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## Procedimento operacional padrão no ambiente hospitalar: percepção de enfermeiros

Standard operating procedure in the hospital context: the nurses' perception

Procedimiento operativo estándar en el medio hospitalario: enfermeras percepción

Rossana da Rosa Walter<sup>1</sup>; Maria Helena Gehlen<sup>2</sup>; Silomar Ilha<sup>3</sup>; Claudia Zamberlan<sup>4</sup>; Hilda Maria Barbosa de Freitas<sup>5</sup>; Fabiani Weiss Pereira<sup>6</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** to learn the perception that nurses have about the development of Standard Operating Procedure in the hospital context. **Methods:** exploratory, descriptive and qualitative research developed between the months of March and April 2011 with five nurses working in the inpatient units of a medium-sized hospital, located in a city in the central region of Rio Grande do Sul. Data were collected using a semi-structured interview and were subjected to content analysis. **Results:** two categories emerged: Standard Operating Procedure in the daily practice of the Nurse: a reality to be built; From the visibility of the Standard Operating Procedure to the organization of nursing care. **Conclusion:** the importance of qualified staff to implement the Standard Operating Procedure is evident, and this must happen through protocols within the units, decreasing thus the existing problems regarding patient care and prioritizing the quality of care.

**Descriptors:** Protocols; Leadership; Health Personnel; Nursing.

<sup>1</sup> Nurse. Specialist in Intensive Care. Care Nurse at Hospital São Francisco de Assis. Santa Maria, RS, Brazil.

<sup>2</sup> Nurse. Master in Education. Ph.D. student in Gerontology by the Pontifical Catholic University (PUC). Professor at the Franciscano University Center. Santa Maria, RS, Brazil.

<sup>3</sup> Nurse. Master in Nursing. Ph.D. student in Nursing by the Graduate Program in Nursing (PPGenf) of the Federal University of Rio Grande (FURG). Professor at the Franciscano University Center. Santa Maria, RS, Brazil.

<sup>4</sup> Nurse. Ph.D. in Nursing. Professor at the Franciscano University Center. Santa Maria, RS, Brazil.

<sup>5</sup> Nurse. Ph.D in Sciences. Professor at the Franciscano University Center. Santa Maria, RS, Brazil.

<sup>6</sup> Nurse. Master in Nursing. Ph.D. student in Nursing by the Graduate Program in Nursing (PPGenf) of the Federal University of Rio Grande (FURG). Rio Grande, RS, Brazil.

## RESUMO

**Objetivo:** conhecer a percepção de enfermeiros acerca do desenvolvimento do Procedimento Operacional Padrão no ambiente hospitalar. **Métodos:** pesquisa exploratória e descritiva, de caráter qualitativo, desenvolvida entre os meses de março e abril de 2011, com cinco enfermeiros que trabalham nas unidades de internação de um hospital de médio porte, localizado em uma cidade da região central do Rio Grande do Sul. Os dados foram coletados por meio de entrevista semiestruturada e foram submetidos à análise de conteúdo. **Resultados:** emergiram duas categorias: Procedimento Operacional Padrão no cotidiano da prática do enfermeiro: uma realidade a ser construída; Da visibilidade do Procedimento Operacional Padrão à organização do cuidado de enfermagem. **Conclusão:** Evidencia-se a importância de uma equipe qualificada para a implementação do Procedimento Operacional Padrão, por meio de protocolos dentro das unidades, diminuindo, dessa forma, os problemas existentes com relação ao cuidado do paciente, priorizando a qualidade do atendimento.

**Descritores:** Protocolos; Liderança; Pessoal de Saúde; Enfermagem.

## RESUMEN

**Objetivo:** conocer la percepción de las enfermeras sobre el desarrollo del Procedimiento Operativo Estándar en el hospital. **Métodos:** investigación cualitativa exploratoria y descriptiva, desarrollado entre marzo a abril de 2011, con cinco enfermeras que trabajan en unidades de hospitalización de un hospital de tamaño medio, ubicadas en una ciudad de la región central de Río Grande do Sul. Los datos fueron recolectados a través de entrevistas semi-estructuradas y fueron sometieron a análisis de contenido. **Resultados:** emergieron dos categorías: Procedimiento Operativo Estándar en la práctica de la vida diaria de enfermería: una realidad que se construirá; La visibilidad del Procedimiento Operativo Estándar para la organización de la atención de enfermería. **Conclusión:** es evidente la importancia de personal calificado para implementar el Procedimiento Operativo Estándar, utilizando protocolos dentro de las unidades, lo que reduce los problemas existentes en relación con la atención al paciente, dando prioridad a la calidad de la atención.

**Descriptorios:** Protocolos; Liderazgo; Personal de Salud; Enfermería.

## INTRODUCTION

With a view to ensure the quality and reliability of the organization of services and nursing care to clients, it is essential to develop and use the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) that standardizes the actions in a safe manner.<sup>1</sup>

Considered a tool for quality management in health services, the SOP is an important technological resource in health practice and should be validated to gain scientific credibility.<sup>1</sup> The objective is to seek excellence in the provision of service by the health staff and to minimize errors and distortions acquired in routine actions. Thus, it is subject of evolution and provides significant cultural change in institutions, in the technical and political-institutional aspects, and it has also educational purpose.<sup>2</sup>

In this context, the nurses integrating the technical team of the operationalization in construction of SOP have a managerial role linked to their leadership in the team, as

well as to the systematic organization of care that ensure the improvement of nursing assistance.<sup>2</sup> In the past, the nurse was considered the head of the sector; currently, the nurse is required to become the unit manager with understanding of the whole and not only of the parts,<sup>3</sup> that is, it is required that he visualizes both the weaknesses and the potentials involved in the process of promotion and health care.

The organization of care in the form of SOP is a dynamic leadership process, since it is present in all activities of nurses, especially when they take the administrative function that involves interaction with nurses and in relation to the skill in the performance of assistance activities of the care<sup>4</sup>. Therefore, the nursing leadership in the technical staff of the operationalization of SOP is believed to begin with a group process of dialogic communication with other nurses, with the help of lifelong education, the meeting between health and education.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, managerial actions of nurses become relevant. These are related to the organization and the quality of nursing services that may use the SOP as a technology that aid caregivers in favor of improving the welfare of those needing hospital care. Some studies about protocols in nursing in different scenarios of action have been conducted.<sup>6-7</sup> However, there is a gap of knowledge related to understanding/implementing SOP by health professionals, especially from the perspective of nurses who usually take the leadership of the team. This fact justifies the need and relevance of this study.

Based on these considerations, the question raised is: what is the perception that nurses have about the development of Standard Operating Procedure in the hospital setting? As an attempt to answer this question and in anticipation of the possibility to understand the theme with a view to better health care practices, we set the objective to learn the perception that nurses have about the development of Standard Operating Procedure in the hospital setting.

## METHODS

This is an exploratory and descriptive research with qualitative approach.<sup>8</sup> The study setting was a medium-sized hospital, linked to the Unified Health System (SUS), located in the central region of Rio Grande do Sul. There are 163 health professionals registered in different functions in this setting. Among these, 13 hospital nurses, three doctors and two managerial employees integrate the technical team of operationalization of SOP.

As inclusion criteria, only clinical nurses who had employment bond for over one year were elected for inclusion in the research. Nurses who had less than one year of employment in that hospital, or those who were on vacation or on sick leave were excluded. Five professionals met the inclusion criteria and made up the *corpus* of this study.

Data were collected from March to April 2011 by means of a semi-structured interview. After that, data were

subjected to content analysis, what consists in discovering the core meanings that compose communication, whose presence or frequency add considerable perspectives to the object under study.<sup>9</sup>

Thus, the implementation of the analysis followed the three steps of the method. In the first step, a thorough reading of the data was made. Then, the organization of material and the formulation of hypotheses took place. In the sequence, material was explored, encoding the raw data. In the third and final phase, the data were interpreted and limited to categories, according to the attributed meanings.<sup>9</sup>

Ethical and legal principles involving research with human beings were respected, according to the Ministry of Health Resolution 196/96.<sup>10</sup> Participants signed the Informed Consent in two copies, one copy was given to the participant and the other was kept with researchers. To ensure anonymity of participants, they are identified by the letter N (Nurse) followed by a number as interview order (N1, N2 ...N5). The Ethics and Research Committee of the Franciscan University Center, under number 3752010.2, approved the project.

## RESULTS

Data analysis resulted in two categories: Standard Operating Procedure in the daily practice of the Nurse: a reality to be built and from the visibility of the Standard Operating Procedure to the organization of nursing care.

### Standard Operating Procedure in the daily practice of the Nurse: a reality to be built

By learning the perception that nurses have on the development of SOP in the hospital practice everyday, it became evident that they consider its effectiveness as a continuous process that requires skill, involvement and participation of all professionals of the nursing and health team. However, nurses do not see its effectiveness in the nursing service, in the respective operation units, what is expressed by the speeches:

*It serves as a guide for the service and standardizes care grounded in scientific knowledge. It is difficult to adhere to it, because SOP has not been put on paper. Its effectiveness comes from training the team. (N1)*

*These are procedures to improve and organize activities in services, so that there is a pattern to be followed. When put into practice in the unit, emphasizing the operational procedures to be followed. Building up the employees. (N3)*

The need for developing SOP with cooperation and dialogic communication among nurses is explicit, so that its effectiveness may be built collectively, according to the particularities of the respective hospital units:

*It is the basis for standardizing tasks, because it describes them step by step. It is the way to implement nursing activities. It has the objective to ensure and achieve effective results in their realization, with safety and quality. To be put into practice, it should be first evaluated by a committee and discussed with the nurse in each sector, who will train his team. (N4)*

It is possible to see that the standardization of actions ensure effective results with greater safety and quality, requiring dialogue among nurses in different hospital departments with a view to train the team.

### From the visibility of the Standard Operating Procedure to the organization of nursing care

In the opinion of study subjects, SOP organizes professional actions to ensure quality and satisfaction of nursing care toward patients. SOP is a priority to be built in the investigated reality, ensuring, thus, the standardization of services with a focus on the human being:

*SOP is the way to put the daily assistance on paper, making all nursing staff in various sectors follow the same conduct. Its effectiveness is permanent education, teamwork, like ants. (N5)*

*SOP corresponds to the organization, norms and conducts within the service. It is implemented through group and continuous training. (N2)*

Survey participants also linked the effectiveness of development of SOP with the leadership of the nurse in the form of supervision. This demonstrates a culture rooted in Cartesian models and restrain the professional care to doing and repeating, as eliminates the freedom of expression between the different kinds of knowledge that make SOP effective:

*If there is that oversight [In order to supervise teaching] SOP will work. The nurse should always be a leading educator, spreading the knowledge of SOPs. (N5)*

In fact, there is a need for building a collective and permanent responsibility and awareness in hospital units as well as to stimulate the desire for change in the attitudes and practices of nurses as leaders committed to dialogue the knowledge for implementation and effectiveness of SOPs in their respective sectors. It was evident that respondents do not experience the development of SOP in their daily practice, although they theoretically describe the difficulties and facilities of its implementation, as the lines below show:

*Difficult is to make all employees accept and put the procedures into practice. As for the facilities, it is a standard way of organizing nursing services, making the procedures to be effective. (N3)*

*Difficulties: Change of sectors, resignation, employee resistance. I see no facilities at the moment of implementation. I see facilities after implementation and training. (N5)*

The visibility of the importance of SOP by the subjects in their respective units demonstrated that this is indispensable for the organization of nursing care. However, they have not yet been created, discussed and socialized because they do not exist in the investigated setting. This became prominent in the speeches of professionals:

*The SOP is very good when employees realize that the standardization facilitates the daily work [...] there is still difficulty to adhere the SOPs. (N1)*

*I don't think so, because we have few SOPs already filed and the staff's awareness was minimal. (N4)*

It is noticed that there is still work to be discussed, built and analyzed according to the needs of each unit, so that SOP may become a reality that visualizes and organizes the care on the whole nursing team and is thus able to contribute and qualify its everyday practice.

## DISCUSSION

In many areas of the hospital setting, the quality of care and the environment is the responsibility of the entire health team, and the nurse is the mediator of the rules and routines that define the guidelines for the control and continuous improvement of SOP quality. It was observed in this study that the majority of nurses recognize the beneficial effects of SOPs in the daily practice, as many reported positive aspects of it, noting that these are the basis for standardizing tasks, serving as a guide to the services, as well as being a form to implement nursing activities with quality and safety.

Corroborating these findings, initial studies in two Intensive Care Units in Rio Grande do Sul highlighted the importance of SOPs mainly in the effectiveness of biosafety standards, demonstrating effectiveness and better quality after their implementation<sup>11</sup>. It is known that safe procedures are necessary to ensure the reliability of nursing care. These are based on actions that can be performed through the construction of nursing protocols, such as SOPs, which direct the work and officially record the care performed in the resolution or prevention of diseases.<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, it was observed that some participants experience difficulties with implementation of SOPs, for these have not yet been digitalized, filed, validated and implemented. In this context, a concern comes up in the

sense that if the nurse is considered the leader and, most often, the mediator of the rules and routines that define the guidelines for the control and continuous improvement SOP quality, why there are yet difficulties in its implementation?

It seems to be necessary that the respondent nurses take a dynamic and effective position in this regard, intensifying awareness-raising activities about the importance of SOP for its effectiveness in service. Study in a public teaching hospital in Paraná showed that nurses, within their managerial skills, have the possibility to create opportunities for other management tools to administer care. Among these, the authors emphasized leadership as an essential tool to work when it comes to the nurse, as this is responsible for the coordination of nursing and intermediation between different health professionals of the team.<sup>2</sup>

Recent surveys have shown that standardization make possible to avoid categorical issues that cause problems for health services. These studies indicate that SOP organizes the service and when its absence may promote the occurrence of hospital infections, insofar as there is no standardization.<sup>12-13</sup> Therefore, it is observed that the concern with quality in the provision of health services is continuous.

The purpose of the patient when he seeks hospital services is to restore his health, solve problems and balance disorders. Thus, in order that he may take advantage of the services, the implementation of a management system is necessary to recognize these needs, establish standards and seek to keep them to ensure the patient's satisfaction<sup>2</sup>

Most respondents mentioned training and continuing education as a strategy for recognizing the importance of SOPs and their effectiveness for the health team. They also cited the importance of teamwork and supervising look of the nurse, to teach other professionals. They reported, although, that a committee should evaluate SOPs so that they could be put into practice.

Case study, conducted in a mid-sized hospital in Belo Horizonte, argued that the nurse, as team leader, has the specific duty to provide conditions for the care to take place safely and with quality through management actions. Among these, the importance of the management of SOPs, which should be organized and implemented by nurses, stands out<sup>3</sup>. In this sense, it seems that it is essential to encourage the leadership of nurses who were subjects of this study, to overcome the difficulties encountered, as the study in Belo Horizonte showed positive results resulting from the implementation and effectiveness of SOPs.

It is known that the SOP has several purposes and is not only focused on the clinical problems of a person in the hospital setting, but on his response to the intervention of the nursing staff. When building and carrying out the SOP, the nurse should ensure that the care be designed for human beings and not just for the disease. Thus it is essential that this may be accepted and made effective in practice.

In this respect, the development of lifelong learning it is essential insofar as it is not just a practice of teaching and

learning, but a health education policy that seeks potential, raising questions, investigations of the realities in the perspective of learning about the self, the environment and the professional liability.<sup>5</sup>

A positive aspect reported by one of the respondents and that deserves attention refers to the need for SOPs to be discussed among the nurses in each sector, since they are responsible for creating awareness of the health team. This brings up the importance of training. This finding is similar to results of the study carried out at a research center of hemodynamics and interventional cardiology in São Paulo, which showed the need for training in the preparation and adherence to SOPs to ensure the quality and uniformity of all processes involved in the work organization. Thus, the authors of this study highlight the importance of professionals from all sectors to be involved in this process.<sup>14</sup>

A study conducted in São Paulo in nine hospitals showed the existence of standardization of urinary catheterization procedure in the institutions surveyed, and the standardization prompted satisfactory results with better quality of care, service organization and team satisfaction. Among the difficulties found, the authors stressed the issue of staff training and the position of the nurse as a leader<sup>15</sup>, difficulties that were corroborated by the results of the present survey.

The absence of standard procedures, norms and nonexistent routines and non-use of nursing care methodology may result in different professional conduct, causing the disruption of service. For this reason standards should be defined with a view to establishing guidelines for the control and continuous improvement of quality.<sup>4</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

The accomplishment of this study is considered satisfactory as it reached the proposed objective, since it was possible to learn the perception that nurses have about the development of Standard Operating Procedure in the hospital context.

It was evident that nurses, subjects of this study, recognize the importance of SOP in the hospital setting. However, they said that this is still not a reality in the effective practice of activity in the investigated inpatient units because they were not validated and filed and also due to the fact that the operation team is not yet consolidated. Therefore, the importance of the staff to be qualified for the implementation of SOPs within the units is evident. This would help to decrease the existing problems regarding patient care, prioritizing the quality of care.

This study has the limitations typical of any qualitative study, especially the data collection that was conducted at a single institution, thus not allowing the comparison of results with different realities at the time of the study. However, the results were discussed under light of a comprehensive literature and studies coming from different contexts. It

was evident that the studies in this subject corroborate the findings and/or show paths to be followed in pursuit of improved health practices through the implementation of SOPs.

It is believed that the subject approached as theme of the present study can generate reflections/discussions among nursing/health professionals. It also contributes to the science of nursing/health regarding qualified care and best practice in the hospital setting. It is expected that this study contribute to the scientific community, encouraging other researchers in the field of nursing/health to conduct further research on the importance and implementation of SOPs in different health care settings.

New studies conducted on POPs in different scenarios of operation, as well as on the importance of nurses and other professionals in this process, are considered of utmost importance.

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**Mailing address:**

Silomar Ilha

Centro Universitário Franciscano.

Conjunto III. Rua Silva Jardim, 1175,

Centro. Santa Maria (RS)

ZIP Code: 97010-491