

Report on the 36th International Society for Quality in Health Care Conference held from the 20th–23rd October 2019 in Cape Town, South Africa

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Introduction

The International Society for Quality in Health Care (ISQua) is an international organisation with membership from 70 countries from six continents including Africa with an aim to promote quality and patient safety through accreditation, capacity building and advocacy for health care users globally. South Africa is a member country. The conference was held for the first time on African soil in collaboration with the Council for Health Services Accreditation of Southern Africa (COHSASA). The conference presented 500 posters and 250 presentations from more than 40 countries and was attended by more than one thousand delegates. The conference was organised under the theme “Beating the drum for safety, quality and equity.”

Conference Tracks

The sessions were held under the following three tracks: Policy Sustainability and Resourcing, Patient Safety and Quality Improvement Practices. The lessons learnt from the conference will be presented with implications for nursing practice.

Policy, Sustainability and Resourcing for Quality and Safety Track

The presentations highlighted the importance of established frameworks to guide quality improvement and patient safety activities in health establishments. The evidence presented demonstrated that negative patient experiences and adverse events are prevalent in environments characterised by unguided procurement and unregulated sourcing of health human resources.

Implications for Nursing Practice

- Health professionals employed should have current registration with their professional regulatory bodies.
- There should be policies and standard operating procedures to guide practitioners in delivering health care.
- The replenishment of equipment and supplies should be based on a top-up system to ensure sustainability, minimise stock-outs and promote consistency of procedures and positive patient experiences.

Patient Safety Track

The delegates were urged to understand patient safety as programmes aimed at reducing the risk of unnecessary harm associated with health care to a minimum. Patient safety can be promoted through the implementation of a patient safety cycle covering five steps: measuring harm, understanding causes, identifying solutions, evaluating impact and translating evidence into safe care. Measuring harm involves recording harmful practices to understand the extent and nature of incidents that pose a risk to patients; understanding causes will enable the development of effective interventions to minimise these; implementing these interventions should be followed by an evaluation of their impact on patient safety; finally, the evaluation should be used to translate such interventions into policy to ensure a continuous patient safety culture in the organisation.

Implications for Nursing Practice

- Health establishments should have approved policies and processes related to patient safety to ensure standardisation of care.
- Care auditing should be undertaken in all nursing units to assess compliance and quality of care.
- Service users should be involved in their care to promote patient-centred care.

Developing Quality Improvement Skills Track

The highlight was the capacity building workshop for quality improvement conducted for identified participants. The following principles were highlighted to guide quality improvement initiatives in the health sector.

Implications for Nursing Practice

Nurses should infuse and consider the following principles in the planning and implementation of quality improvement programmes:

Context Matters

Quality improvement initiatives should not follow a one-size-fits-all approach. The environment will vary in terms of available resources, taking into account knowledge and skills, and the processes and systems in place. What works in developed countries may not necessarily work in developing countries.

Change Is Constant in Health Systems

The importance of understanding that change will always occur as new innovations emerge is fundamental for health professionals so that they develop skills and approaches that are not resistant towards but embrace change positively in the health systems.

Emotional Intelligence

Quality improvement involves challenging the status quo. As such, emotions and egos are bound to be affected. It is thus essential that the committees and staff should be exposed to capacity building in terms of team dynamics as well as emotional intelligence strategies to be able to communicate the new strategies in a manner that promotes buy-in from the stakeholders.

Simplicity Is Key

Quality improvement initiatives should utilise processes that are easy to understand. For example, a Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle is a good start rather than opting for complex processes that may not be understood by ordinary health workers and may thus create resistance and delay the implementation of quality improvement initiatives.

Systems Thinking

Although nursing is the largest sector within the health workforce unit, it requires the support of other disciplines to be able to provide quality care. There is a need for organisation-wide collaborations with finance departments, supply chains, and infrastructure teams to realise long-term quality improvement in the organisation. Systems thinking will also promote cost saving as the duplication of efforts will be prevented when teams understand what the other team is planning and plan accordingly to complement each other.

Networking Is Important to Quality Improvement

Working in silos is detrimental to quality improvement initiatives. Identifying influential people including chief executives, clinical heads and finance managers in the organisation and networking with them is essential for the successful implementation of quality improvement programmes. These people hold the purse and authority in the organisation, without which programmes will stall and not be implemented. Teamwork across disciplines is essential for success.

Promote Curiosity and Creativity in the Organisation

A leadership style that promotes quality is one that encourages personnel to ask questions and suggest ways to perform activities better. Staff opinions should be sought through quality improvement forums and quality improvement chat rooms. Staff should be rewarded and recognised for suggesting smarter ways of doing things.

Conclusion

Nurses are at the forefront of quality improvement and patient safety. It would be beneficial to access more resources through www.isqua.org.

Acknowledgement

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