

## STRATEGIES PERFORMED BY NURSES FOR RISK FACTORS PREVENTION: A BIBLIOMETRIC STUDY

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### RESUMO

Este estudo teve o objetivo de caracterizar as competências do nutricionista hospitalar e as estratégias gerenciais desenvolvidas para a mobilização dessas competências. Trata-se de uma pesquisa qualitativa, na qual participaram 29 nutricionistas de três instituições hospitalares. Os dados foram coletados de julho a setembro de 2015 por meio de duas fontes de evidências: entrevistas semiestruturadas e observação direta. Foi realizada análise de conteúdo indutiva dos dados. Os resultados permitiram evidenciar competências dos nutricionistas, tais como conhecimento teórico-prático, liderança, comunicação e trabalho em equipe. Estratégias para desenvolver as competências também foram identificadas, sendo algumas delas: participação em cursos, treinamentos e palestras. Considera-se que este estudo possibilita a reflexão de futuros profissionais, centros formadores e gestores dos serviços de saúde quanto às competências essenciais do nutricionista para atuação no contexto hospitalar. Programas de educação permanente em serviço devem contribuir para o aprimoramento de novas competências. A análise das competências desenvolvidas na formação acadêmica do nutricionista deve ser fator essencial para o alcance de melhores resultados na prática profissional do nutricionista.

**Palavras-chave:** Nutritionists; Professional Competence; Hospital Food Service; Strategies.

### INTRODUCTION

The nutritionist is the professional who is directly related to pathologies of nutritional origin, for which the specialized attention in nutrition is fundamental in the recovery of the patient<sup>(1)</sup>. Thus, a competent worker profile is required.

The institutions' concern about the skills of professionals has been notable. Skilled workers with manual agility added to the skills to propose changes, creativity and safety in decision making have been increasingly demanded by the institutions, that is, with a profile capable of responding to rapid changes in the labor market<sup>(2)</sup>.

Professional skills may be related to human capabilities to fulfill a specific task, and these have become a basic element that allows companies to be focused on the essential aspects of their business and to have human capital that has knowledge, skills and attitudes to respond to the challenges of the globalized world. Thus, competencies focus on knowledge

holders who have the skills and attitudes to perform their job effectively<sup>(3)</sup>.

Improving or mobilizing professional skills presupposes a differentiated work within the organizations that must seek instruments or strategies to develop them. With this, having human capital with mastery of the practice through the professional competence that allows to carry out their work with efficiency<sup>(2)</sup>.

In this direction, the nutritionist must have competencies to perform his/her work with excellence. Practical skills essential for nutrition professionals, such as nutritionists and nutrition technicians, have been identified at the international level, such as Ethics and Professionalism; Communication; Leadership; Decision Making; Computing; Safety and Risk Management; Clinical Care; Community; Food Service Management and Organization Management, among others<sup>(4)</sup>.

In Brazil, the body responsible for professional practice has emphasized that nutritionists who work in

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a hospital should develop skills both in clinical nutrition and in the collective feeding area. Among the main attributions of the clinical nutrition area in the hospital, there is the provision of nutritional assistance to patients. So, the nutritionist must perform nutritional assessment, which will result in nutritional diagnosis, being possible to determine the best prescription for that patient<sup>(5)</sup>.

In contrast, the Food and Nutrition Service of a hospital should receive dietary prescription and plan menus according to the needs of their patients. This activity also requires the performance of the hospital nutritionist, so he/she needs technical skills that are references to the Food and Nutrition Unit, in which the diets will be elaborated according to the dietary prescriptions<sup>(5)</sup>.

In this perspective, given the complexity and breadth of the nutritionist's work in the hospital and that the balance between the nutritional needs of the patients and the costs of the diet in the hospital can be guaranteed by this professional, this study presents the following questions: who is the nutritionist who works in a hospital nutrition service? What competencies do these professionals perceive to be essential for the hospital? Are there managerial strategies being carried out to enhance skills in these workers?

Thus, identifying the profile of nutritionists and their competencies may provoke the reflection of future professionals, managers of health services, as well as it may provide subsidies for the training centers in the implementation of active teaching-learning strategies aiming at the improvement or development of new skills. Regarding the relevance of this theme, there is still a shortage of studies that have identified the competencies of the nutritionist, especially those who work in the hospital setting. It is important to say that studies were found addressing competences of the nutritionist in the scope of Collective Health and managerial skills of the nutritionist in outsourced feeding, but these are not specifically directed to hospitals.

Thus, the present research aimed to characterize the professional skills of the hospital nutritionist and the management strategies developed to enhance these skills.

## METHODOLOGY

This is an exploratory and qualitative study that used as a methodological design the multiple case study, which is considered an empirical research

method that studies contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context, when the border between the phenomenon and context is not clearly evident and in which several sources of evidence are used<sup>(6)</sup>.

This research was carried out between July and September 2015. The research scenario consisted of three hospital institutions, two public and one philanthropic. Twenty-nine nutritionists participated and two sources of evidence were used to collect data: direct non-participant observation, and semi-structured interviews.

The observation occurred on the occasion of field visits for interviews; it lasted one hour before and after the interviews, with the aid of a script that contained topics related to the professional skills of nutritionists and possible strategies of the institution for their development. The data were recorded in a field diary.

For the interviews, a two-part script was used. The first one consists of data identifying the professional's profile, such as gender, age, graduation year, postgraduate area and working time at the institution. The second part contained open questions to identify the skills of nutritionists and the strategies of the service to develop them.

The interviews took place individually, during working hours, in a private room, with duration of approximately 20 minutes, being recorded and later transcribed in full. The scripts were submitted to visual and content validation by specialists in the area, that is, the script items were evaluated for their appearance, clarity and whether the content was representative in the universe they would be used.

It is worth mentioning that the data recorded during the observation were aggregated to the data of the interviews and analyzed jointly in order to reach the proposed objective. For the interpretation of the data, the inductive content analysis was performed and, for that, thematic analysis was chosen<sup>(7)</sup>.

The participants were identified by the initials "NUT" for Nutritionist and received a numeration in Arabic numeral sequence, NUT1 to NUT29, thus guaranteeing the anonymity of the speeches. This study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the School of Nursing of Ribeirão Preto at the University of São Paulo (EERP-USP), under protocol CAAE: 44632915.1.0000.5393.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Twenty-nine nutritionists participated in the study, with only one male. In relation to age, 18 were over 30

years old, that is, it was a mature population that may have had other experiences, which corroborates data from another study<sup>(8)</sup>. As for the working time in the hospital, 12 of them have worked as nutritionists for five to nine years; 11 of them have worked for less than four years; and six have been working for more than 10 years, a result also found in another study<sup>(8)</sup>. This situation portrays a professional who has some experience, but that can improve his/her skills in a complex setting such as the hospital.

The analysis of the discourses allowed identifying two categories: Competences of nutritionists working in the hospital Nutrition and Dietetics Service (NDS) and Strategies to develop nutritionists' competences.

Competences of Nutritionists working in the hospital Nutrition and Dietetics Service (NDS)

The competences of the nutritionists working in hospital NDS identified were: Theoretical-Practical Knowledge, Leadership, Communication, Interpersonal Relationships, Multidisciplinary Teamwork and Ethics.

### **Theoretical-practical knowledge in nutrition**

Nutritionists have perceived the need to have theoretical-practical knowledge as one of their competencies for the performance of daily activities in hospital services, which is evidenced in the following speeches:

We need to have a good theoretical foundation to position ourselves in the team, to show the importance of our area. (NUT3)

Knowledge is of utmost importance because here we always have challenges, because the most diverse pathologies appear. So, we have to study to be updated and at the same time we have to work. (NUT6)

The uniqueness of the hospital institutions and the technological advances in this area have driven the constant increase of care complexity, which demands of the workers of this sector greater knowledge of their practice. In this direction, nutritionists acknowledge this need, corroborating with another study in which the theoretical-practical knowledge was perceived as part of the skills needed by health professionals working in hospital settings<sup>(9)</sup>. Thus, it is relevant that these professionals constantly improve their knowledge so that they can meet the needs of the team and the institution.

The nutritionist is called upon to make decisions in their work process. For this, in addition to their ability to solve problems, they must have a certain degree of

improvisation, guided by experience and knowledge<sup>(10)</sup>.

### **Leadership in nutrition**

Leadership was pointed out as a skill to be performed by the nutritionist during their supervisory activity.

I think leadership is important because we focus on the responsibilities of everything. So if you do not lead and if the people that are together, if they are not in line with what you need to match the job, the work does not happen or happens inefficiently. So, I think leadership will always be important in this regard. (NUT7)

Leadership I think it is very important because for you to work in this type of service in which much happens at the same time, you have to know how to delegate functions for each person, precisely to help the operation. (NUT10)

In this sense, leadership is perceived as competence when these professionals take on skills by delegating activities to the team so that the work can happen effectively, promoting the improvement of NDSs. The nutritionist has the role of effective leader, both in administration and supervision, in order to ensure that its subordinates carry out their work in a sublime way, ensuring safe and healthy food<sup>(11)</sup>. The nutritionist must recognize the value and role of each member of his/her team in order to establish responsible leadership, in which trust and the constant pursuit of knowledge must prevail.

### **Interpersonal communication with users and professionals**

The Hospital Nutrition Service is considered to be a complex service that demands clear communication both among the members of the team and between the professional and the user. In this sense, interpersonal communication was pointed out as one of the essential competences for the nutritionist to carry out his/her work efficiently.

Without communication nothing happens. We have to communicate a lot and very well, especially in this area here. Because if you say one thing half said, if you think the other person understood without being sure he understood, things may not happen the way they must happen. (NUT7)

And communication is of utmost importance; you must know how to communicate with the patient. (NUT15)

Through the communication established with the clients, the professional knows their general vision,

their way of thinking, feeling and acting; identifies the problems experienced by them and can help them in preserving or improving their health<sup>(12)</sup>. Communication is considered an important tool in the interpersonal relationship between professionals and the patient and in the success of the educational actions carried out by the professionals with those that are under their care<sup>(13)</sup>.

Thus, communication favors teamwork, also highlighted as essential competence to the nutritionist, since the collaboration and articulation of all, that is, the nutrition and health team, make the service possible, thus favoring a positive result for the user.

### ***Multidisciplinary teamwork***

The collaboration and articulation of all those working in the nutrition and the health team enables the service to reach a positive result. Thus, for nutritionists, the performance within the hospital should be based on teamwork, that is, a competence that favors the development of the work together with other professionals.

Teamwork is important because our work is not only in the scope of care, of working only in the clinic, for example, the issue of patient's diet therapy. We, at this location, help in coordination; we all help each other, the coordinator, clinical administration, schedules, absences, and employees' statistics [...] (NUT26)

So, knowing how to work in a team is crucial. Because you have to work with a physician, nurse and psychologist; so we have to work with a multidisciplinary team. (NUT9)

Multidisciplinarity can be conceptualized as a mutual aid for the well-being of the user. Teamwork facilitates patient and family approach and enables greater ability to provide comfort<sup>(14)</sup>.

Thus, teamwork becomes very beneficial both for the institution and for the users, since it allows the tasks to be fulfilled more quickly and efficiently, besides stimulating the improvement of the skills of each professional. Still, team interaction adds value to the service and builds trust among professionals, making them motivated and prepared to take on challenges that may emerge from their own professional practice.

### ***Interpersonal relationship***

Interpersonal relationship is very complex because we are people with different feelings, values, emotions, needs and, therefore, we react and relate in a different way. When questioning the nutritionist about their competences, the interpersonal relationship was

described as one of them.

I think the area of psychology, the interpersonal relationship; you have to have a lot to work. (NUT2)

You have to try to solve, the dialogue, as best as possible, so as not to become a mess. You have to try to solve the situation, respect the posture of other professionals. (NUT5)

The interpersonal relationship with the team and with the users must be a competence of the nutritionists, as it empowers these professionals to deal effectively in the scope of interpersonal relationships in the face of the most diverse situations. It is noteworthy that the nutritionist, besides having skills, must have internal availability to establish an adequate interpersonal relationship regardless of the context in which they are inserted.

A study described how the human capacity to maintain relationships, communicate and live with other people is an indispensable factor for socialization<sup>(15)</sup>. However, when the interpersonal relationship is not innate to the professional, management strategies can help developing it.

### ***Professional ethics***

In order for professionals to develop their work with commitment and responsibility in the hospital, it is necessary to seek the development of a collective work through dialogue and involvement, respecting the ethical precepts of each profession. Thus, ethics was identified as an essential competence of the nutritionist.

We must have ethics, for sure. Making comments about the patient both inside and out there is unethical. Secrecy of information; otherwise it interferes with their nutritional behavior. (NUT26)

Ethics, every work has to be based on ethics, implicit, not only in nutrition, but in life as a whole; you have to have ethics. (NUT29)

The ideology of ethics occurs under a permanent state of insecurity that demands the maximum of the professional's potentialities and an unrestrained overcoming of productivity in an environment of exacerbated managerial pressure and peer competitiveness<sup>(16)</sup>.

Talking about the professional ethics of the nutritionist is talking about values, virtues, responsibility and respect. The principles of ethical responsibility of this professional should be to understand the work they are performing and to take their performance in a responsible manner. Thus, the

ethical professional must make appropriate decisions following their values and principles in line with the principles of the organization.

### **Strategies to develop nutritionists' competences**

The discourses also revealed managerial strategies for the development of competences, of which some have been carried out by the organization and others by the professionals themselves.

#### **Organizational Strategies**

The present study identified strategies developed by the organizations, some continuously and others periodically, for the improvement of skills of nutritionists, such as training, courses and meetings with the team, which can be verified in the following statements:

Well, sometimes the hospital provides us with this. We are invited to participate in courses, on this area of management, and some are even mandatory; we need to attend and participate in these courses. (NUT6)

They use strategies through meetings, bulletins, workshops that we have to attend. [...] Periodically we have team meetings to set goals for the good care of the patient. We also have training courses within the institution. (NUT9)

It is observed that the organization uses some strategies for the professional's development, which can contribute positively for the formation of new competences.

Organizational strategies are necessary for the various and unexpected work situations that may arise in the form of challenges, innovations or new customer demands<sup>(9)</sup>. Permanent education should be a strategy promoted by organizations for professional development.

Permanent education in health is considered as one of the most effective strategies for the qualification of workers and, consequently, for the management and health care of users<sup>(17)</sup>. The training and support of the institution are crucial for the professional to follow the constant changes and demands of the labor market, so the institution must constantly seek strategies for the improvement of its workers<sup>(18)</sup>.

#### **Individual Strategies**

As a way to complement their training and develop skills for their activity in the institution, nutritionists have sought to constantly improve through lectures, training and updates, even postgraduate courses.

I usually attend courses, conferences, and even before I take up the position of leadership, I had to participate in several courses to improve and offer greater quality in my service. With this, I think that I can do much better in the work environment and be competent in my service. (NUT2)

We have to show interest by searching courses for technical knowledge, improvement, workshops in our area of expertise [...] (NUT6)

A competent professional would then be the one who not only have resources, but also who would be able to use them adequately to carry out a task, regardless of its complexity<sup>(19)</sup>. Thus, the professional becomes responsible for their learning and updating<sup>(9)</sup>.

Although the professionals have emphasized that the professional experience of the daily routine and the experience in units of such complexity contribute satisfactorily to their learning and performance, personal strategies have been conducted, as their participation in scientific events and search for specialization courses. In spite of this, the organization must facilitate the improvement of competences, that is, provide to the nutritionists conditions for them to develop themselves.

This research has a limitation regarding the professional category participant, since it approaches only nutritionists working in hospital nutrition services, believing that these could have an expanded vision about their competences, not being contemplated other professionals of the health team that could also raise aspects of the nutritionist's competencies. Therefore, further studies should extend research to other categories of health team professionals with a view to comparing and/or generalizing the data, in order to contribute to identify gaps in the training of nutritionists that should be developed for the demands of hospital nutrition services.

### **FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The study of competencies has been object of study in several professional areas. This study focused on the nutritionist who works in the hospital. Teamwork, communication, theoretical-practical knowledge, leadership, interpersonal relationship and ethics were identified as competencies that should permeate the practices of attention to nutrition, especially in the hospital.

Competences can be developed by professionals constantly, beginning in the academic training and having continuity in the work as professional. For this purpose, organizational and/or individual strategies are

necessary. This research also identified specific strategies of the organization to develop these competences and, because they are not systematized, the professionals sometimes have to make an individual search for this improvement. Permanent education activities offered by the organization continuously and in partnerships with training centers represent an effective alternative for the development of competences, contributing to the transformation of the professional practice of the nutritionist.

Also, although organizational support represents a preponderant factor in the training process, another fundamental factor for the learning of nutritionists is the initiative for self-development through the search for alternative paths, such as courses, specializations,

lectures and scientific events. The continuous search for knowledge and for making changes in the workplace is an attitude that is expected of nutritionists as members of the multidisciplinary team.

Thus, it is important that nutritionists continue to improve themselves in order to guarantee the development of the essential skills for their work process. In addition, it is understood that it is necessary to invest in the training centers so that they review and reflect on their mission, their pedagogical projects and teaching-learning strategies. The analysis of the competences developed in the academic training of the nutritionist should be essential for achieving better results in the professional practice of the nutritionist.

## COMPETÊNCIAS PROFISSIONAIS DO NUTRICIONISTA HOSPITALAR E ESTRATÉGIAS PARA POTENCIALIZÁ-LAS

### RESUMO

Este estudo teve o objetivo de caracterizar as competências do nutricionista hospitalar e as estratégias gerenciais desenvolvidas para a mobilização dessas competências. Trata-se de uma pesquisa qualitativa, na qual participaram 29 nutricionistas de três instituições hospitalares. Os dados foram coletados de julho a setembro de 2015 por meio de duas fontes de evidências: entrevistas semiestruturadas e observação direta. Foi realizada análise de conteúdo indutiva dos dados. Os resultados permitiram evidenciar competências dos nutricionistas, tais como conhecimento teórico-prático, liderança, comunicação e trabalho em equipe. Estratégias para desenvolver as competências também foram identificadas, sendo algumas delas: participação em cursos, treinamentos e palestras. Considera-se que este estudo possibilita a reflexão de futuros profissionais, centros formadores e gestores dos serviços de saúde quanto às competências essenciais do nutricionista para atuação no contexto hospitalar. Programas de educação permanente em serviço devem contribuir para o aprimoramento de novas competências. A análise das competências desenvolvidas na formação acadêmica do nutricionista deve ser fator essencial para o alcance de melhores resultados na prática profissional do nutricionista.

**Palavras-chave:** Nutricionistas; Competência Profissional; Serviço Hospitalar de Nutrição; Estratégias.

## COMPETENCIAS PROFESIONALES DEL NUTRICIONISTA HOSPITALARIO Y ESTRATEGIAS PARA POTENCIALIZAR LAS

### RESUMEN

Este estudio tuvo el objetivo de caracterizar las competencias del nutricionista hospitalario y las estrategias gerenciales desarrolladas para la movilización de estas competencias. Se trata de una investigación cualitativa, que participaron 29 nutricionistas de tres instituciones hospitalarias. Los datos fueron recolectados de julio a septiembre de 2015 por medio de dos fuentes de evidencias: entrevistas semiestructuradas y observación directa. Fue realizado análisis de contenido inductivo de los datos. Los resultados permitieron evidenciar competencias de los nutricionistas, tales como conocimiento teórico-práctico, liderazgo, comunicación y trabajo en equipo. Estrategias para desarrollar las competencias también fueron identificadas, siendo algunas de ellas: participación en cursos, entrenamientos y conferencias. Se considera que este estudio posibilita la reflexión de futuros profesionales, centros formadores y gestores de los servicios de salud en cuanto a las competencias esenciales del nutricionista para actuación en el contexto hospitalario. Programas de educación permanente en servicio deben contribuir para el perfeccionamiento de nuevas competencias. El análisis de las competencias desarrolladas en la formación académica del nutricionista debe ser factor esencial para lograr mejores resultados en la práctica profesional del nutricionista.

**Palabras clave:** Nutricionistas; Competencia Profesional; Servicio Hospitalario de Nutrición; Estrategias.

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