker leaves. (Morgan 2008, 259) Recruitment of new staff is expensive and time consuming. Therefore, the aim is to prevent employee turnover associated costs: such as hiring and training expenses; productivity loss; lost clients; and causing low staff morale and satisfaction scores. Thus, workforce health and productivity translate into direct and indirect costs for every employer, and both the workplace environment and the lifestyles of employees and their families influence those costs. (Faulkner 2003, 138, Finkler 2001, 87, Phillips & Connell 2003, 20).

Furthermore staff retention is about how an organization manages its workforce or more specifically, relationships within the workforce. To foster staff retention, organizations need to develop environments in which nurses want to work. Among other things, nurses want safe workplaces that promote quality health care. It is also important that nurses play an active role in shaping their environment. (Larson, Lakin, Bruininks & Braddock 1998, 26-30). Organizations require capable staff in the right places at the right times. So as to reach and maintain good staffing, the organization needs an effective plan for recruiting, choosing, training, developing and retaining the right people. In the process of planning these strategies the organization needs to realize the value of good staff, define good staff, find the reasons and attract the best possible people to join the organization in question. The staff make a difference at an organization and are its most valued advantage. (Raurarmo 2004, 38, Browell 2003, 5-6.)

It is evident that in a stable working community the vision is clear, leadership is supportive, individual and teamwork run smoothly, the atmosphere is open and problem solving change can be dealt with efficiently. (Multanen, Bredenberg, Koskensalmi, Lauttio & Pähkin 2004, 10-12). Common forums for discussions and decision-making are essential for a working community to develop. Building communality requires an open and prejudice free atmosphere. Every member of the community is responsible for making this happen as it is something that cannot be ordered from above or done for another person. (Kaivola & Launila 2003, 78, Mäkisalo 2003, 181).

Managers working towards staff retention should avoid making assumptions; instead, they should aim to identify the reasons behind voluntary resignation. Workplaces are unique and have different needs. Therefore there is no simple solution or best practice to solve the prob-

lem. A good approach is to try to understand a working community's specific turnover drivers and react with suitable solutions. (Taylor 2002, 4, McCellan et al. 2009, 352).

Organizations often react to the topic of staff retention when the problem of high staff turnover has already occurred. If the situation gets this far it has a financial impact on the organization as well as stress of finding the solution quickly. A better way is to have a proactive approach to staff retention which can avoid the problems from ever developing. (Phillips & Connell 2003, 20).

2.2 The importance of staff retention in an organization

At a time when nurse turnover rates are high, hospitals have to battle to recruit and retain their staff. Nurse Managers with their leadership traits have an impact on job satisfaction and nursing staff retention. (VanOyen 2005, 336.) Numerous other organizational concerns in healthcare result in staff retention being disregarded. High staff turnover is costly and diminishes on staff morale and patient dissatisfaction. Promoting staff retention can affect the organization much more than one might think. (Levoy & Levoy 2007, 231-232.) High staff turnover can have a negative effect on high quality patient care. A supportive workplace increases job satisfaction, retention of the workers and helps both the staff and patients' well-being. (Riggs & Rantz 2001, 43). The shortage of nurses will increase in the twenty-first century which can compromise patient care. Hospitals will have to pay more attention to recruitment efforts as well as retain the workers they have. (Brownson & Harriman 2000, 34).

The more experienced the staff, the more capable they are in dealing with varying problems at work, therefore retaining long-term workers is beneficial to the organizations. (Faulkner 2003, 138.) According to study conducted by Laine (2005, 5), nurses who were most prone to leave their workplaces were young nurses, short term staff, new nurses, and nurses not in leadership roles, temporary employees and nurses with symptoms of burnout. Nurses with longer professional education considered changing their workplace more often. The most popular places to change to were outpatient clinics and hospitals.

Employment and retention of adequate competent nursing staff leads to good patient outcomes and nurse satisfaction. (Finkler 2001, 87, Ostermeier & Bonnie 2008, 95). Hospitals would profit from having a clear plan for employment and retention strategies that contain the contribution of those nurses who take care of patients daily. Thus, retaining good workers is critical to the healthcare industry. Literature and best practices indicate that if employers treat employees as valued contributors, the employees will be more likely to stay in their jobs. (Gering & Conner 2002, 40-44, Faulkner 2003, 138.)

To this end, companies train their managers, offer competitive compensation plans, and increase benefits to secure their employees' loyalty. Despite these efforts, many healthcare

organizations experience a shortage of employees and high turnover rates. Moreover, employees who are planning to leave become less productive, and new employees require additional time to reach optimum productivity. The productivity of other employees may deteriorate as they spend time training and serving, as a resource for the new team member. Part-time replacement personnel are typically not as productive as full-time personnel. In some cases, quality of work could be affected during the transition. (Gering & Conner 2002, 40-44)

A survey done in Ireland in 2006 revealed several reasons of why healthcare workers leave their jobs. Main dissatisfactions which could lead to voluntary resignation were inconvenient working hours, lack of management support and pressures of workload. (Fleming & Taylor 2006, 67). Reasons for leaving a workplace may also be unhappiness, being treated badly, lack of orientation or bad relationship with the manager or a co-worker. (Morgan 2008, 259).

In order to attract good people, an organization needs to have a good reputation. If an organization has a reputation of being an unscrupulous place to work at, it will not appeal to decent workers. For example downsizing, cost reductions, outsourcing and restructuring has not improved staff loyalty in the past. Not feeling secure and having career development as a personal responsibility, has made workers think that their only option for advancement is to change workplaces. Therefore, organizations acquire ways to ensure staff commitment and retention. For instance overall flexibility and having emotionally intelligent managers who recognize employees' needs are also vital. In this way the managers can be more tolerant and considerate towards the staff, delegating, giving the staff more responsibility and autonomy as well as ensuring effective communication. (Browell 2003, 7-9, 15-18.)

Another crucially important aspect of retention and recruitment is orientation of the new workers. (Levoy & Levoy 2007, 234, Huotari, Kallunki & Kinnunen 2007, 1, Ackerman 2003, 41.) Orientation refers to all those actions which help the new worker in acquainting themselves with the co-workers, new workplace, and its customs and learn how to do their job efficiently and well. Orientation is supposed to give a correct image of the workplace and work. Orientation creates the basis for the new worker's professional methods in order for the employee to adopt the new workplace's customs. Therefore retention strategy should start already before recruitment.

A sufficiently oriented worker is more independent and active in their work and is capable of developing themselves as well as the whole working community. Good orientation suggests interest towards the new worker and their capabilities and is crucial for the whole unit to succeed in making good results in a pleasant and challenging working environment. (Huotari et al. 2007,1-3). Organizations that focus on good orientation get new workers familiar with their work efficiently and reach long-lasting success. How the new employees are treated on

their first day makes a permanent impression and sets the attitude for all that will follow. (Levoy & Levoy 2007, 231-232).

The lack of nurses is a liability for the hospital units employing them. Sufficient nurse staffing is significant for good patient care, diminishing burnout and keeping the nurses working where they are required. (Levoy & Levoy 2007, 231-232.) News of substandard care was three times as likely in hospitals with little staffing and little is maintained for nurses as in hospitals with above average staffing and support. Good quality staffing is not only a matter of complaints but infections and patient lives. A connection is found also between nursing workload and the nurses' hygiene standards. If the nurses' shifts are too hectic they may not consider washing their hands as frequently. (Chambers Clark 2009, 327.)

Furthermore, the values of the nurses frequently decide if they remain working in a hospital or leave. The study of nursing staff retention explored ways of staff retention that are meaningful for nurses and found three top ranking strategies which included teamwork, support from co-workers and intervallic increases in salary. (Huber 2006, 580-581.) The findings indicate that working in groups and getting support from co-workers is a meaningful way of retaining nursing staff. Therefore interventions that focus on promoting the increase of strong working relationships, strengthening successful team processes and obtaining significant results of group effort has an impact on rising staff retention. Work teams with excellent interpersonal relations facilitate the development of a strong feeling of connection and community between workers. Another factor workers appreciate in their workplace is sufficient problem solving. People need to see the challenging parts of their job being solved so that things would improve over time. (Huber 2006, 817).

McCellan, Stringer & Barr (2009, 352) also mention suitable financial compensation, realistic benefits and helpful feedback from co-workers as critical factors in staff retention. Furthermore they add possibilities for professional development, being heard and feeling needed as well as personal factors such as suitable working hours, possibility to support family members in need and good educational prospects to factors promoting staff retention. An organization that wants to prevent needless staff turnover will attend to the requests of their staff in multiple ways.

The notion of social support is promoting good relationships and preventing stress factors. Parts of this support are informational support such as advice, re-evaluating situations and help in practice. Supporting is also appreciation by positive feedback and loyalty, empathy, listening and encouraging. (Kivimäki, Eloväiniö, Vahtera & Virtanen 2002, 48). An attractive working community is inspired by its work, social responsibilities and setting goals. Us-spirit with helping each other and teamwork reflects also beyond the workplace. (Virtanen 2005, 13.)

It is possible to influence the nurses' poor commitment to their workplaces by organizing the work better, making sure that nurses are able to use their expertise in their work and develop their skills. Other factors that develop work commitment of nurses are continual professional training and increasing possibilities for the nurses to influence their work. Special attention should be applied to the working conditions of ageing nurses and promoting the commitment of young nurses by ensuring permanent work contracts and making sure that their professional education corresponds with their work. Also the work and working conditions of health centre bed wards should be improved in order to enable them to become more attractive workplaces for nurses. (Laine 2005, 5). Morgan (2008, 259) adds good working environment and comfortable collegial relationships to factors that promote staff retention.

Since improving staff retention involves more than one aspect, it is vital to maintain a holistic perspective of the situation. In addition to considering the working conditions of nurses, work-life balance must also be in the equation. The factors that promote work and leisure time harmonization are connected to the actual work, working community, work organization and the nurses' professionalism as well as to the life outside the workplace where family, relationships, hobbies, nature and religion are a crucial resource. Work and leisure time are connected, but for the most part work satisfaction depends on working conditions and personal life is affected by life outside of work. (Pekkarinen 2008, 9.)

2.3 Working welfare

2.3.1 Definition of working welfare

Working welfare means a working community that offers challenges, possibilities, safety and communality as well as, success and possibilities for further development. This goes beyond physical well-being of the workers or fun engagements for the workers once a year. (Ojala & Ahonen 2003, 16). Working welfare means different things to different people and therefore the promotion of working welfare in a workplace has to be both communal and individual combined with responsible leadership. (Hakanen 2004, 292.)

The basis of working welfare embraces both mental and physical needs. Physical factors are concerned with the working environment, working conditions, safety of staff development, work endurance and adequacy of sufficient staff. Whereas, the mental factors of working welfare encompass intangible aspects, such as attitudes, values and motivations. (Surakka 2009, 101-102.)

2.3.2 Effects of wellbeing at work

A holistic approach to an individual's well-being requires consideration of three personal key factors; life, history outside the workplace and work. A positive attitude obtained during life

affects the person's satisfaction at work. Physical, mental and social wellbeing are essential elements and should be the starting point of work satisfaction. Both negative and positive factors that affect an individual's well-being can accumulate, therefore even minute positive changes can build up to optimistic expansion in all areas of life. (Pekkarinen 2008, 9.)

To produce good results an employer has to create processes that conclude with the employees' wellbeing. It has become more and more important for the employers to understand the emotional level of the work. The managers are expected to master communication skills and notice the changes in the employees' wellbeing. Creating wellbeing requests cooperation of the whole working community. Working life today requires good adaptation skills in the presence of uncertainty, changes and rush. Work enjoyment in Finland has suffered from inflation throughout the 21st century. According to the statistics in 2007 over half of the employees find their work mentally hard, more people apply for sick leave due to depression and workplace bullying, Finland is on an internationally high level. (Nummelin 2008, 11-15.)

The following elements were developed by the Nursing Organizations Alliance as catalysts to assist hospitals and other health care facilities to create positive work environments. Such environments where: respectful collegial communication and behaviour; communication rich culture; a culture of accountability; the presence of adequate numbers of qualified nurses; the presence of expert, competent, credible, visible leadership; shared decision-making at all levels; the encouragement of professional practice and continued growth; recognition of the value of nursing's contribution. (The Nursing Organizations Alliance, 2004).

Studies have shown a connection between work satisfaction and managerial behaviours, salary and scheduling, nursing professional's age, years of experience, personality and education. It is also important that the workplace organization and their employees have compatible personalities. The nursing professionals compare their own values to the attitudes of an organization which affects the work environment. On the other hand, stress has been shown to be of negative influence towards nurses' work satisfaction. (Levoy & Levoy 2007, 232, Feldman 2003, 107-108.) What nurses consider stressful varies in units, practice areas and depending on the nurses own personalities. Consequently, qualitative studies on individual nurses and work units work satisfaction should be emphasized. (Feldman 2003, 107-108).

An ideal change at a workplace is the kind where the employees are involved already throughout the planning phase. Positive feelings give the energy to implement the change while feelings of uncertainty massively affect the possibilities of the employees to affect the change. If the management does not support the change or the employees are not taken into the working phase of the change it brings forth uncertainty and worry about the future along with negative feelings. (Nummelin 2008, 11-15). Staff empowerment motivates and makes the

staff content. By allowing the employees take the lead in the daily situations they will be energized and more committed. (Faulkner 2003,138).

Organizational citizenship behaviour has been studied as skills of an organization, individual or working communities. The behaviour has been categorized into the workers skills related to work, colleagues, clients and managers. Most studies concerning organizational citizenship behaviour have been about the factors leading to them. Factors that affect organizational citizenship behaviour are among other things work satisfaction, the possibility to take part into the decision-making in the workplace, justice inside the working community and versatility of work. The organizational citizenship behaviour has a connection between the communal working welfare. In the working communities doing well there were more organizational citizenship behaviour connected to internal communication and the behaviour was all in all better than in working communities not doing so well. The factors influencing a person's organizational citizenship behaviour are personality, skills, motivation, work atmosphere and quality of leadership and management. (Hakala-Ewing 2010,14-15).

2.4 Work satisfaction

2.4.1 Definition of work satisfaction

Work satisfaction is worker's emotional reaction towards work. Work satisfaction can also be described as a sum of the factors that affect the worker's attitude towards work. Numerous aspects contribute to work satisfaction; workload, working community, management, organizational working methods and the work itself. Work satisfaction comes and grows from smooth working where the worker feels success in their own meaningful work tasks. In the workplace a stable working community and leadership that promotes it significantly decreases the work burden. (Hakulinen 2008, 40). In addition, possibilities for professional development, positive attitude from the physician towards the nursing staff, national and the organization's internal image of nursing, financial compensations as well as flexible working hours have an impact on the working satisfaction of nurses.(Finkler 2001, 87-88).

Messer (2006, 13) suggests four keys in job satisfaction for improving staff retention. These keys include financial compensations, working environment, professional development as well as work-life balance. A supportive and positive workplace is stated to be at the top of the list of job applicants. Employees need to feel valued and engaged in addition to receiving managerial support in challenging times. The workers also need recognition for their input which is not necessarily just praising words. Actively including staff in problem solving processes at the workplace is an example of a more innovative way of appreciation.

2.4.2 Advantages of work satisfaction

As the nursing shortage is growing and staff retention issues are of the utter most importance it is crucial to comprehend and exploit sources of work satisfaction. Research has shown that content nursing professionals are generally more productive, perform better at their work and stay at their workplace longer. (Feldman 2003, 107.)

Employment and retention of sufficient and well-committed nursing staff are essential for providing safe and effective health care. In light of this, nursing leaders have been searching for ways to re-engineer the healthcare system particularly by providing an environment that is conducive to staff empowerment, work satisfaction and commitment. Work-related stress has a crucial role in the overall nursing shortage, nurses leaving the hospital duty or leaving the nursing profession entirely. There is a general agreement on the factors causing stress. Such factors include: inappropriate advice for inexperienced staff, conflicts within the multi-disciplinary team, bureaucracy, inadequacies of nursing care by others, verbal abuse from the patients and relatives, physical abuse from the patients, dealing with death and dying, shift work, lack of emotional support, and uncertainty due to political issues. (Taylor, White & Muncer 1999, 975-983)

Often employees are happy with their work if they get to use their skills and have opportunities for advancement. Rewards or money are not necessarily the whole motivation, since job satisfaction relies on numerous factors. It is valuable if the workplace feels good to be at or is fun. Management, co-workers, working conditions, rewards and the job itself play a part in satisfaction. An open working culture where the staff are encouraged to share ideas, influence decision-making and know how they contribute, impacts job satisfaction in a positive way. The work should be inspiring and reassure advancement in work performance and the worker's personal development. Suitable resources should be provided and originality and innovation stimulated. Dullness should be disallowed for instance with job rotation and various projects. (Browell 2003, 68-69.)

Extensive working hours are a health hazard for the workers and a safety risk at work places. Working hours have been found to have an impact on the worker's health and therefore sick leaves. Participating in their shift scheduling the workers are more satisfied and take less sick leaves. (Lallukka 2008, 16). Shift work has been discovered to have negative impact on the workers well-being as well. In the near future Finland will have a shortage of nurses when the baby boomer generation retires. To help the situation the employers should promote factors that increase work satisfaction. Social and health field should furthermore be made attractive for new students. (Vahla 2008, 13.)

Nurses are a vital part in the functioning of a hospital and, ultimately, they are the most frequent contact for people who come to hospital. As an example, the NMHSA (New Mexico Hospitals and Health Systems Association) considers that a most important role of hospitals must be to cultivate meaningful work for all workers, and particularly for nurses, in order to successfully recruit and retain sufficient staff to meet the growing demands for hospital care. By focusing on achieving and maintaining a balance in hospitals, staff satisfaction, safety, and productivity will improve clinical outcomes, enhancing client satisfaction and hospital financial viability. Hospitals should work to create and maintain a culture in which, nurses, and all workers, feel valued and that they are treated with respect. Hospitals should promote open, multidisciplinary communication and an environment that promotes teamwork. (New Mexico Hospitals and Health Systems Association, 2009.)

Multidisciplinary teamwork is a process where different professionals manage a mutual issue with respect for everyone's opinions and sharing their expertise equally with each other. The professionals concentrate on the customer's needs and systematically work for the customer's good as a team. The different professionals' knowledge and expertise unite benefiting the customer's care. And multidisciplinary teamwork breaks the traditional organizational barriers in order to provide the customer with the best possible care. (Isoherranen 2005, 20-21.)

Reasons for a worker to leave their organization have to do with work satisfaction. The employee can say they felt undervalued, no one noticed their efforts or they did not receive enough feedback or have enough opportunities. An effective appraisal system could prevent these situations. An organization with well-functioning appraisal system has regular evaluation and feedback going both ways between the employee and employer to prevent any dissatisfaction. It is also good to notice that money is seldom the key issue in staff retention where the workers who stay are as likely to complain about the pay as those who leave. (Pepitt 2004, 21, 24.)

Management of change entails thoughtful planning and sensitive implementation, and above all, consultation with and involvement of the workers affected by the changes. (Huber 2006, 817). Weak management of change and poor information can trigger feelings of inequality in the process of change. People appreciate to be told about things even if they would not agree with them. It is a fundamental need to be accepted and acknowledged in all situations. Uncertainty created by changes on the organizational level manifests itself in turnover, sick leaves and weakening of commitment of the staff. Planning changes together with the employees and giving them the possibility to share their experiences and notice that their opinions are taken into consideration affect wellbeing in a positive way. A change always means giving up something which makes it an evaluative process of life and therefore very personal. A well-managed change respects people in every phase of its process. Change is easier to

accept when it is justifiable and it can be seen as an understandable and necessary solution to problems and brings more value. (Nummelin 2008, 11-15.)

According to the study done in 2002-2003 among Finnish nurses the commitment to the nursing profession and work places is high. The strongest committers were nurses who saw their health, mental wellbeing and working ability as fine. In addition to these factors a leadership role at their work place and a good economic situation in life affected the commitment in a positive way. The weakening factors were found to be a feeling of insignificance and less importance of their work as well as poor developmental and influencing possibilities, bad work atmosphere, poor quality of management and not being able to use their expertise enough. Other work related factors that reduced commitment were the disappointment of not being able to provide the patients with the required care, poor advancing possibilities, physical burdening of the work and multiple night shifts. (Laine 2005, 5).

3 The Purpose of the study and research question

The purpose of this study is to describe the nursing staff retention in a medical ward of the Triangle Hospital.

The aim of this study is to identify the factors that promote and improve nursing staff retention.

Research question:

What are the factors that motivate nurses to stay in their jobs?

4 Methodological approach of the thesis

4.1 Qualitative research

“Qualitative research is a way to gain insights through discovering meanings. These insights are obtained not by establishing causality but through improving our comprehension of the whole. Within a holistic framework, qualitative research is a means exploring in depth, richness, and complexity inherent in phenomena.” (Burns & Grove 2005, 52).

The methodological approach of this study is qualitative research formed by the focus group interview as data collection applying inductive content analysis. The aspect of qualitative research is to understand the given research problem from the perspectives of the participants it involves. (Silverman 2006, 33). A qualitative approach is applied as the most suitable method with the focus group interview based on the synergy of the group interaction. The type of qualitative research is qualitative inquiry which is richly descriptive. The combination of descriptions of the context, the participants involved, data in the form of quotes from

documents are used to convey what researchers have learned about the phenomenon. These aspects contribute to the descriptive nature of qualitative research. (Merriam 2009, 16).

Qualitative content analysis brings contextual meaning in a text through the development of occurring themes derived from text to other states or properties to its sources that involve comparing, contrasting, and categorizing a collection of data. Content analysis as qualitative process is developed to generate content, whereby informants' actual words form concepts, or through hidden content, whereby, concepts are evolved from the interpretation and judgment of informants' responses. (Priest, Roberts & Woods 2002, 43-51). As a result, the central of interest is to derive the aspects of interpretation, categories, as near as possible to the original data. For that scope, the procedures of inductive category are applied, which are oriented to the reductive processes formulated. (Patton 2002, 21-22.)

4.2 Participants

This study's target organization is a medical ward from the Triangle Hospital of HUCH. The data were collected by interviewing five nurses from a medical ward at a given hospital. The participants had to have more than five years of experience in the ward, to make sure that they are fairly retained in their jobs.

The nursing chief received a permission request and thesis plan from the authors, where she was inquired to choose the most suitable wards to participate in the study. Subsequently, ward managers received an e-mail and an attachment of the thesis plan and personal invitation to the study to better understand the purpose of the study. After a considerable time of waiting for the reply the ward managers were contacted by phone and the interview time and place was settled. The ward managers were responsible for suggesting the participants for the voluntary study.

4.3 Focus group interview as data collection

Focus groups generate verbal and observational data and is generally coded and analysed by means of content analysis. (Stewart, Shamdasani & Rook 2007, 44, 51). Focus group interviews provide researchers with more surprises than other types of research, thus, it is an opportunity to gain insight into real experiences and valuable information. Interviewing is intensive work and challenges are prone to arise whilst aiming to gather data from multiple participants. (Webb & Doman 2008, 1.)

Focus group consists of 6-12 people who participate in an interview simultaneously. Though, groups with smaller size are researched too. In addition to being significantly more efficient, the data gathered is often richer. The discussion between the participants creates spontaneity and directness, which in turn may bring forth surprising perspectives and even lead to

completely new ideas. This method of data collection offers a safe environment for participants to share and discuss thoughts and feelings concerning specific matters. (Jackson 1998.)

Focus group gives more control of the process to participants and interviews are conducted with semi-structured open-ended questions, a fairly open framework which allow for focused, conversational, two-way communication, where, participants need both direction and flexibility. This can be achieved by preparing a suitable schedule, which will permit new possibilities to be considered. (Gerrish & Lacey 2006, 343.)

In order to collect data for the researches' aim the selection of focus group method of five participants was completed to discuss their personal views and experiences. Five registered nurses with more than 5 years of experience at the ward participated in the focus group discussion, from a variety of clinical expertise employed in medical wards of the Triangle Hospital. The logic behind this method leads to encouraging and questioning each other, which seemed to be an appropriate approach in obtaining rich amount of data.

The focus group included two thematic questions with a moderator and an observer. This enables new ideas and perspectives to be introduced in a social context, where people can consider their own views in the light of others. (Patton 1990, 124). Kitzinger (1994, 1995) argues that "interaction is the crucial feature of focus groups because the interaction between participants highlights their view of the world, the language they use about an issue and their values and beliefs about a situation, as well as to re-evaluate and reconsider their own understandings of their specific experiences."

The interview followed a well-structured sequence, beginning with an introduction of the study, explaining its purpose and ensuring the participants understand it with no objections to participate. The warm-up was followed by the main interview questions; these questions were structured around the aim of the study and remained consistent in sequence. (Gerrish & Lacey 2006, 337, 343,355.) The interview was planned in advance, agreed to be confidential and audio recorded.

Concerning this study the moderator's guiding role was in the first instance to present the introduction, explain its purpose, scheduling, technical concerns and planning the discussion's main sequences. While, the observer's role was to take notes, observe and audio record the discussion. However, the point was to be as less involved as possible in influencing the line of discussion. Nevertheless, the attempt was to create an atmosphere of trust and openness. (O'leary 2004, 167-168). In addition, towards the end of the interview key issues were summarized on which the interviewees had an opportunity to refine or change their responses. The focus group interview lasted approximately 40 minutes. To create a welcoming atmos-

where, we provided snacks and beverages during the interview. Considering the data that was obtained, the experience proved to be interesting and meaningful.

4.4 Data analysis

The data was collected via a focus group interview of five nurses. The interview took place in the hospital environment and all the volunteered nurses had at least five years of experience at the ward. After focus group and debriefing sessions were completed, the next step was to prepare data for analysis. This involved compiling information from audio recorder, and field notes into one aggregate format. After the data was compiled into a coherent and usable form the analysis began. The purpose was to organize the received data so that it can be integrated, interpreted and transformed into written text. By means of content analysis the data is analysed and summarized systematically and objectively, by identifying key themes or commonalities among respondents' comments.

The data was analysed with an inductive content analysis method. The authentic discussion was first written down as spoken and then divided into twelve different colour idea categories containing similar statements. These twelve idea categories were then narrowed down to reduced statements where combining abstract concepts were found. As Figure 1 reveals in page 20, the findings were formulated by twelve subcategories offering three categories and emerging in one main category.

The audio recording of the participants' views facilitated credibility and dependability of the data collection process. Once the data was transcribed, familiarization with the data began and authentic expressions were highlighted. Furthermore, data was divided into concepts that emerged from key expressions used by participants to answer our research question, where several subcategories were formulated in terms of the material and for that scope procedures of inductive method are used. The meaning of this procedure is to formulate a criterion of definition, derived from theoretical background and research question, which determines the aspects of the textual material taken into account. Following this criterion the material is worked through and categories are yet indefinite and step by step deduced. Categories are then revised, eventually reduced to main one category and checked in respect to their reliability. (Mayring 2000).

In other words, the analysing of the data was processed in three stages: grouping of data from key statements, reduction of statements and forming then subcategories. Subcategories with similar content were linked into three identified categories, thus, forming a unifying category. Illustrations are shown in Figure 1, 2, 3, and 4. The content analysis yielded a sort of a report of nursing staff retention. Data analysis was guided by the aim of the research study and research question. The aim was to keep the essential content as invariable as possible.

5 Findings

The data from the participants provided information on nursing staff retention. The analysis of the data gained evolved into three categories consisting of twelve subcategories and uniting into one main category. The Information obtained from the study about factors that motivate nurses to stay is descriptive, where the authors aim to understand the phenomenon as it is and identify key concepts.

The findings are presented in figures and texts. The interpretations are clearly presented and adequately supported by interviewees’ direct expressions. The most common statements of participants reflected on work satisfaction, working environment and nursing management accountability which are the three manifested categories assembled in one unifying category. (See Figure 1)

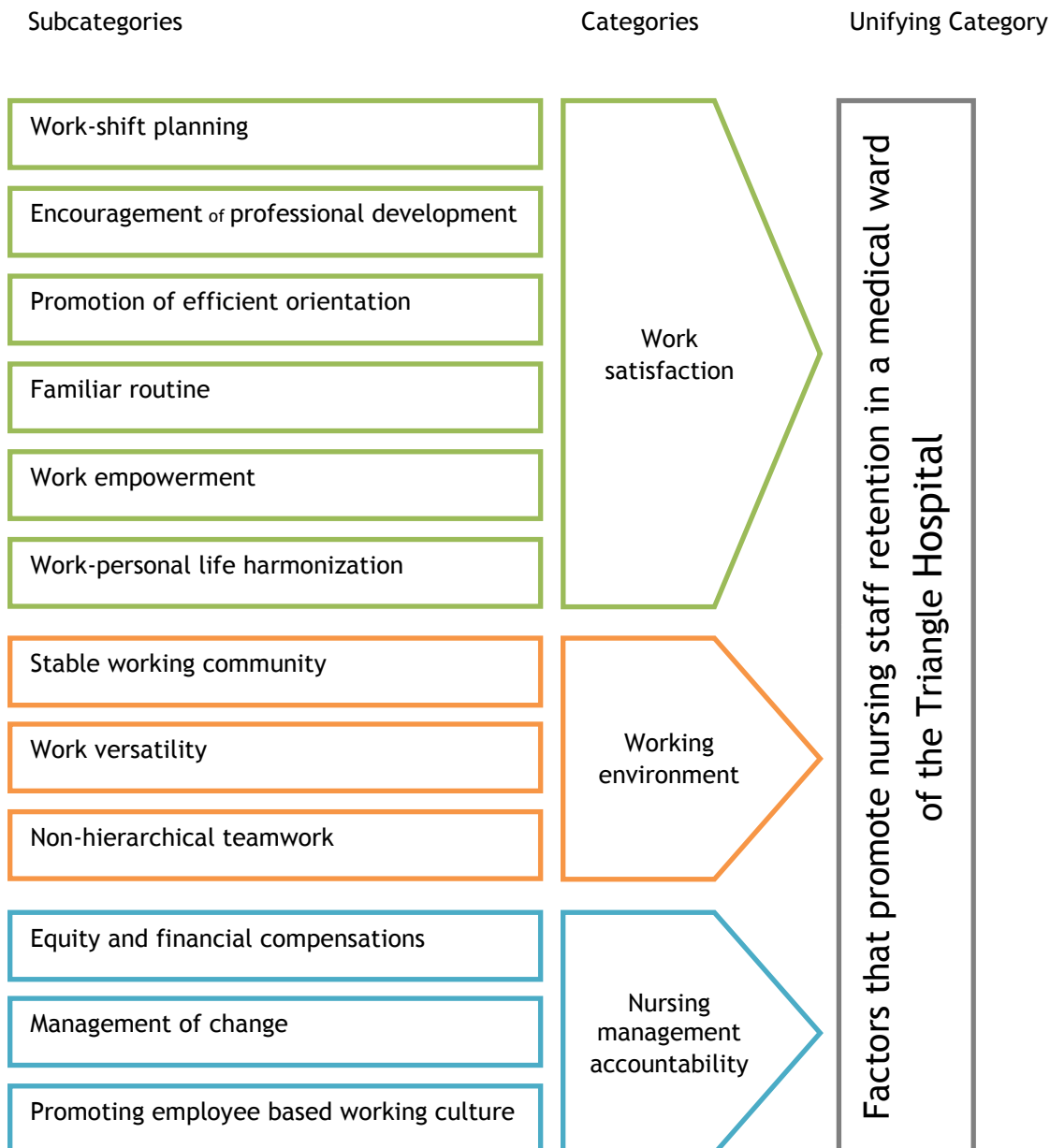


Figure 1. Factors that promote nursing staff retention in a medical ward of the Triangle Hospital.

5.1 Work satisfaction

Work satisfaction is one of the factors that affect nursing staff retention. Figure 2 illuminates how this was proved throughout the group interview where the interviewees repeatedly expressed their thoughts on matters of work satisfaction. The issues raised were opinions on concrete matters such as work shift planning, encouragement of professional development, promotion of efficient orientation for newcomers and work empowerment as well as more complex aspects like familiar routine or work personal life harmonization. (See Figure 2)

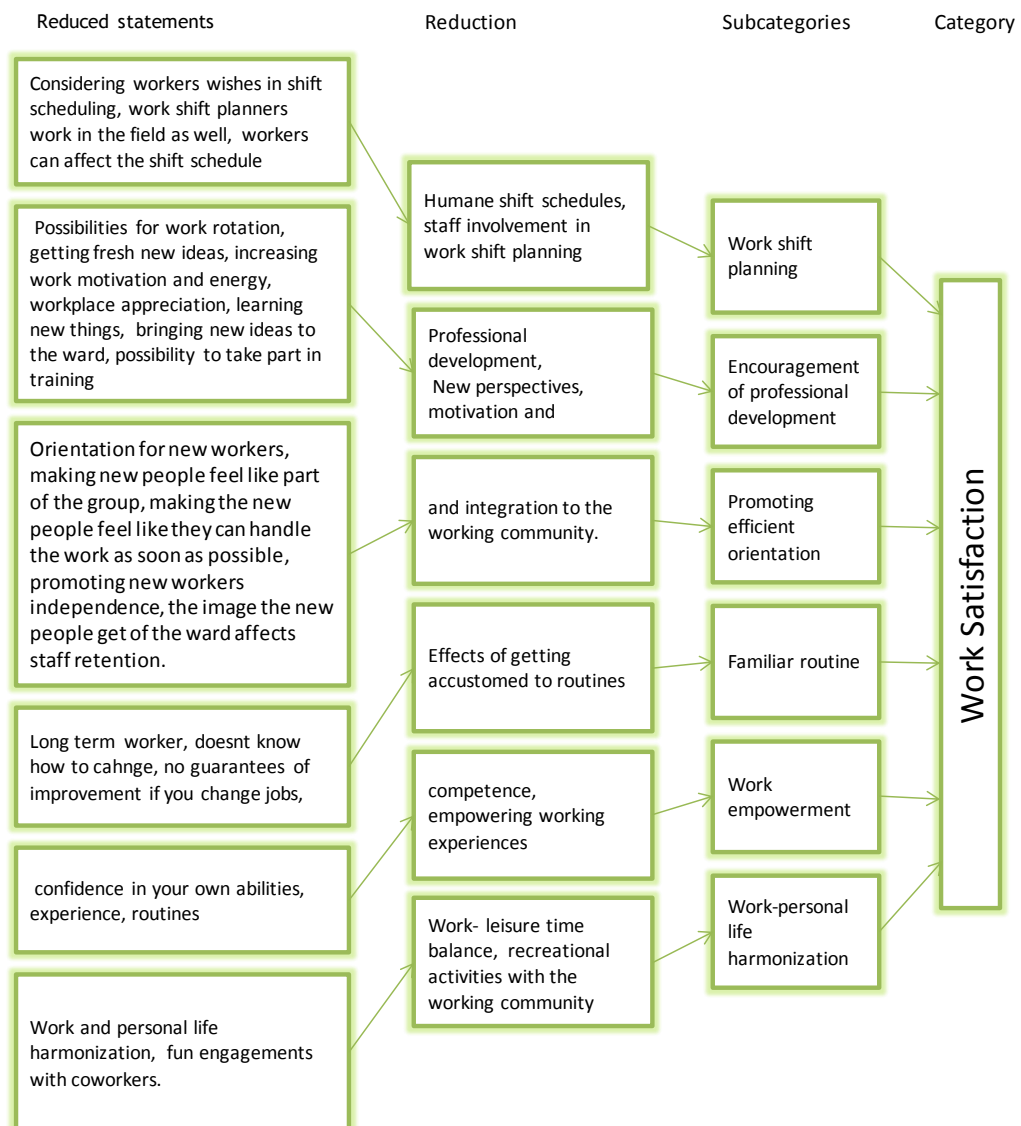


Figure 2. Data grouping of the Work Satisfaction category.

5.1.1 Work shift planning

One of the most common statements involving work satisfaction in the group interview was work shift planning. All of the nurses expressed their expectations of being involved in the work shift planning and also the view of the nurse who plans the shifts was heard. The interviewees were overall happy with the work shift planning and listed that as one of the factors promoting their retention on the ward. A big contributing factor was that the work shift planners were nurses on the ward themselves and in that way understood how to make the shifts bearable. The interviewees emphasized that they want to make suggestions to their own shift schedules and expect them to be heard. The following quotations include both, the shift planner nurse's and a shift worker nurse's views on the importance of shift scheduling.

“Mä otan aika paljon huomioon sen mitä ihmiset toivoo sitten niinkun kuunnellaan ehkä se että, et me ollaan itte työvuorosuunnittelijat myös tekemässä tätä käytännön työtä ja sä näät sen et mitä oikeasti sä jaksat tehdä, ja otat huomioon sen sitäkin kautta sen ettet tavallaan suunnittele semmosia päättömiä ihan ylipitkä tämmästä työputkee se kyllä vaikuttaa aika paljon sen työvuorosuunnittelun kautta.”

“I take into consideration what people wish quite much. Then like listening and that us work shift planners are also doing this practical work and see what you really are able to do and take it into consideration in that way as well, so that you don't in a way plan those endless work weeks. That affects quite much through that work shift planning “

“Mun on vaikea sanoa niin ku yleisesti mä voin sanoa mun pysyvyyttä voi parantaa täällä edelleen et hyvät työvuorosuunnittelut jatkuu ja huomioidaan ne omat toivomukset.”

“It is difficult for me to say in general but I can say how to improve my retention here with continuing the good work shift planning and noticing my own wishes.”

5.1.2 Encouragement of professional development

Another concern of the interviewees' was encouragement of professional development involving possibilities for further training or work rotation periods. After recently being moved to a new hospital building, the nurses felt similar to being in a new workplace, nevertheless, wished to have the opportunity for work rotation later on. The nurses also agreed that not

everyone is interested in the rotation possibilities but the most experienced workers desired change. The nurses were not aware of any possibilities for rotation at the time so this was one of their suggestions to improving staff retention.

It was also mentioned that the nurses did not wish the rotation to mean that they would have to change their workplace permanently but merely see something different for a while. A good length for a rotation period was suggested to be six months. The interviewees agreed that a work rotation would affect the worker positively and give new experience and energy to take back to their own ward once they return. The interviewees also stated trainings as one of the factors promoting staff retention that already is implemented but furthermore wanted to enhance more training possibilities as part of their professional development. The following quotations show how the nurses valued these factors.

“Ja sitten se tieto että, voi mennä työnkiertoon niin se on yks asia.”

“And the knowledge that you can go to work rotation is one thing.”

“No varmaan et pääsee koulutuksiin ja tämmösiin ja kyl nyt on päässykki tärkeä asia kans.”

“Well I guess that you can go to trainings and those types of things and we have which is an important thing as well.”

“Semmosta ihmistä se ainaki vois virkistää, joka on ollu pitempää samassa paikassa ni, ehkä oppis sitte taas niinko arvostaa sitä omaa työpaikkaansa ja miettimään et haluaako oikeesti vaihtaa.”

“At least the sort of person who has been in the same workplace for long it could refresh and maybe you would learn to appreciate that your own work place and reconsider if you really want to change it “

5.1.3 Promotion of efficient orientation

Although many of the nurses on the ward were long term workers they pointed out orientation of new comers as one of the factors that should be improved. The nurses emphasized orientation as making the new workers adequate part of the working community. The nurses were pointing out issues how to maximize the orientation possibilities for the tutor and make the integration period for the new worker as smooth as possible in order to promote staff retention and thus the wellbeing of the entire working community. The nurses wanted new workers to become part of the group and take the ward as their own as soon as possible. The field of expertise on the ward is very specific therefore the nurses wanted to make the orien-

tation efficient enough to make the new workers feel like they can handle it and enjoy the work, become independent and get the know-how as soon as possible.

“Otettais mukaan sillä tavalla niin ku pidettäis huolta niistä uusista ihmisistäkin. Et muuten kiva kaikilla on tää perehdytys et haluttais et tulis niinku mahdollisimman nopeesti joukkoon sopivaks.”

“Would take them along and take care of the new people as well like in other ways too even though everyone has this orientation that we would want that they would become suitable for our own group as soon as possible.”

”Kyllähän se niinku vaikuttaa pitkälti siihen pysyvyyteen et minkälaisen mielikuvan (uudet työntekijät) saa siitä osastosta.”

“It does affect the retention what kind of impression we give of the ward.”

The interviewees were pleased that the nurse turnover rate on their ward was not very high and therefore their working community included many long term nurse experts who they saw as a valuable resource. Furthermore the nurses expressed that it would be stressful if the workers on the ward would be constantly changing and new workers required orienting. Training new workers calls for time from the nurses which they have to find during their already busy days. In addition to new workers the nurses have to tutor nursing students during their practice placements on the ward from time to time. It was discussed that additional time or reduced other responsibilities would be beneficial for those who orient new workers or train students. Overall the orientation of new workers was an issue that most of the nurses interviewed wanted more attention and improvement for.

5.1.4 Familiar routine

Some of the nurses interviewed had been working in the same ward for decades and stated that as one of the retaining factors because they said they were unable to change. These long term workers were comfortable with their work and did not see a good enough reason to switch jobs. Others had been to see different units and found that this ward is better compared to others. Changing workplace would mean leaving their comfort-zone and making work more demanding. The nurses saw no good reason to leave their work since they were comfortably familiar with their routine. The following quotes are from nurses who are content with their workplace and see more effort in changing jobs than staying where they are.

”Ollu niin kauan samassa työpaikassa ni ei oikee osaa vaihtaa pitäis tietää niin varmasti että, kannattaa lähteä toiseen paikkaan pitäis olla jotain tällasia etuja, etuja siihen verrattuna.”

“Have been in the same workplace for so long that can’t really change. Should know for sure that it is worthwhile to go to another place and should have some kind of benefits, benefits in comparison.”

“Se että on todennu tän hyväks työpaikaks sillä että, on käyny kurkistelemassa eri paikkoja niin on huomannu et tää on oikeen hyvä työpaikka.”

“The fact that I have discovered this to be a good workplace by peeking into different places, and noticed that this is a really good workplace.”

The nurses were happy with their ward and therefore did not think of changing jobs but still mentioned that in order to consider another work place they should have a confirmation of benefits gained from the change. Therefore familiar and comfortable routines are a retaining factor for staff on the ward. Even though new things can boost the working motivation at times, usually having a familiar routine at work is significant.

5.1.5 Work empowerment

The most experienced nurses on the ward agreed that one factor that makes them stay at the ward is their expertise. They can be confident in what they know even with changing situations and problems in patients’ recovery. With patient complications there has typically been a similar problem before during their career which enables the nurses to prepare and evaluate what is to come. The interviewees stated that learning new things is always demanding and therefore it is good if there is not that much new to learn all the time due to reoccurring problems and uniting factors in the patients. The nurses experienced confidence in their own abilities as an empowering factor in their work. Confidence and expertise at work was seen as a retaining factor. These quotes show their motivation:

“Ja sitten ainakin se motivoi aika vahvasti et tiedän et mä osaan, aika hyvin tän työn mitä mä teen täällä osastolla ja ettei tarvi ainakaan hirveesti ahdistua siitä etten osais.”

“And at least that motivates strongly that I know that I can, and know pretty well this job that I do in this ward and I don’t at least have to become really distressed by not knowing.”

”On työvuosia niin paljon takana ni on se sillä tavalla niinku osaa tehdä sitte sitä työtä.”

“So many years of work experience that it is so, that when you know how to do the work.”

5.1.6 Work-personal life harmonization

It was furthermore mentioned throughout the discussion that the nurses valued their life outside the workplace and did not want the work to take all their energy. They also reminisced on their nights out with the co-workers and valued free time with them. Work and personal life balance was seen as a valuable part of work satisfaction. Where the nurses wanted to make sure their shift schedule and work load would leave time for their personal life they also hoped for more encouragement in the recreational activities within the working community. Leisure time activities with co-workers were a factor listed by the nurses that could improve staff retention on the ward. Activities and outings with co-workers outside the workplace could improve the atmosphere and relationships in the working community.

“Tavallaan se ei kuluta sitten niinku yksityiselämässä niin paljon kun sä osaat työsi niin ei vie sitten mehuja vapaa-ajalta.”

“In a way it doesn’t consume that much in your personal life when you know your work so it doesn’t take the juice away from your free time.”

”Sitten yhteiset illanvietot, keila illat. Ennen oli enemmän sellasta yhteistoimintaa.”

”Then the get-togethers after work, bowling nights. We used to have more of that sort of synergy before.”

5.2 Working environment

There are several conditions in the environment that effect the motivation of the staff. Participants’ motivation referred to the way in which working community, work versatility and non-hierarchical teamwork are shaped. According to participants fostering working satisfaction and collegial interaction may improve nursing staff’s motivation and retention. Often the focus is conditions of the work environment that may have a positive or negative impact in nurses in terms of how they feel about their work and positions. (See Figure 3)

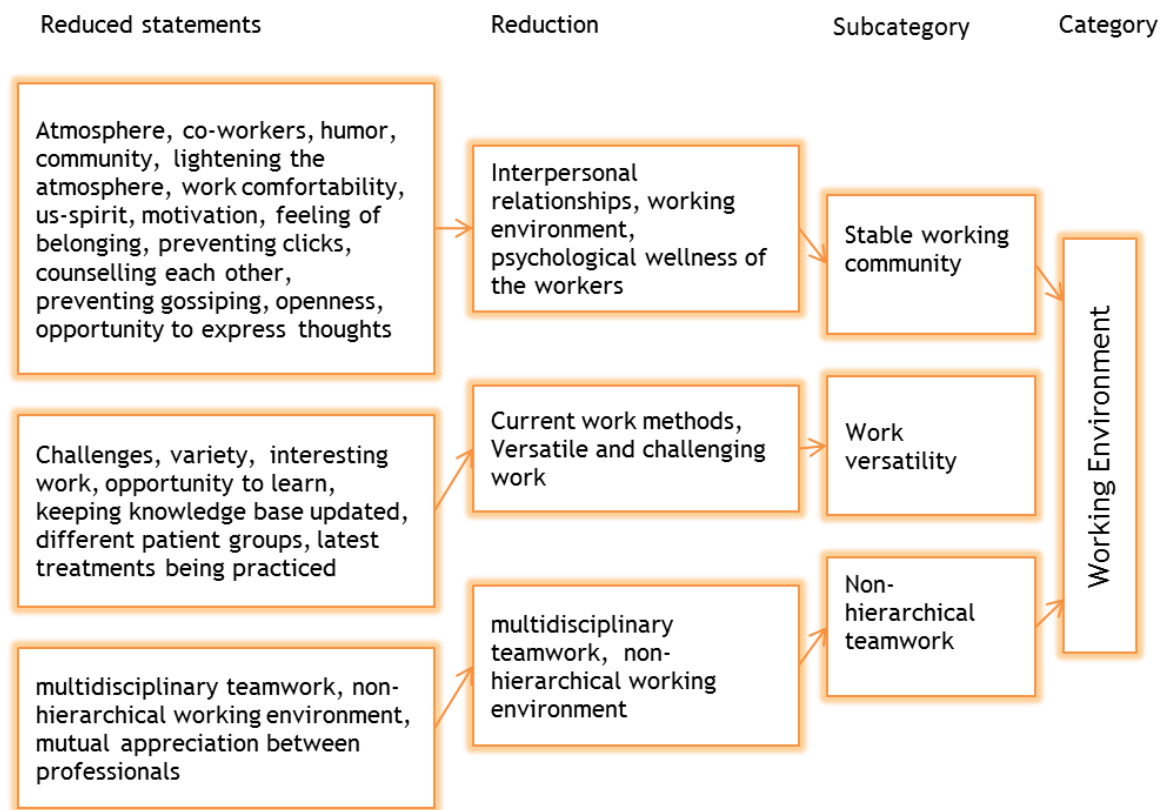


Figure 3. Data grouping into Working Environment Category.

5.2.1 Stable working community

The most important factors reported by participants in this study were related to working atmosphere, collegial relationships and feeling of belonging in the work community. Good collegial relationships reinforced friendly and supportive atmosphere among the staff and enabled open communication where opinions can be discussed cooperatively and clashes are prevented. One can feel that this is our ward and our ward is the best. Factors such as these were associated with increasing motivation and retention. In case the working community had had a challenging member the nurses had been able to counsel each other without going to the other extremity of gossiping. The following comments from participants denote this:

”Tietysti ne työkaverit on hirveen iso osa sitä työssä viihtyvyyttä et vaikka se ois kuinka raskasta jos sun työyhteisö työkaverit on sellasia kenen kaa sä voit tehdä niinku joka asiasta vaikka ne ois miten kamalia tai muuta niin sä voit nauraa tietyllä tavalla vähän sellasta ironista tavallaa seki jo voi keventää niitä tilanteita huomattavasti.”

“Of course those colleagues are a huge part of the work satisfaction so that no matter how hard it was, if your working community, co-workers are such that you make everything, no matter how horrible or whatever, so that you

can laugh in a way a bit ironically, in a way that can already lighten the situations remarkably.”

“Joo no varmaan samat just tää että, yhteisö et pystyis avoimesti sanomaan mielipiteensä niinko asioista ni se ois aika tärkeää ja just noi hyvät niinku sellanen hyvä ilmapiiri jossa vois niitä mielipiteitensä ilmaista.”

“Yes well I guess the same this community so that you could openly express your opinion on a topic would be quite important and good atmosphere where those opinions could be expressed.”

”Kyllä se yleensä on jos on se me-henki niin parantaa sitä motivaatiota jos tavallaan tietää että, kuuluu johonki. Tää on tää meidän osasto ja meidän osasto on paras. Jokaisen pitäis ajatella sillä lailla että, niin kyllähan se parantaa sitä viihtyvyyttä jos tavallaan tulee sellanen osasto jossa on klikkejä ja sä olet ulkopuolinen niin ei kukaan sellasessa halua olla.”

”Usually if there is that Us-spirit it improves that work motivation when in a way you know that you belong in something. This is our ward and this ward of ours is the best. That is how everyone should think and it does improve the work satisfaction rather than if there is a ward with clicks of people and you are left on the outside, I’m sure no one would like to be there.”

The importance of humour and nice co-workers was mentioned repeatedly during the interview. All of the participants expressed good collegial relationships as a resource and a valuable motivation in their work no matter how busy or stressful a day might be. One of the participants also stated that one nasty colleague can ruin an otherwise good workday which only emphasizes the significance of a supportive working community and collegial relationships. Ideally the support and kindness of the rest of the staff would overrule one negative voice as mentioned by a nurse in the interview.

5.2.2 Work versatility

Participants emphasized the importance to cultivate opportunities for work versatility. Versatility is seen an opportunity for the nurses to expand and upgrade their knowledge base and professional development. Apart from having a challenging and interesting job one of the participants expressed the desire to be in a workplace, where utilization of latest treatments is practiced. Versatile patients and opportunities to learn new things in the job were also seen as a resource. Participants contributed statements:

”Ja pitämään niinku niitä omia tietoja ajan tasalla niinku monelta eri alueelta että, se on ollu kyl semmonen tosi mielenkiintonen.”

”And to keep your knowledge updated like from many different aspects, that has been really interesting.”

”Ja kyllä mä haluan olla semmosessa työpaikassa missä niinku sovelletaan sitä viimesintä, viimesimpiä hoitomuotoja potilaiden hoidossa.”

”I want to be in a workplace that applies the latest treatments in patient care.”

”Ja työ on haasteellista ja mielenkiintoista.”

”And where the work is challenging and interesting.”

5.2.3 Non-hierarchical teamwork

Participants rated the nature of professional relationships with doctors as one of the reasons that have the added effect for the retention. For the healthy working environment participants find it important to have the doctors' appreciation towards the staff and by also acknowledging the interdependence between multidisciplinary teams. The non-hierarchical team work is essential to having empowered team members. The interviewees agreed that at times it depends on the individual when some doctors work well together with nurses whereas others do not. Even though the frequently changing doctors were sometimes seen as a problem the nurses found the positive side of that to be the knowledge that in most cases the challenging individuals would change as well.

”Ja sitten kyllähän silläkin on merkitys että, lääkärit arvostaa henkilökunta lisää sitä pysyvyyttä, edellisten lisäksi.”

”And it does have an effect when the doctors appreciate the staff, that increases the retention in addition to the previous.”

”Semmonen asia tulee mieleen ainaki täällä meidän osastolla et eri ammattiryhmät toimii ihan kivasti yhteen ettei oo semmosta et, esimerkiks lääkäreitä kohtaan tarvi pokkuroida niinku ehkä jossain muissa paikoissa saattaa olla.”

”This sort of factor comes to mind that at least on our ward different professionals work nicely together and there is no humbling ourselves in front of the doctors like maybe in some places they have to.”

5.3 Nursing Management Accountability

All participants brought up the matter of acknowledging their expectations, responding to the different needs, and to be listening to as part of the team. Also there was a strong suggestion of promoting reliable support, advocacy and flexibility from nurse manager. As Figure 4 illustrates that the nature of supportive effective management described by participants included those subcategories: equity and financial compensations, management of change and promoting employee based working culture.

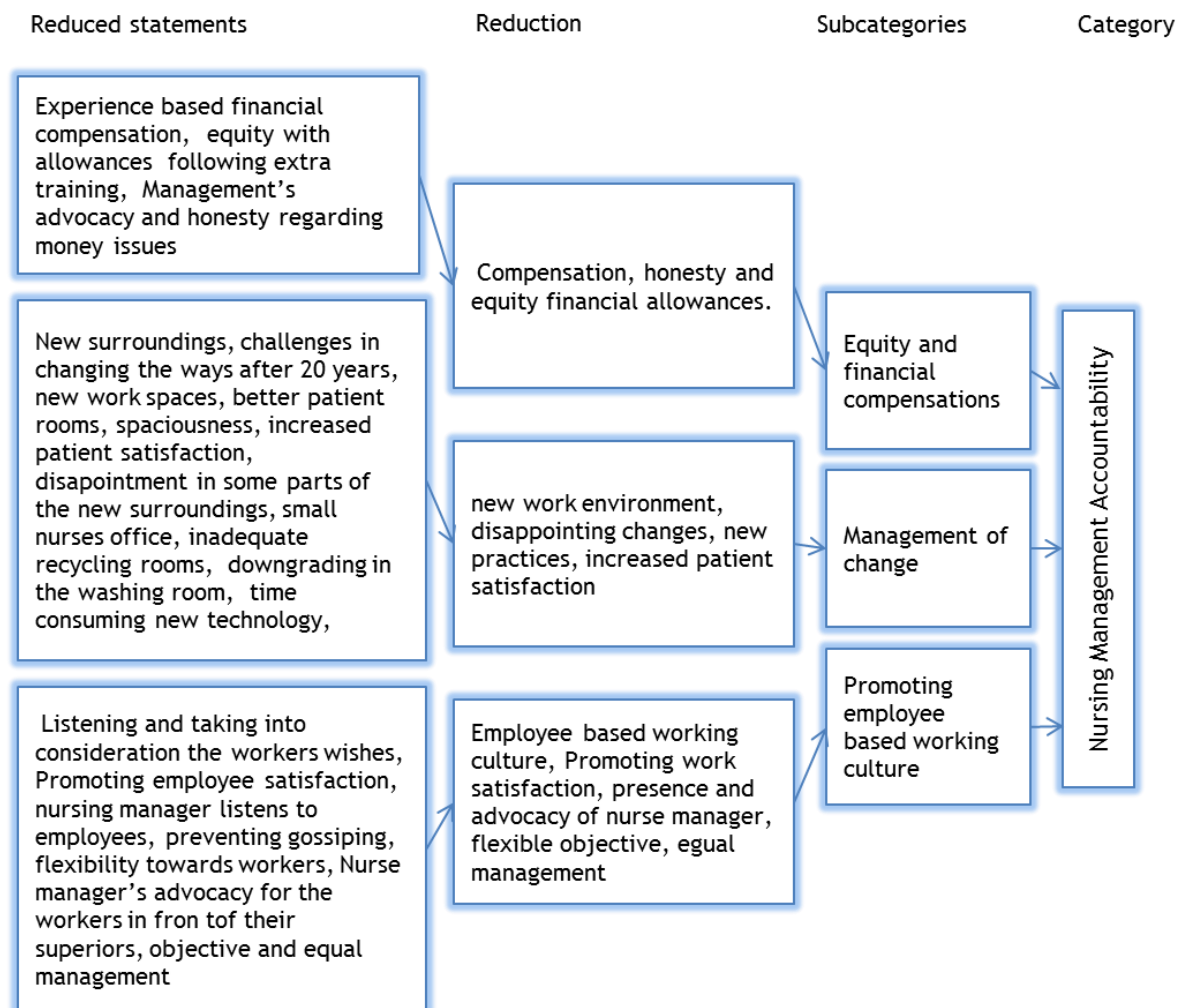


Figure 4. Grouping of the data into Nursing Management Accountability category.

5.3.1 Equity and financial compensations

The issue of financial compensation was elevated during the discussion, although the interviewees knew nurses' salaries are not easily changed in Finland, participants suggested financial allowance for long term workers as a fair method for the employer to show appreciation towards committed individuals. One disappointing factor that the nurses wanted honesty with

was experience and training based allowances that had been shared unequally. Some workers had previously gotten an allowance after training when others with the same credits did not. The participants were bothered by this inequity and pondered the reasons behind it. After nurses with the allowances had left the workplace the interviewees saw no reason for that extra money not be added to those with the same training credentials. It was evident from the participant´s responses that maintaining equity in salaries among employees is a major reason why nurses remain at the workplace, although one can hardly affect it. These factors are evident from the following statements:

”Ja tietysti nää mihin nyt ei hirveesti voi vaikuttaa ni, tämmöset palkassa huomioitavat kokemukseen perustuvat lisät.”

”And of course these that you cannot really much affect these experience based increases in the salary.”

”Kai täällä on jonkin näkösi henkilökohtasi lisiä mä oon ite ollu vast sen viis vuotta ni ei oo tää puoli niin tuttua mutta, onhan tuo nyt aina motivoivaa jos jotenki rahallisestikin sitä huomioitas pysyvyyttä.”

”I suppose they have some sort of personal allowances here. I myself have only been here for those five years so this side is not that familiar but it is always motivating if the retention would be somehow financially noticed.”

”Se on vähä hassua tämmönen tietty epäoikeudenmukaisuus. Kuitenki on samoilla ansiolla ja osa saanu lisät ja osa ei.”

”It is a little bit funny this particular unfairness. After all with the same qualifications some have gotten the allowances and others have not.”

Participants also added that financial compensations must be deliberated with a holistic approach to meeting the varying needs of the diverse expertise while maintaining equity among workers.

5.3.2 Management of change

After recently moving into the new hospital facilities the workers felt like being oriented to a whole new workplace. Whereas the new surroundings were found to be inspiring and they also produced more workload when the nurses had to change their routines, get accustomed to new technology and documentation programs. The new ward was seen as wonderful but at the same time some expectations had not been met. Nevertheless, the participants did not see the changes in the surroundings as a major factor affecting staff retention on the ward.

According to participants these aspects were relevant to new work settings and patient satisfaction. The participants found the change of the environment partially disappointing from staff standpoint; however, patient satisfaction was increased by new physical environment changes. The following comments from participants point this out:

“Aika moni on odottanu tätä niin hirveesti et, sit nää tietyt puutteet mitä täällä on niin ne äärsyttää kyllä ihan hirveesti.”

“Quite many have really waited for this and then these specific short comings that they have here annoy terribly.”

”Kyllä tää ihan fyysisiltä tiloiltaan et potilashuoneet on suurempia että, ihan luksusta verrattuna niihin vanhoihin. Nyt mahtuu kaikki välineet mitä kuntoutuksessakin tarvitaan ja hyvät potilashuoneet. Kyllä se on ainakin mun mielestä kun tässä nyt on ollut nämä kuukaudet nin ollut kyllä sellanen iso asia.”

“With the physical spaces this is like the patient rooms are bigger which is luxury compared to the old. Now, all the appliances needed in rehabilitation fit and the good patient rooms. At least in my opinion now that we have been here these months it is a big thing.”

“Nyt kun ollaan muutettu tänne kolmioon niin tähän on vähän niinkun uudessa työpaikassa olis sama tilanne koska on niin paljon uutta.”

”Now that we have moved here to the Triangle Hospital this is like being in a new workplace because there is so much that is new.”

5.3.3 Promoting employee based working culture

The majority of the participants expressed their need for the nursing manager to listen and take into consideration the workers' wishes and be flexible. The hospital environment was seen very bureaucratic to the workers where constant demands come from higher up in the organization without explanations. Therefore the nurses set huge value and responsibility to their nearest nursing manager to advocate and stand up for the workers in front of their superiors. Nursing manager's advocacy was stated to be a crucial factor promoting staff retention as well as one that still requires improvement. The nurses wanted the nursing manager to communicate that she is on their side. Participants also stated that an essential element of promoting employee based culture is characterized by openness in preventing conflicts and not tolerating disruptive behaviour. Nurse Manager has to create an environment of flexibility

where everyone feels respected, supported and equal. This is what was reported by participants:

“Kyllä se tavallaan sen esimiehen pitäis olla sen henkilökunnan puolella ja jollakin tavalla puolueeton ettei ota niinku tämmöset tai ei anna niinkään semmosten henkilökohtaisten mielipiteiden vaikuttaa.”

“In a way the manager should be on the staff’s side and in a way neutral so that they at least would not consider things through their own personal opinions.”

”Ainaki mun mielestä meidän osastolla justii myös niinku esimiestaholta tulee selkeesti et semmostä ei myöskään tai sitä ei oo mutta, ei myöskään suvaita semmosta niinku selän takana puhumista ja tämmöstä, se on tärkeitä.”

“At least in my opinion on our ward like managerial level suggests that also a certain kind of talking behind some one’s back, which does not exist, but it would not be tolerated. This sort of thing is important.”

”Kyllä se esimies kans tietyllä tavalla myös vaikuttaa siihen työssä viihtyvyyteen. Ja tietysti niillä esimiehillä on tietyt rajat jos menee sellanen. Tietynlainen joustavuus työntekijää kohtaan on se mikä myös vaikuttaa siihen työssä viihtyvyyteen.”

”The manager in a way affects the work satisfaction and of course them managers have certain boundaries and certain flexibility towards a worker also is what matters in work satisfaction.”

6 Discussion

6.1 Ethical considerations

In November of 2010 the research permission request according to the instructions of HUCH was sent to the target organisation i.e. the Triangle Hospital. The permission was granted by the end of the year 2010.

Ethical considerations were taken into account in every phase of qualitative research. They were “present from the beginning and are woven throughout every step of the methodology” (Talbot 1995, 36). The protection of study participants is important regardless of the research paradigm, whether it is a qualitative or quantitative approach. The participants’ identity has to be protected and the anonymity assured. Moreover, the gained data is handled confidentially and the participants are not identifiable. (Speziale & Carpenter 2007, 57-58.) The inter-

view was audio recorded; still the participants are not identifiable in the final report. The data was handled confidentially and it was assured that the collected data will be destroyed after the end of analysis.

The focus group theme discussion bases on voluntariness and confidentiality between the researchers and the participants involved. As a ground for voluntariness the participants have to be informed appropriately and sufficiently about the background and purpose of the research. The letter requesting participation in the study was distributed to participants by HUS contact person. Also an attachment of the thesis plan was sent to the contact person and ward managers for a better understanding of the purpose of the study. (Fry & Johnstone 2002, 21-25.)

Informed consent is a vital part of any scientific research according to the guidelines of the principle of respect for persons. Informed consent is an interactive progression where people voluntarily accept to take part in a research study after the reason of the study, risks, profit and alternatives have been carefully explained and understood. The three most important things in informed consent are sufficient information, understanding of that information and voluntary part taking. (Marshall 2007, 23.)

Polit & Beck (2004, 151) defined informed consent as follows: "Informed consent means that participants have adequate information regarding research; are capable of comprehending the information; and the power of free choice, enabling them to consent voluntarily to participate in the research or decline participation." The participants of this study were provided with relevant and adequate information when obtaining informed consent (See Appendix 1)

The increase of research with humans has led to ethical concerns about the rights of the study participants. Ethical principles are used to justify actions and assist to resolve moral dilemmas. Four major ethical principles incorporated into most guidelines are autonomy, beneficence, nonmaleficence, and justice. (Talbot 1995, 487-488)

Autonomy, the primary of this word is self-determination. The complexity of this concept is increased by its link with liberty. Individuals are to be permitted personal liberty to determine their own actions meaning that an individual is free to make decisions without influence by others. When the term "autonomy" is applied in contemporary health care practice and research the focus is on the right to informed consent. Thus, self-determination means that prospective participants have the right to decide voluntarily whether to participate in the study, without the risk of incurring penalty or prejudicial treatment. (Polit, Beck & Hungler 2001, 77-78.) Participants of this study were given the autonomy to decide freely whether they would like to participate in the study and the right to continue or withdraw at any time.

The principle of beneficence, doing good and preventing harm, applies to providing confidentiality and anonymity for research study participants. Beneficence involves the protection of participants from physical and psychological harm, protection of participants from exploitation; therefore, the performance of some good should outweigh any associated risk. (Fry & Johnstone 2002, 21-25). The researchers of this study were neutral in opinion and adhered to honesty, diligence and accuracy.

The principle of nonmaleficence implies that exposing study participants to experiences that result in serious harm, whether physical, emotional, legal, financial, or social harm is unacceptable. (Talbot 1995, 487-488). The researchers must do everything possible to minimise such risks in research study. The participants were ensured that there would be no financial gain out of the study and the information given by them would be used for learning intentions and further development only

The principle of justice includes the participants' right to fair equitable treatment and their right to privacy before, during, and after their participation in the study. Concerning privacy, researchers certified that their research is not more intrusive than it needs to be and that the participants' privacy is maintained throughout the study. (Polit, Beck & Hungler 2001, 81-82.)

6.2 Trustworthiness

Qualitative research aims to find the facts, however the method of the findings is conditional and that explanations are linked to time and place. (Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara 2007, 25). All the participants of this study were experienced nurses with similar and different views on the research study. In interviewees' responses were raised individuals' personal characteristics and experiences. The choice of the target participants has also influence on the findings. (Nieminen 1997, 215-221.)

In qualitative content analysis certain subjectivity can't be avoided due to the researchers' analytical thought processes, however, consumers should be able to assess whether the methods and approaches used by authors lead logically to conclusions drawn. (Patton 2002). To enhance trustworthiness a report about the researchers own analytical processes and procedures is given to the tutors for evaluation. In this study, measures to achieving trustworthiness include: credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability.

Credibility deals with the focus of the research and refers to confidence in how well data and processes of analysis address the intended focus. (Talbot 1995, 487-488). The focus group interview was a new learning experience for the researchers. The researchers based the knowledge on literature review and tutorial guidance. Because this was a positive experience the researchers are even more interested in the phenomenon. To demonstrate credibility the progress of the research process and data analysis is described thoroughly and accurately and

the findings are illustrated with direct quotes in both languages Finnish and English to enhance credibility.

The question of transferability refers to the extent to which the findings can be transferred to other work settings or groups. This is accomplished by providing sufficient descriptive data in the research report for consumers to evaluate the applicability of the data to other context. (Lincoln & Guba 1986, 73). In this study transferability is attained by explaining thoroughly the concept of nursing staff retention. Because this study produces only a certain amount of nurses' opinions, therefore the findings are not directly transferrable to another work setting; nevertheless, the findings are indicative. The concreteness of the findings provides a lot of potential for exploitation. (Nieminen 1997, 215-221.) Moreover, the findings are described in a thorough and practical way that can be utilized in practice.

The aspect of dependability that is, the degree to which data change over time and alterations made in the authors' decisions during the analysis process. (Graneheim & Lundman. 2003, 105). To assessing data dependability the interview transcripts were read the authors, and constructed independent interpretive summaries of the interview and then achieved consensus on the final version.

Confirmability refers to the objectivity or neutrality of the data. It ensures that the findings, conclusions, and recommendations are sustained by the data indicating that there is an internal agreement between the investigator's interpretations and the actual evidence. (Talbot 1995, 487-488) Confirmability in this study is obtained by coherent relationship between data gathered from participants and the theory to which it was related.

6.3 Discussion of the findings

The purpose and aim of this study was to describe the factors that promote and improve nursing staff retention in a medical ward of the Triangle Hospital. With one research question - what are the factors that motivate nurses to stay in their jobs- answers were sought to the thematic questions. The responses represent only the opinions of a given ward's staff.

According to this study, factors that promote nursing staff retention are related to working satisfaction, working environment and nursing management accountability. By paying attention to those aspects' contents the retention of nurses can be influenced. The significance of the study resolute to retention of staff and, therefore impacting positively on performance, results and success of the health care organization (Laschinger, Wilk, Cho & Greco 2009, 636-646).

Overall the participants of this study were pleased with the work shift planning where they could contribute to their own schedules and agreed that it is an important aspect on their

work satisfaction. Sufficient orientation for new workers showed to be a priority for many and the nurses saw the value of investing in the stable and open working community. Good co-workers, non-hierarchical multidisciplinary teamwork and an open and humorous atmosphere seemed to be a factor that motivated many to stay on the ward. On one hand it was emphasized how current working methods and versatile patient groups were enriching but on the other, routines and self-confidence in the field of expertise made the work less stressful for the nurses.

The participants were thankful for management involvement in preventing clashes and gossiping among the workers as well as opportunities to go to further professional trainings. In addition the new surroundings and better patient rooms with the mutual appreciation between professionals were highly valued. Further attention was anticipated in counseling, additional time for the person orientating new workers, listening and taking into consideration the workers wishes, nurse manager's advocacy for the workers in front of their superiors, objective and equal management, possibility to go for work rotation periods on top of honesty and equity and experience based financial compensations.

The importance of a supportive working community and good relationships with coworkers was stated as one of the most valued factors promoting staff retention. The nurses were pleased with the nursing manager's involvement in maintaining a gossip free atmosphere in the workplace. A disagreement in the opinions of the interviewees surfaced in the significance of one negative person's effect on the working community. Some nurses stated that all the other supportive and helpful colleagues would override one challenging one. Whereas some nurses could not get past a clash in collegial relations. Everyone is an individual and therefore some can be more sensitive towards harsh words or unkind manners than others. A zero tolerance for disruptive behavior in a working community could be helpful as well as fair since no one appreciates negativity. As stated in the theoretical framework workplace bullying has increased sick leaves in Finland in the recent years (Nummelin 2008, 11-15.) In order to prevent such challenges in the working community in question the importance of open and honest atmosphere should not be belittled.

The findings support the theoretical framework as the responses of all five nurses were concerned with financial compensation, working environment, professional development and work-life balance as factors of staff retention, which are the keys of jobs satisfaction. (Messer 2006, 13). As mentioned in the literature review, orienting new workers can decrease the productivity of the employees responsible for their training. (Gering & Conner 2002, 40-44) These findings agree with Huber's study (2006) which also highlights the importance of a healthy working community, efficient problem solving and raises in the salary based on work experience.

In the literature review Hakala-Ewing (2010, 14.15) refers to stable working community as a place of integrity where the employees can take part into the decision-making process and where the work is versatile. These factors were all mentioned by the nurses interviewed in this study who also highly valued a stable working community. This highlights the importance of including promotion of interpersonal relationships, working environment and psychological wellness of the workers, which the interviewees listed as important aspects of a stable working community, in the staff retention strategy of the target organization.

Consequently, the participants highlighted the work environment as an important factor and they believed that the success of the work is dependent on collegial relationships among others. As part of the work satisfaction the findings showed that the nurses appreciate the opportunities offered for further education by health the care organization. Also this is perceived to have supporting ground and encouragement on staff retention. Furthermore, the support, advocacy and flexibility of the nurse manager were seen as binding factors to staff retention.

Basically, the most parts of the responses by participants correlated with the literature review regarding nursing staff retention (Nummelin 2008, Laine 2005, Pepitt 2004, Browell 2003, Feldman 2003, Meyer at al. 2003, Larson 1998.) The results are also strongly supported by Surakka (2009) study, where wellbeing at work, opportunities for further training, sufficient orientation for new workers, work shift planning had a positive impact on work commitment. Therefore, it is beneficial to invest in work satisfaction and working environment because it promotes the workers' wellbeing and group spirit.

As it was stated in the theoretical framework (Taylor, 2002) every working community has individual needs and reasons for staff turnover; there is no one solution for staff retention. In accordance with the literature review, this study has revealed factors that affect the ward in question, to help find a specific solution for promoting staff retention in this working community.

Fleming & Taylor (2006) believe pressures of workload have a substantial influence on staff retention; however, this did not surface during the interview. Neither did the impact of stress as suggested by Levoy & Levoy (2007), Feldman (2003) as well as Taylor (2002) and White & Muncer (1999). This also supports the earlier points made by Taylor (2002) and McCellan et al. (2009) on different places having different needs. Not all factors are relevant to all situations, therefore managers should seek to find answers and avoid making dangerous assumptions that lead to creating inapt solutions, which address issues that may not exist.

The findings of this thesis are to provide knowledge and actionable insights for nurses and managers to benefit from, when developing nursing staff retention strategy for the Triangle

Hospital. The information in the findings supplies examples of factors that promote, and on the contrary ones that could be improved to idealize, nursing staff retention in the ward. The research data can be used to create a variety of approaches to enhance nursing staff retention. The findings may also be utilized when orienting new workers, continuing education and recruitment of new nurses. A copy of the findings will be sent to the Triangle Hospital and presentation of the study will be arranged to introduce the findings in the target organization.

6.4 Conclusion and Recommendations

The nurses interviewed in this study stated the staff retention on their ward is fairly good and were quite satisfied with their working environment. As a result, there were no substantial factors identified for improvement. A future study could occur on a ward with concrete problems in nursing staff retention or be a comparing study between an elderly people's homes and a specialized nursing care wards' nursing staff retention. Since old hospital buildings and poor work environments are occasionally criticized, it might also be interesting to study work satisfaction and staff retention in the Triangle Hospital after a few years and determine if the new surroundings have improved the situation or made the hospital a more attractive workplace. During the group interview some problems occurred with the nurses not coming up with diverse answers to the questions. An hour's recorded group interview is not a natural situation and understandably all the responses to very open ended questions do not occur to nurses in the middle of a busy work shift. A further study could be conducted with more specific questions that remind the nurses of different aspects of staff retention.

The findings of this study suggest that the organization's management might want to create conditions that promote nursing staff retention. Based on the findings, the following practices will help increase nurses' retention to the organization such as:

The atmosphere and efficiency of regular staff meetings could be optimized. A possibility to submit concerns and topics for open discussions amongst the working community anonymously could boost diverse and healthy communication. The nursing manager could pay attention to honest and direct sharing of information concerning financial issues and employee well-being. Noticing individual workers' recommendations and issues was also a popular topic in the interview. This is of course taken into consideration during the annual appraisal meetings but nevertheless encouraging the continuous feedback between the nursing manager and staff could help.

Interest to leisure time activities for the working community arose in the interview. Perhaps there could be a person assigned to be responsible to once in a while arrange an outing or luxury enhancements for the staff rooms based on the workers recommendations. Additional

fundraising for this could be conducted through lotteries or bakery sales within the hospital which would already raise the “us-spirit” on their own. An improved orientation manual for new workers could be in order since the move to new location. A clear new manual could also emphasize that the nurses mentoring students or new workers would automatically be freed from other additional duties and given the time and possibilities for their important task.

By addressing the factors identified in this thesis, the nurses and managers of the Triangle Hospital will have a fresh understanding of how to start tackling staff retention problems in an appropriate manner. In addition to its initial purpose, this study can inspire forward-thinking nurses and human resource managers to recognize that situations always differ and no single best-practice exists. The key is to find the answers unique to each workplace and react appropriately. Nurses should strive to understand why people choose to leave, why this matters and what can be done to maximize staff retention.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Informed consent

TIETOINEN SUOSTUMUS

Olen lukenut tutkimustiedotteen ja suostun vapaaehtoisesti osallistumaan ryhmähaastatteluun.

Osallistujan nimi _____

Aika ja paikka _____

Allekirjoitus _____

Appendix 2 Interview theme questions

RYHMÄHAASTATTELU

Taustakysymykset:

Sukupuoli: _____

Ikä: _____

Työkokemus (vuosina): _____

Haastattelu kysymykset:

1 Which factors motivate you to stay in your work place? / Mitkä tekijät motivoivat teitä pysymään työpaikassanne?

2 In your opinion what should be improved to retain nursing staff on your ward? / Miten hoitohenkilökunnan työssä pysyvyyttä voisi mielestänne parantaa osastollanne?

Appendix 3 Personal invitations to group interview

Laurea-ammattikorkeakoulu
Metsänpojankuja 3
02130 Espoo
TUTKIMUSTIEDOTE

Kolmiosairaala hanke

Hyvä sairaanhoitaja,

Olemme sairaanhoitajaopiskelijoita Otaniemen Laurean Degree programme in nursing koulutusohjelmasta. Teemme opinnäytetyötä hoitohenkilökunnan pysyvyydestä Kolmiosairaalan sisätautiosastolla. Tutkimusluvat on haettu asianmukaisesti.

Pyydämme teitä ystävällisesti osallistumaan opinnäytetyömme ryhmähaastatteluun.

Järjestämme ryhmähaastattelun viidelle (5) sairaanhoitajalle tammikuun loppuun mennessä. Osallistujilla tulee olla vähintään viiden vuoden työkokemus samalla osastolla. Luottamuksellinen keskustelu nauhoitetaan ja vastaukset ovat anonyymejä. Opinnäytetyömme ei mainitse vastaajien työskentelyosastoa. Osallistuminen ryhmähaastatteluun on vapaaehtoista ja teillä on oikeus keskeyttää tutkimus missä vaiheessa tahansa. Toivomme vilpittömästi, että mahdollistatte opinnäytetyömme toteutumisen. Kokemuksenne on arvokasta opinnäytetyömme materiaalia. Vastauksenne tarjoavat tärkeää lisätietoa ajankohtaiseen aiheeseemme ja näin hyödyttää meitä kaikkia hoitoalalla työskenteleviä.

Mikäli haluatte lisätietoa opinnäytetyötämme koskien, ottakaa rohkeasti yhteyttä. Kiitos yhteistyöstänne jo etukäteen!

Kunnioittaen,

Aida Isa
Liisa McDonald
Sairaanhoitajaopiskelijat.