

NURSE AGREEABLENESS AND THE LOWEST PATIENT-PERCEIVED CARE QUALITY

Ching-I Teng, Graduate Institute of Business and Management, Department of Industrial and Business Management, Chang Gung University, 259, Wenhua 1st Rd, Gueishan Shiang, Taoyuan 333, Taiwan, 886-3-2118800 ext 5418, chingit@mail.cgu.edu.tw.

Wen-Hsin Hsu, Department of Health Care Management, Chang Gung University, a27123@hotmail.com.

The authors thank Chang Gung Memorial Hospital for financial support (CARPD360032).

ABSTRACT

Care quality has been widely recognized as a vital healthcare outcome because it boosts patients' intention revisit a certain hospital (Lee & Yom, 2007). Previous studies have investigated care quality using perception of a single patient to assess care quality provided by a single nurse. Such an approach restrains us from understanding the phenomenon that the care quality delivered by a single nurse may fluctuate from time to time. The worst case owing to the fluctuation or the lowest patient-perceived care quality may trigger patient complaints, negative word-of-mouth, and reduction in revisit behavior. Thus research is needed to understand the lowest patient-perceived care quality. Personality theory suggests that agreeableness (tendency to be kind, empathetic, and friendly) is essential for a job involving helping others. This study thus investigated whether agreeableness is positively related to the *lowest* patient-perceived care quality. Using personality theory, we developed hypotheses which predict positive relations between nurse agreeableness and the lowest patient perception of care quality.

This study utilized a cross-sectional design, and questionnaires for collecting responses from nurses and patients in 90 units in two medical centers. This study collected 412 complete sets of responses. Each set comprised one nurse and three patients. This study included full-time nurses who work at the day shift, increasing comparability within our study sample. Totally, we issued 1424 questionnaires to patients and 473 questionnaires to nurses. We excluded the responses that were incomplete or did not for a complete data set (one nurse and three patients). Eventually, we used 1236 patient responses and 412 nurse responses for analyses. The effective response ratio for patient participants is 86.8%, while the effective response ratio for nurse participants is 87.1%.

This study used regressions for testing study hypotheses. For the three patients cared by a single nurse, the minimum score among their scores was coded as the lowest care quality for the nurse, which was used as the dependent variable in regressions. All nurses included in this study were female and thus nurse gender was not used as an independent variable. Nurse age was used as the independent variable because Uzun (2001) identified a positive link between nurse age and care quality. Nurse education was used as the independent variable because previous studies have identified nurse education is positive to patient care outcomes (Aiken *et al.*, 2003; Chang & Mark, 2009). Moreover, nurse age was highly correlated with years of experience of nursing ($r = .81$) and thus years of experience was excluded from regression analyses owing to avoidance of multicollinearity. This study utilized the level of statistical significance of 0.05.

We found that agreeableness is positively related to the lowest perception of care quality, in terms of reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles ($\beta \geq .06$, $t \geq 2.19$, $p \leq .05$). The literature has identified a negative relationship between nurse agreeableness and depersonalization (Deary,

Watson, & Hogston, 2003; Watson, Deary, Thompson, & Li, 2008), indicating the important role of nurse agreeableness in caring tasks. The present study is in line with the literature by investigating the influences of nurse agreeableness. However, this study is new in proposing *the lowest* care quality perceptions as the novel influences of nurse agreeableness. The findings of this study indicate the need for further research on the influences of nurse agreeableness.

Keywords: Hospital nurse; agreeableness; patient-perceived care quality; care quality; the lowest care quality.