

## Development of quality of nursing care in Thailand

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**Background.** In Thailand there is a need to establish definitions of quality of nursing care and to determine how it is measured. There is an urgent need to focus more closely on indicators of nursing quality. In Thailand there is no agreed upon definition of quality nursing care or indicators by which to measure it.

**Purpose.** The purpose of this research was to develop a definition of quality of nursing care and to begin the process of defining quality of care indicator measures to evaluate the care given in acute care settings.

**Methods.** This descriptive study was conducted in Thailand. The process included two phases. The first phase used individual interviews and focus group discussion and the second phase included consultation with quality of nursing care experts. An interview guide was used to structure the interviews and the draft definitions of quality and suggested indicators were used when consulting with the experts in the second phase of the study.

**Findings.** The findings are organized into two sections: (1) definition of quality of nursing care and quality of nursing indicators; and (2) consultation with Thailand quality experts to refine the definition and quality of care indicators. The indicators were categorized into three groups: structure, process, and outcome.

**Limitations.** This descriptive study using qualitative method relied upon the opinions of various stakeholders. Their opinions may or may not have any direct

relationship to the scientific literature related to quality. Many of the indicators need to be further refined.

**Conclusions.** The findings generally support the initial work done in the United States of America. There is a need to further refine the various Thailand indicators. This study is the first in Thailand that has attempted to address quality of nursing care.

**Keywords:** indicators of quality, international, nursing, quality of care, qualitative research, Thailand

## Introduction

Health care delivery in Thailand as elsewhere in the world is experiencing unparalleled changes. The escalating cost of care, demand for health care services, and innovations in the treatment of diseases are creating momentous changes in systems of health care delivery. The demands on the health care system are straining the existing infrastructure.

Health care reform in Thailand began slowly in the mid to late 1990s. The current economic crisis is forcing both the public and private sectors to examine closely costs and quality of care. With patients unable to afford care at private facilities, public sector agencies are experiencing rapid increases in their patient population, while their revenues are diminishing (Bhatiasevi 1998). The increase in patient demand has the potential to impact significantly on the quality of health care.

Nurses comprise the largest group of health care providers in both the public and private sectors. Patients have more contact with professional nurses than any other health care provider. It is appropriate that nursing, as a vital component of the health care delivery system, reaffirms its purpose as a practical discipline in assisting patients to achieve positive health care outcomes (Pollard *et al.* 1996).

Changes in the nursing workforce as well as changes in the health care system have prompted renewed efforts to ensure that hospitalized patients receive quality nursing care. In response to these efforts nurses in Thailand are increasingly aware of the need to focus more closely on indicators of quality. In Thailand models for assessing quality of care are not well developed. There are no national standards of nursing care and nursing practice, and limited indicators to measure the quality of nursing care delivered in hospital settings.

A significant nursing shortage in Thailand combined with severe economic constraints of funding available for health care has prompted concern in the nursing community regarding patient safety and the quality of care provided to patients in hospitals. A major concern is that the cost

reductions will impact on the quality of health care (Bhatiasevi 1998, Nontharit & Bhatrasevi 1998).

In order to ensure that the citizens of Thailand continue to receive cost effective, high quality nursing care, nursing must take an active role in determining how these goals are achieved. There is a critical need for more definitive data to document the link between nursing interventions, staffing levels and patient outcomes. The need to define quality of nursing care and to determine how it is measured is urgent. Health care costs, as in other countries, could potentially reduce the number of registered nurses and replace them with unlicensed nurses or other licensed personnel. Such changes could adversely impact the quality of care received by the citizens of Thailand. Initiatives are needed to establish definitions of quality of nursing care and to determine how it is measured. This will allow the profession to explore links between nursing interventions and patient outcomes (American Nursing Association [ANA] 1996).

In response to these concerns there is an urgent need to focus more closely on indicators of nursing quality. Information collected from these indicators will provide nurses, policy makers, and consumers with information concerning the quality of nursing care being provided. While this study focuses on acute care settings, the application and value will also apply in other clinical settings.

The purpose of this two-phase research is to develop a definition of quality of nursing care and to begin the process of defining quality of care indicator measures designed to evaluate the care given in acute care settings. The research questions for this study are:

- What is the definition of nursing care quality in Thailand?
- What are nursing care quality indicators in Thailand?

## Literature review

The Thailand nursing literature was reviewed manually using the only available database, the *Thailand Research Report*. This document lists all Master of Science theses completed in