Stress Factors in Nursing: A Literature Review

By: Eva Kuperman, RN
Faculty Mentor: Professor Regina Gonzalez Lama, RN, MS
Department: Nursing

Introduction
“Stress, up to a certain point, will improve people’s performance and quality of life because it is healthy and essential that they should experience challenges within their lives…” (Moustaka & Constantinidis, 2010, p.211). Stress, and its consequences, can be beneficial or detrimental to one’s health and productivity. Mild stress can increase attention and promote learning and growth. However, excessive stress can become harmful, causing anxiety, an inability to pay attention, follow commands, or concentrate, and even a state of panic. The ability of nurses to cope with stressors when they arise is a vital skill.

What are the common stress factors?
- Working environment
  - Poor ventilation and lighting
  - Bad odors and too much noise
  - Warm vs cool colors
  - Temperature
- Interpersonal relationships
- Nature of nursing
  - Death and dying
  - Long days/mandated overtime
  - Night shifts
- Organizational factors
  - Understaffing
  - General ward nurses often form poorer nurse-patient relationships than critical care nurses
  - Lack of support from higher ups
- Role characteristics
  - Difficult patient populations
  - Errors of omission
- Individual characteristics
  - Lack of preparation in handling emotional needs of patients
  - Nurses “eating their young”

What are the results of stress?
- Common results of stress include:
  - Problems in staff’s behavior
  - Mental health problems
    - Anxiety
    - Depression
    - Apathy
  - Physical health problems
    - Insomnia
    - Muscle, joint, and back pain
    - Can contract an illness from their patients
  - Migraines and hypertension
  - Poor decision making skills
  - Lack of concentration
  - Lack of job satisfaction
  - Poor eating habits
  - Alcohol/drug use
  - Errors
    - Medication errors
    - Errors of omissions/commission
  - Emotional exhaustion
  - Burnout
    - Ineffective coping mechanism
    - Feelings of exhaustion, inability to complete tasks, and detachment

What are solutions to limiting stress?
- Mentoring
  - Leads to nurses having improved feelings about their job
- Work with the management to report bullying
- Lobby for workplace violence prevention and protection
- Advocacy for the patients and themselves
- Leave/transfer units or work settings
- Alter work hours to allow for rest
- Accept you cannot control everything
- Self care
  - Positive self talk
  - Allow yourself time to think
  - Meditation
  - Rest periods and adequate sleep
  - Healthy diet and exercise
  - Deep breathing techniques
  - Make time for hobbies, interests, and relaxation

Objective
- Provide an overview of what stress is and the relevance of stress in nursing.
- The discuss the significance of stress to nurse and patient outcomes.
- To discuss common stress factors and the results of stress.
- To provide solutions for the stress that nurses face.

Significance
- Nurses are the front line, and sometimes only line, of patient care.
- If a nurse is stressed, they are most likely unable to provide safe and quality care.
- The impact of stress can be detrimental not just to the nurse, but to the unit (turnover, unit dynamics), and patient.

Male vs Female
- A study was conducted with 189 nurses (149 female and 50 male) from various wards.
- Questions were asked from the Occupational Stress Inventory Revised (OSI-R).
- The 60 question questionnaire was used to determine job stress and the cause of stress.
- Females: Range of roles (48.4%), role duality (40.9%) and job environment (39.6%).
- Males: Range of roles (57.5%), job environment (50%) and responsibility (45%).
- Range of roles= ability to determine a conflict and what their job requirements are.
- Role duality= knowledge of priority setting and expectations for their job
- Job environment= unsuitable environments in which nurses spend their work hours
- Responsibility= determining their own responsibility and impact on patient’s welfare