‘I beg your pardon?’ – Nurses’ experiences in facilitating doctors’ learning process

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Introduction

In Belgium, general practitioners (GPs) are assisted by nurses from specialized palliative home care teams (PHCTs) in caring for their palliative patients. Previous research indicates GPs’ learning from these nurses during collaboration (workplace learning: WPL). We trained PHCT nurses in communication techniques to facilitate GPs’ WPL behavior and process. It is not known how the nurses experience this new task and how they manage during everyday collaboration with GPs.

Methods

Semi-structured interviews were taken from 28 nurses one month after the training. Topics discussed: what goes well and what doesn’t; how do you feel in this new role; how does the training affect your work?

Grounded Theory analysis was done by two researchers.

Results

Shared themes by all nurses: Patient care as core business and Respect for other team members from whatever discipline

Two axes were defined: from expert role to facilitator role and from patient care focused to GP relationship focused

Crossing the axes resulted in 4 typologies of nurses: Consultant, Buddy, Supporter and Team Manager. Each had their own way of handling their tasks, roles and responsibilities

Discussion/implications

Training of PHCT nurses added the role of ‘teacher/trainer’ to the previous role of ‘consulted expert’. This induced a tendency towards reflective practice with GPs. Some nurses mentioned a loss of spontaneity when applying certain communication techniques. Peer discussions within the nursing team helped to overcome this. The shared focus on quality of patient care initiated collaborative discussions between nurses and GPs, resulting in mutual respect for each other’s views and responsibilities. Nurses felt more comfortable in discussing medical policy with GPs. Attention should be paid to the match of a nurse’s identity with one of the typologies.

Training PHCT nurses can foster conditions for WPL for GPs. Further research is needed to evaluate the effect on the learning outcomes of GPs.