Nursing image and the importance of its effects on the relationship with patients

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Abstract

Image is said to be everything, at least in the eyes of the public. When someone is asked to identify a nurse, they will often identify a person wearing scrubs and a stethoscope with a clipboard in hand. In today’s world, a nurse does not have to wear scrubs and a stethoscope to be labeled a nurse. Nurses believe it or not come in many different forms! This is a shock to some of the public. When you assess the person asked to identify a nurse, you will see a noticeable difference in opinion related to age, education, and economic back-round. In this paper, the image of a nurse is examined and shown how it is important in relationships built with their patients. Nursing theories will be examined and the importance of image in relation to the environment with a reflection of image will be evaluated in the relation to the American Nurses Association and the QSEN.
Nursing Image

Nursing image has been evolving since the term nurse was first coined by Florence Nightingale. In today’s world, a nurse’s image is skewed by the media by the portrayal of what a nurse does. Many different television shows tend to paint the ugly picture of a nurse as a sexy adulteress, a drug addict, or a person that is often just told what to do. In the reality of the nurse, what he or she really does has nothing to do with what the media poses them to be. Nursing is a profession and it is not filled with brainless sex symbols that hide in the shadows of the doctors. The image of a nurse is important to define since nurses are the front runners in the care of the patient population.

Nurses come in all shapes, colors, and sizes and this should not be mistaken as a profession that discriminates. The title should be worn proudly by the ones that have earned it. This proudness should be seen in the way a nurse carries them self in the presence of the community. Becoming a nurse is not the easiest degree sought in the college world. Theory, skill base, and professionalism are well blended in the training to become a nurse. During school the reference to the scopes of practice and the American Nurses Association’s code of ethics are often referred to in all types of learning settings. Image is ingrained in all of these areas of focus of knowledge. Without the image of what a nurse is today, the healthcare industry would be lost.

The base of the image began in the Florence Nightingale era and is still evolving in this generation. Image not only encases the physical perception of a nurse, but it is the attitude of how it is presented. In the experience of this assignment, the search to find what exactly a nurse image includes became more in-depth as ever. With the question at hand, “What is the importance of nursing image, and its effects on the role of the relationship with the patient?” The importance of theory in the role of a nurse was better defined from a result of this research.
Image research from a patient’s perspective was obtained by a simple question from the author to the different age groups encountered during this period of the project. The findings of the research will be discussed later in this paper as well as the relevance of theory, the effects on the environment, and a reflection of image is evaluated in relation to the ANA and the QSEN.

**Theory Base**

**Peplau’s Psychodynamic Nursing Theory**

A very interesting nursing theory involving the importance of nursing image is that of the theory of Hildegard E. Peplau. It is called Peplau’s Psychodynamic Nursing Theory. Its main focus is on the interpersonal process of maturing force for personality and the importance of the nurse’s ability to understand their own behavior to help others identify perceived difficulties. There are four phases in this theory which involve orientation, identification, exploitations, and resolutions. The role of the nurse is also described in this model as stranger, resource person, teacher, leader, surrogate, and counselor.

In an article by Peterson (2007) it describes Peplau’s theory in relation to men in nursing roles. The reference to Peplau’s theory relating to interpersonal relations in nursing was defined by the six roles of the nurse. The roles mentioned were stranger, resource person, teacher, leader, surrogate, and counselor. In the surrogate role, males image in nursing starts up an interesting discussion. A large area affected by this evolution to the nursing image involves the patient perception to what a nurse is. This perception and image is similar to how a mother cares for a child, and changing the sex of the care giver often confuses the patient leading to stress.

In the Peterson article, a reference to O’Lynn (2004 p 231) states, “the feminization of nursing has become so pervasive, the image of nursing and caring has been used to symbolize the essence of femininity itself." This statement defines the male role of a nurse to be more
difficult to surrender their masculinity and to adopt the perception and image in regards to mother like behaviors. During certain roles of the nurse in the atmosphere of the healthcare setting, the surrendering of the masculine side is only needed in certain areas like neonatal and pediatric nursing. In the intensive care side of nursing the need to have a masculine nurse can be proven beneficial in the eyes of the co workers as well as the patient families. Masculinity is beneficial since it often portrays safety and it lends a strong hand when a patient or family member is getting out of hand.

**Travelbee’s Human to Human Relationship Model**

Another important theory pertaining to nursing image was that of Joyce Travelbees human to human relationship model. This theory also holds the nursing image in high regard. It focuses on the therapeutic relationships between the healthcare giver and the patient. The main focus of this theory with image is that nursing is accomplished through human to human relationships that began with the original encounter and then progressed through stages of emerging identities. While in the development stages of empathy and sympathy, the nurse and patient attained rapport in the final stages of the relationship. Butts and Rich (2001) states, “Travelbee's proposed that the caring goal of nursing is to assist an individual, family, or community to prevent or cope with experiences of illness and suffering, and in necessary, find meaning in these experiences, with the ultimate goal being the instillation of hope.” (p280)

Travelbee's theory has five phases in the nurse and patient relationship. The first phase being the most important to nursing image, this is emerging identities. This is where the patient identifies the nurse and the relationship begins down the path. With each role in the relationship identified here and this is when the patient will either accept or reject the nurse with emotional investments. The following phase is the developing feelings of empathy; this involves both
parties beginning to recognize the urge of empathy for the current state which the relationship was needed. Developing feelings of sympathy is the next phase, which this is when feelings should be expressed and the feelings are demonstrated. At this point, the nurse needs to translate their sympathy into their actions. The final stage is rapport, this allows all the phases to blend and the patient and nurse feelings, thoughts, and attitudes are able to be communicated. In this theory, the important portion to the nursing image is the need to establish an identifiable person or persons so the patient can have someone to identify with. This is where being the patient advocate is the most important. With having an established relationship with the patient, the nurse is able to better accommodate the patient and the health care plan is able to be met.

**Assessment of Healthcare Environment**

When it comes to identifying types of nurses, many of all back rounds cannot identify the differences of a nurse. Domrose (2002) stated, “Many do not understand the differences between licensed practical nurses, registered nurses and nurse practitioners.” Organizations throughout the United States have campaigns to push the nurse image. One organization in particular is Johnson & Johnson. They used commercials to show the importance of a nurse and the image is displayed here to entice people to want to be a nurse.

**Research**

When a person is to identify a nurse, they look for what they have been told a nurse looks like. Commonly the first to describe what a nurse typically looks like is the media. They will often describe a nurse as a person wearing scrubs and a stethoscope around their neck, holding a clip board. Regardless the age of the patient, they do not always turn to read the badge on the person’s lapel. Many organizations have all their staff wear scrubs and a badge to identify their role. When the author started out in the research for this assignment, she chose to do a snap shot
survey to various people that she encountered. The population was taken on an anonymous viewpoint with the only identifying factor being that of the age of the person interviewed. The findings of the snapshot survey are important in identifying the importance of nursing image in the health care environment. After compiling what the people surveyed identified a nurse, the author’s findings were broken down into age groups identified as follows: school age, young adult, adult, and elderly. In a summary, the findings from each group were common; each age group had similar answers with them identifying a nurse as the person in scrubs helping the doctor.

In the article by Begeny and associates, it discusses the effects of the internet on nursing image. They state, “A negative image of nursing has a number of negative consequences. It impacts the quality and quantity of persons who choose nursing as a profession” (Begeny et al 2007). This ultimately affects everyone in the health care atmosphere; a negative image impacts the relationship between patients and the nurse. In this article, a study shows the impact on the future of nursing. The school age individual is likely to choose a career with a person that has a positive image with in the public eye. When the media portrays a nurse a negative way, this tatters the public image of a nurse, thus impacting the future generations from generally wanting to be a nurse. It could send many future potential nurses on a journey to a different profession and this can make the nursing shortage even worse in the future. The study explored by Begeny et al, is more in depth than the authors snapshot survey. The people surveyed were assessed further for characteristics involving the image of a nurse in the aspect of intelligence, respect, accountability, trustworthy, and diversity (Begeny 2007). The overall findings from the study involving the internet shows the nurse in a positive way by 70%, and that the internet shows nursing as intelligent, and respected by 60% (Begeny et al 2007). These are impressive odds
since when people watch television shows centered in a hospital, the nurse is sighted as a background figure to a doctor, or as a person that appears easy and not respected.

Inferences, Implications, and Consequences

Patients

A patient’s view of a nurse is not only to establish a trusting relationship but to easily identify the person to turn to in the time of need. When a patient can easily identify the person that is assuming responsibility in the care that they are receiving the stay is less stressful. Image is very important to a person that is vulnerable and when the image is strong, dependable, and trustworthy. The nursing theories involving the patient relationship blend the qualities that a patient is seeking into a proper nursing approach to a healthy relationship building. The end result of a patient’s views and opinions are observed with the overall satisfaction of the patients stay in the facility that they encountered the nurse in. This satisfaction of the patient can affect the whole organization that the patient chose to have encountered simply by the patients feelings of acceptable care.

Nurses

A nurse will often see their image as something in the lines of what the patient is looking for which would be that of an advocate. The major difference between the patient and the nurse’s views is the knowledge of knowing the importance of self image lies in the hands of the nurse. A nurse is taught in school that the importance of establishing a professional appearance.

Image by definition from Merriam-Webster (2011) is, “a mental picture or impression of something: a mental conception held in common by members of a group and symbolic of a basic attitude and orientation.” By this definition, a nurse embraces the overall impression of the clients they encounter. The impact of the American Nurses Association (ANA) impacts the
nurse with their personal appearance. The stress of the ANA on professionalism plays a role with the nurse in realizing that image is important to the professional figures that the ANA encompasses in their standards of care. The ANA’s mission statement is “nurses advancing our profession to improve health for all.” This is encompassed in not only the image of a nurse but the quality of the nurse’s care to their clients. In the ANA’s code of ethics, the importance of wholeness of character is discussed. It states, “Nurses have both personal and professional identities that are neither entirely separate, nor entirely merged, but are integrated. In the process of becoming a professional, the nurse embraces the values of the profession, integrating them with personal values.” (ANA 2011)

Facilities

In the hospital setting, the image of the nurse is the forefront to their business. With respected nursing staff and physicians, the eye of the client will be more likely to choose them over their competitor. When the nurse is best visualized as a respected professional, the persona will carry out into the community and the relationships will be better formed with the clients seeking care. A facility may try to mold the nursing image so it is better recognized. A quality and safety model for patient care is evidenced by a facility making it easier in identifying who is caring for the patient by simplifying it into color coding. Here is an example with a facilities dress code requirement incorporating colors for identification. The registered nurses are dressed in ceil blue or white as primary colors in their outfit. The licensed practical nurse is assigned the color of royal blue; this color is to be the primary color in the outfit chosen to wear. The nursing assistant is identified by the color of maroon or burgundy, and the cleaning staff wears the color navy. All of these colors are easily identifiable and a color matching card is placed for all patients to see the assigned colors. This is in place to make the patient have an easier time
identifying who is in their presence. Nursing image is also important in the facility since the image of a nurse and how they are treated in the facility can depend on how effective they are in hiring more nurses in the future. If the image of the nurse is widely trusted and respected, the individual seeking a job will gravitate towards the facility that carries that image.

Conclusion

In conclusion, nursing image is important in all aspects to care and to the community. Nurse image is the gateway to establishing a trustworthy and respected relationship with the patient. When the image of a nurse is drawn in a negative tone, it not only affects the present day nurses, it can truly affect the future and well being of the profession. With professionalism in the definition of the mission statement by the ANA, image is as important as ever. The livelihood of the profession depends on the communities’ thoughts and feeling of trust in the nurse that is assuming care for them. To answer the question at hand, “What is the importance of nursing image, and its effects on the role of the relationship with the patient?” the answer is: image is everything and it is just as important as the education that the individual is receiving to become a nurse. When the patient seeks comfort, they will often gravitate towards a nurse whose image is trustworthy, professional, and respected. In the theory base, environmental changes, and the impression of the media; each has important roles in developing the nursing image into what it is today.
References


