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The influence of an e-message system on nurses' cross-sectoral communication

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Background

Changes towards shorter hospital stay have challenged health care systems and made requirements for nurses across sectors to optimize transitional care. Cross-sectoral communication is identified as a main barrier for high quality in transitional care. Electronic communication systems have been introduced over the past years as a tool to improve cross sectoral communication and collaboration.

Project aim

The aim of the study was to investigate hospital and home care nurses' experiences on how implementation of an e-message system influences cross-sectoral communication and collaboration two years after introduction.

Project methods

Nurses from one hospital and six collaborating municipalities were included. A total of 27 nurses from three hospital departments and 52 nurses from eight different units in primary health care participated i 24 semi-structured focus group interviews. Additionally, 165 hours of participation observation was conducted. Further, a workshop with 27 nurses and leader from participating units were held to present data and develop ideas for interventions to optimize cross sectoral communication and collaboration. Data were analysed using content analysis.

Project results

The e-message system was used in both sectors but the e-message system was used for one-way communication from hospital to home care and did not promote cross-sectoral dialogue or collaboration. The home care nurses expressed distrust in the information from the hospital. The hospital nurses' intention was to provide relevant and accurate information but their main focus was to fulfil the standards within the system rather than the quality of the information exchanged. The nurses perceived the hospital and home care as two different worlds and were lacking insight into each other's world.

Preliminary or final conclusions/discussion

The e-message system supports a one-way information flow, rather than a loop of information exchange and dialogue and as such it does not support the intended communication and collaboration.