

Background

The nursing mobile workstation (NMW) is frequently described as equipment that facilitates direct nursing care and is daily used in the hospital setting. It is generally described as a mobile device that can be found adjacent to the patients room. It houses equipment used in nursing care and ICT devices such as a computer. It could be seen as a vital tool to assist nurses in their daily tasks. However, limited evidence exists on this NMW.

Aim(s)

This study aims to explore what it is used for, by whom and what facilitates or hinders the use of the NMW.

Methods

A descriptive observational design was used with observations of an actively used NMW (n=105) on 19 nursing wards in an university hospital in Flanders. An observation tool was developed to guide the observers. Focus group and individual interviews (n=19) were held with nurses. An interview guide was used. The data were thematically analyzed.

Results

Twenty-two functions were identified. The NMW is used by nurses to register/consult information in the electronic medical records (EMR), to dispose of waste, to disinfect hands and to gather nursing equipment. Other nurses, doctors, administrative employees and patients/family members use the NMW as a meeting place, to gather nursing equipment, to pass on documents or to consult or revise the EMR.

Nurses state they need the NMW to work efficiently, to reduce the walking distances between patient and nursing station, to register/consult data at the point of care, to feel professional, to be prepared for unforeseen circumstances, to protect privacy of the patients and to monitor their patients from a distance.

The difficulty in steering and maneuvering due to the weight and size of the NMW, the absence of locks on the medication drawers, the lack of stock of nursing material and being interrupted while working were stated as barriers in the use of the NMW.

Discussion

Contradiction between the needs of the patients/family members and the needs of the nurses regarding the NMW became apparent.

Nurses view the NMW as a moving desk that provides them with nursing equipment and seem to lack a clear vision on the future of the NMW. They expressed a wait-and-see attitude when asked about a new design for the NMW. They seemed to assume that they will learn to work with or around the NMW given to them by management, rather than proactively taking the lead of the process.

Implications and future perspectives

This study was conducted in an University hospital where patient allocation is used to organize care. It might be interesting for future research to compare the functions and users of the NMW in an different health care setting. A more proactive attitude of nurses is needed to design the NMW of the future.

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