

Is nursing and midwifery clinical documentation a burden? An empirical study of perception versus reality.

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ABSTRACT

Background: Accurate documentation as part of clinical communication, is needed to effectively coordinate and communicate patient care. The majority of patient related paperwork in hospitals is completed by nurses and midwives. There is international concern that clinical documentation has increased, at a time when resources and health budgets are constrained. Excessive clinical documentation reduces time available for direct patient care, lowers the quality of care and is a predictor of, and can adversely affect both clinician and patient satisfaction.

Aim: To measure how much time midwives and nurses spend completing clinical documentation and their perceptions of this aspect of their role.

Methods: This project utilises an action research approach. A time and motion study was undertaken to establish the pattern and amount of paperwork completed on each shift. Nurses and midwives were also asked to self-report the time taken to complete various aspects of clinical documentation and paperwork. Additionally, we developed and validated a questionnaire based on the existing literature, subsequently used to measure perceptions of paperwork.

Results: This presentation reports the results of the observation of n=15 midwives and/or nurses from two wards. A total of 120 hours of observation were undertaken, recording the time taken to complete paperwork. This data is compared to self-reported time taken to complete paperwork, and the difference between the objective measure and subjective perception is discussed. Results for the survey are described, illustrating the perceptions of paperwork, the issues paperwork raises and potential solutions to the problem, which will be measured using the same approach and compared to the pre-intervention data.

Conclusion: The results from this study will inform a targeted intervention to reduce paperwork burden. Reducing paperwork is likely to increase the amount of time that nurses and midwives can spend on direct patient care and improve clinician and patient satisfaction.