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# Perceptions on Bulgarian nursing and midwifery of the work-related requirements in healthcare management

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**Abstract:** Ethoprofiles development is important for the successful and effective management of human resources. In this study, we investigated how medical professionals' perceived the work-related requirements and their need for healthcare management education. Materials and methods: Qualitative interview study (N = 15). Consenting on group profiles health care specialists outlined the following areas of abilities that need to predominate in the profession of a nurse managers – 80% „ability to speak”, 60% „imagination”, 100% „physical ability”, „being innovative” and „possessing organizational, business and social skills”. Involving healthcare professionals in exploring ethograms and ethoprofiles may foster professional commitment and prove to be an effective managerial approach of human resources through enhanced organizational communication encouraging feedback on personnel self-assessment thus enabling effective motivation and decision making.

**Keywords:** Organizational Behavior, Nurse Education, Healthcare Management, Healthcare Professionals, Management Competence

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## 1. Introduction

People are the main resource of health care organizations and their competence predetermines to a great degree the quality of the medical activities. Preparing the health workforce to work towards attainment of its health objectives represents one of the most important challenges and opportunities for health systems. Going beyond the traditional notion of skill mix extends the concept to include also the degree to which training corresponds to the sociocultural and demographic characteristics of the population and not only the tasks the different levels of health workers are trained to do but what they are actually capable of performing (competencies). Maintaining a reasonable balance in terms of numbers, diversity and competencies of the health workforce requires a thorough understanding of the driving forces and challenges that shape health and education systems as well as labor markets [1,2].

Organizational behavior as an integrative scientific discipline of interpretative character is increasingly establishing itself within the set of technical disciplines having

particular importance to the managerial competence of professionals working in the area of public healthcare [3,4].

Frequent deployments is a qualitative method of discussion in focus groups to collect data on a range of issues, in particular, where the researcher seeks views, values and beliefs in a collective context. In the field of health and nursing research, focus groups are invaluable for guiding the development of interventions, including education [5,6].

This refers to a modern approach in the management of human resources associated with the diagnostics of work-related behavior, and the development of ethograms and ethoprofiles necessary to provide competent care that can be used in recruiting and assessment of personnel efficiency [7, 8].

Etoprofile (labour behavioral profile) are "integral" portrait of individual labor determinates - psychological characteristics, qualities and abilities, motivational determinants factors of the organizational environment [8].

The Bulgarian healthcare system is currently facing challenges resulting in constant shortage of qualified staff and uneven distribution of specialists across regions and

specialties. By 1990 the numbers of medical professionals per 100 000 people in Bulgaria were relatively good: 329 doctors, 70 dentists, 621 nurses and 87 midwives. Their number has almost halved over the past ten years. Now the total number of nurses in Bulgaria is critically low -29802, middle-aged 48, of which 2458 are working retired. In 2007, the availability of these specialists in the country is two times lower than the EU average - 42,2 ‰ to 85 ‰ in the EU. The ratio of physicians / nurses in 2011 the country was 1: 0.92, while the EU is 1: 2.26. [9,10]. The ongoing reforms in the health system for the last two decades led to massive cuts in hospital and outpatient care as a result of prioritizing "economic efficiency".

The market economy principles in health care and controversial health policy in a period of economic, political, health and social crisis reduced the number and motivation of nursing personnel to a critical level [11].

In this context studying individual behavior determinants in healthcare is an important part of a strategy to improve the quality of care rendered. Until recently, the motivation of health professionals was not included in the national healthcare strategies despite the recognition of their role as a pillar of any health system [12, 13].

Individual work-related behavior is determined by a great variety of factors (cognitive, psychomotor, behavioral, personality traits and skills etc.): on the one hand individual psychological characteristics (qualities, abilities and motivational factors) and on the other factors of the organizational environment, culture and management [14, 15,16]. Possessing expertise in the creation of work-related behavioral profiles (ethoprofiles) of the staff based on the analysis of the specific activities and requirements for holding particular positions is an important prerequisite for the successful and effective management of human resources. More attention is being paid to the alignment of personal characteristics and the requirements of the position [17, 18,19].

## 2. Materials and Methods

The objective of the study was to explore ethograms and ethoprofiles for various positions and levels in healthcare organizations by elaborating on healthcare professionals' perceptions of the work-related requirements, the jobs, characteristics and the respective knowledge, skills and personal qualities needed.

Used is a qualitative research method of discussion in the focus groups. The study drew on interviews with all graduate students in the one-year master's program in healthcare management during the first semester (February 2014) the (N=15). To achieve saturation we held 3 separate discussions lasting approximately 180 minutes. The results from the discussions were registered and transcribed and later discussed by the moderators and supervisors in each focus group.

The discussions were moderated by lecturers in Organizational Behavior from the Faculty of Public Health (FOZ), Plovdiv. The groups had specific tasks and agenda -

developing ethoprofiles for particular positions. The participants had to reach agreement and present a summary at the end of each session. No time limits were preset for the discussions; the total duration of 3 hours corresponds to the time normally allotted to their seminar sessions.

In conducting the study, scientific and ethical requirements for this kind of qualitative method were taken into account. Individual involvement was entirely voluntary activity of the participants; no restrictions were imposed on freedom of expression. The role of the moderators consisted of providing opportunities for everyone willing to take part, putting them at ease without exercising influence over opinions expressed, time management and registration of the results. The participants in the focus groups were practicing health care professionals holding positions of nurses, midwives and rehabilitation therapists. They came from different health organizations and structures, and were mainly female (99%), aged between 30 and 40 years.

First focus group:

D.P. - a female aged 33; senior nursing officer at Hospital for Active Treatment;

L.H. - a female aged 31; a midwife at University Hospital for Active Treatment;

B.A. - a female aged 30; a nurse at Hospital for Continuing Long-term Treatment and Rehabilitation;

V.A. - a female aged 39; senior midwife at Specialized Hospital for Active Treatment in Obstetrics and Gynecology;

P.P. - a female aged 53; nurse; director of Nursery.

Second focus group:

S. Sh. - a female aged 39; a midwife at University Hospital for Active Treatment;

A.U. - a female aged 42; a nurse at Hospital for Active Treatment;

B.I. - a female aged 39; a senior nurse at University Hospital for Active Treatment;

M.D. - a female aged 34; a hospital nurse working abroad;

D.D. - a female aged 43; a surgical nurse in an Invasive Cardiology Unit.

Third focus group:

K.B. - a female aged 43; a rehabilitation therapist at Specialized Hospital for Active Treatment of Cardiovascular Diseases;

I.R. - a female of 34; a senior nurse in an emergency department of University Hospital for Active Treatment;

G.B. - a female of 30; a hospital nurse at Hospital for Active Treatment;

G.P. - a female of 34; a hospital nurse and teacher at Medical College;

Y.G. - a female aged 33; a psychiatric nurse at Clinic of Mental Illness.

The first focus group was asked to describe particular types of activities performed at their workplaces and the required personal characteristics relevant to successful professional performance.

The second focus group had the task to develop an ethoprofile (personal qualities and work-related behavior) for the position of a senior nurse at a hospital ward.

The third focus group was asked to describe the areas of knowledge and interests and competence levels in pursuing career as a healthcare professional.

### 3. Results

The results of the three discussions and presented profiles were further analyzed and discussed among moderators to identify specific priorities, traits and requirements for healthcare professions.

The scope of activities for both a hospital nurse and a midwife is wide and the content and requirements vary depending on the units they work in.

The participants identified the following profile focus referring to the work in a surgical ward and agreed on the following ranking by significance:

1. Teamwork;
2. Compliance with internal regulations;
3. Observance of hierarchy and delegation of authority;
4. Maintenance of apparatuses and instruments;
5. Expertise in dealing with documents;
6. Supervision of hospital attendants' work.

On the basis of the professional duties discussed they worked out the requirements referring to knowledge, skills and personal qualities for a rank-and-file hospital nurse in a surgical ward:

- "high level of accuracy",
- "quick wit",
- "focus and self-control",
- "patience and scrupulousness in his/her work",
- stamina ("physical and mental endurance"),
- "abide moral and ethical norms",
- "ability to act on their own initiative" while "recognizing hierarchy".

Discussing of the main types of activities characteristic of a senior nurse in an emergency unit of a large hospital the following were listed ranked by significance:

1. Preparation of work shift schedules of nurses and other hospital staff;
2. Supplying medical consumables;
3. Preparation of reports;
4. Supervising the staff's performance;
5. Liaising between the management and the staff;
6. Organizing and running staff training courses;
7. Motivating staff to acquire additional qualifications.

To pursue carrier he/she should possess:

- "high level of professionalism and competence",
- "communication and organizational skills",
- "physical and mental endurance",
- "expertise in dealing with documentation",
- "ability to act on their own initiative".

The description of the profession made by the third focus group included senior managers and the characteristics of a senior nursing officer:

1. Knowledge of normative regulations;
2. Organization and supervision of the different types of activities;

3. Exerting control over the consumption of medications and consumables;
4. Control over the observance of working time and leave of absence;
5. Organization and control over nutrition;
6. Staff recruitment;
7. Staff training.

The following ethoprofile for this official position was described as: high level of command of innovation and risk-taking, organizational, administrative and social skills, a high level of communication skills and average degree of imagination and physical ability.

### 4. Discussion

The qualitative study found that according to the participants there were no significant differences in the profiles of a hospital nurse and that of a midwife despite the objective differences related to the character of the activities, professional autonomy and the differences between professional educational programs.

Consenting on group profiles health care specialists outlined the following areas of abilities that need to predominate in the profession of a nurse – 80% „ability to speak”, 60% „imagination”, 100% „physical ability”, „being innovative” and „possessing organizational, business and social skills”.

In the professional requirements defined for the position of a hospital nurse, participants stressed particularly on the ability to communicate; the possession of theoretical and clinical knowledge and its practical application; the ability to take personal responsibility as well as to make decisions unaided.

The perception of professionalism implied accuracy, being attentive and having confidence both in practical actions and in making decisions and that „... a lot of tasks also involve showing initiative as well as good organizational and coordinating abilities and skills”.

Considerable differences were established in the profile of a pediatric and psychiatric nurse at a day-nursery, for whom „imagination” and „social skills” were considered to be of the greatest importance.

Individual work-related behavior constitutes a complex combination of various factors and characteristics working together [20]. The individual needs of the health care professionals, their perceptions and expectations are some of the principal determinants of the work place behavior and performance. These determinants together with the personality traits and behavioral specifics, individuals' technical and intellectual capacity and their physical resources are instrumental in the accomplishment of organizational aims [21].

The professional profiles obtained by means of summarizing group discussions however culturally specific proved to be comparable and comply with standardized profiles of medical professions presented by other authors [22, 23,24].

## 5. Conclusion and Limitations

The main limitation of this study was the small number of students. Results should be confirmed with large studies and other medical specialists.

Individuals achieve self-fulfillment in society through their profession; through their profession they create value both for society and for themselves, thus securing the means of their own existence. The harmonization of professional activity requirements with the individuals' expectations (interests) determines to a great extent the realization of higher professional achievements.

Involving healthcare professionals in exploring ethograms and ethoprofiles may foster professional commitment and prove to be an effectiveness managerial approach of human resources through enhanced organizational communication encouraging feedback on personnel self-assessment thus enabling effective motivation and decision making.

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