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ISSUES AFFECTING NURSING DOCUMENTATION USING
THE FOCUS CHARTING METHOD

AN ABSTRACT OF
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The purpose of this study was to examine issues affecting nurses' attitudes about documentation utilizing the Focus Charting Method. The three research questions examined attitudes of medical-surgical nurses about the documentation process, issues which facilitated nursing documentation, and issues which inhibited the nursing documentation process.

To determine the issues affecting nursing documentation, 75 medical-surgical nurses employed on seven medical-surgical units were asked to respond to a 31-item questionnaire surveying attitude, facilitative, and inhibiting elements affecting documentation. This questionnaire was derived by including items from Edelstein's (1990) tool, "Attitudes and Knowledge About Documentation Scale," elements from Tapp's (1990) study examining facilitative and inhibitory aspects of documentation, and components of Lampe's (1985) Focus Charting Method.

Of the 50 nurses comprising the sample, 13 (26%) indicated fewer than two years of experience, while the remaining 37 (74%) reported more than two years of experience. When categorized by amount of educational preparation, 41 (82%) nurses reported having earned either a diploma or associate degree in nursing, while 9 (18%) reported completing the baccalaureate degree in nursing.

The 50 subjects were asked to rate the questionnaire utilizing a 5-point forced-choice Likert-type scale with categories ranging from "always," "often," "sometimes," "rarely," and "never." The point value assigned to each of these responses was "1" thru "5" respectively, except for six reverse-scored items to avoid an acquiescence response set. The final item of the questionnaire required prioritization of various components of documentation and was taken directly from the Edelstein tool.

A one-way randomized analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed that the attitude scores did not differ significantly on the basis of experience. When compared educationally, the subjects with a diploma or associate degree scored significantly more positively than the baccalaureate group. The average facilitation score did not differ significantly between the two groups when compared by level of experience. However, when compared educationally, the baccalaureate group had a significantly higher average facilitation score. When inhibition scores were studied, the two groups did not differ significantly when compared experientially or educationally. The final item only revealed that all the subjects valued nurses' progress notes as the most important component of their documentation. Limitations of the study included flawed instructions that may have affected the responses obtained.

Implications for nursing are discussed. Future studies examining issues affecting nursing documentation should include methods which may motivate nurses to

increase their documentation performance. A more extensive educational program which involves nurses in several creative sessions to incorporate their suggestions and improve their charting behavior should be considered. An instrument which contains a greater number of items to allow for greater internal consistency and greater predictive ability should be devised for successive studies.