Infant Behavior Theory and Attachment: a theoretical basis for care

The Problem

The Obstetrics (OB) nursing service saw an opportunity to have the Infant Behavior Theory (as used by T. Berry Brazelton MD) become our model of practice. We wanted to assess the influence that this infant behavior model has on maternal newborn attachment as well as how the utilization of this model affects the staff nurse's job satisfaction.

Aim/Goal

We are towards the end of our research project, approved by the IRB, to:

- How does being cared for by a nurse who has participated in the attachment training effect a mother's perceptions of her attachment to her baby?
- How does participating in attachment training program affect a nurse's attitudes and behaviors towards her work and satisfaction with her work?
- What are the mother's perceptions of the nurses' role in helping her learn about her baby?
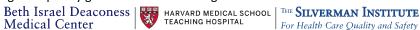
The Team

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The Interventions

Sixteen Labor and Delivery (L&D) and Postpartum (PP) RN's were trained in the intervention by the clinical expert on infant behavior theory. 183 L&D and PP RN's were recruited to be in the control arm of the study and delivered usual care. 32 patients were consented to participate and 11 became part of the intervention cohort when they were cared for by an intervention trained nurse. 21 patients became part of the control group when they were cared for only by non-intervention trained RN's. Mothers were surveyed postpartum using a maternal infant attachment questionnaire and in 2 phone calls. Nurses were surveyed prior to and at the end of the study with a written questionnaire, and were given the opportunity to participate in focus groups.

The intervention trained nurses learned how to engage and empower parents to recognize and respond to the behavior cues of their infant. For example, during a one to one bath demonstration, the RN engaged the parents in identifying their infant's behaviors and capabilities. Staff also engaged in dialogue with parents providing anticipatory guidance and mentoring.

The Results/Progress to Date

We are currently analyzing both the qualitative and quantitative data.

The age range of the patients was 22 to 40 and the average age was between 31 and 35.

The nurses' years of experience ranged from 0 to over 30 years, with 25% less than 10 years' experience and 75% with greater than 10 years. 80% of the nurses had a Bachelor's degree as their highest level of education.

24 of the 32 patients completed the study. The maternal infant attachment questionnaire was completed by 71.8% (23 of the 32) participants.

Lessons Learned

One strength of the research is our highly experienced interdisciplinary team with an academic partnership with Simmons College. Despite the logistical hurdles, we have maintained the solid team structure and have persisted in carrying out the research.

We learned many lessons: 2 interviewers conducted the follow up phone calls so there was variation between their techniques which limited inter-rater reliability: there were limited financial resources to train a larger group of intervention nurses. We also had budget cuts, clinical crises and staffing crises occur on our units as we were conducting our research. This impacted our ability to maintain the research timeline. It was very challenging to have staff with full time responsibilities conduct the research. We have been very fortunate for the past two years to have the help of administrative staff from the Clinical Research Center assist us.

Next Steps/What Should Happen Next

➢ Finish analyzing the data
➢ Present a poster at the AWHONN conference in 2014
➢ Train all staff in the L&D and OB units in the infant behavior theory and to make this the theoretical basis of the care provided to our patients.

References:

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