

Short Paper

Errors during the Night Shift: An Age Management Policy is Needed for Nurses Over 55

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In the study “Relation between sleep deprivation and nursing errors during the night shift,” conducted on a sample of 3358 nurses, 94.7% of the respondents stated that they perform regular activities during the night shift. 16.8% of the respondents made errors in the last two night shifts, with 59.5% of the cases involving a single error. Sleep deprivation (3-5 hours of sleep within the 24 hours preceding the interview) appears to contribute to a higher frequency of errors. This tendency is particularly pronounced among nurses working in critical care units (23.9%). The number of nights worked also influences the likelihood of making errors, with an error frequency of 20.5%. The propensity to make errors is relatively high among the younger age group (17.2%), decreases in the middle age group (15.8%), and then increases again in the older age group (17.6%). We have concluded that night-time care is exhausting and demanding and can have negative effects on the quality of care provided. Therefore, healthcare organizations should support nurses in the organization of night-time care by investing in strategies for safe and quality night-time care that minimizes the negative impact on nurses’ quality of life and psychophysical well-being. This includes increasing the number of nursing staff during the night shift. Furthermore, the authors conclude that precise age management strategies supported at the management level are needed to minimize the negative effects of the current situation and to enhance the skills that increase in quantity and quality with work experience, utilizing them as valuable resources within the system.

A significant portion of the global and Italian nursing workforce is represented by those over 55. According to the “Health Profile 2019” for Italy published by the OECD and the European Commission in 2020, available on the FNOPI website, the majority of nurses are concentrated in the age group between 36 and 55 years: 268,914. There are also 15,552 nurses between 20 and 25 years old and 13,259 nurses over 65. The “younger” nurses (up to 58 years old with over 30 years of professional experience) number over 30,000. Nurses over 60 (with over 30 years of professional experience) amount to just over 13,000, and nurses up to 28 years old, at risk of underemployment/unemployment, are 39,000. Finally, nurses over 60 without more than 30 years of professional experience amount to approximately 25,000. Nurses over 55 are an important segment of the nursing profession who, along with advancing age and years of service, face a range of psychophysical issues that make it difficult to ensure efficient work performance. Despite this, healthcare companies do not pay attention

to this age group of nurses. What would nurses want for their careers in the years leading up to retirement?

A survey conducted at the Modena Local Health Authority investigated the organizational health status of workers over 50, their perceptions, motivations, health issues, and proposed measures to raise awareness of the phenomenon of aging in the profession and suggest improvement actions to be tested within the company. Nurses who participated in the survey listed some self-strategies to mitigate the impact of aging and strategies to suggest to the organizational system.

Self-strategies:

- Invest in personal professional development and participate in individual training courses.
- Maintain a part-time employment contract.
- Have more hours of rest.
- Achieve a balanced use of absences from work for psychophysical recovery by reviewing the threshold for illness and the use of contractually defined leaves.
- Request authorization for extended ordinary leave of at least 4-5 consecutive days for rest and better vacation planning.
- Strategies to suggest to the organizational system:
 - Value the experience gained by older nurses by combining the energy and vitality of younger nurses with the knowledge and experience of older ones. The value of older nurses should be measured by recognizing their wealth of skills and field experience, different culture, and being the key to the company’s historical memory, as older nurses are loyal to their work due to cultural and generational factors.
 - Identify older nurses who can facilitate the integration of newly hired nurses.
 - Mentoring, the process of knowledge transfer through the support of newly hired or nursing students, can play a significant role in work organization.
 - Motivate older nurses by bridging their technological training gaps. Older nurses today face greater difficulty in adapting to new technologies.

- Employ older nurses in less stressful services with lower workloads, services that require experience and good relational skills more than physical endurance.

Exempt employees over 55, upon request, from night shifts and on-call shifts, and ensure a regular schedule to allow for psycho-physical recovery.

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