Background/significance: As the largest health care profession, healthy nurses are imperative to meet the health care needs of the nation (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services & Health Resources and Services Administration, 2010). Nurses, like the general American population, are not meeting dietary recommendations for health promotion and chronic disease prevention (American Nurses Association, 2017; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2010). Dietary choices, including those made while at work, significantly impact nurses’ health. Most nurses in the United States work in hospitals where staffing is required 24 hours a day; 10-12 hour shifts are typically used for coverage (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services & Health Resources and Services Administration, 2010). Extended shift work has been associated with obesity and unhealthy eating across various industries, including nursing (Amani & Gill, 2013; Han, Trinkoff, Storr, & Geiger-Brown, 2011). However, there are unique and complex factors associated with the hospital nurse role that influence workplace dietary behaviors, including environmental, social, affective, and cognitive issues. Additionally, little is known as to what extent nurses prioritize healthy eating while at work or what nurses perceive as major influencers in the hospital setting.

Purpose: The purpose of this study was twofold: 1) to explore nurses’ experiences with dietary behaviors in the workplace; and 2) examine nurses’ perceptions of barriers and facilitators related to shift work and the hospital setting on making healthy nutritional choices.

Methods: This qualitative descriptive study was guided by the Theoretical Domains Framework in both the design and analysis (Atkins et al., 2017). After obtaining IRB approval, Registered Nurses working 10-12 hour shifts in any specialty within a regional hospital system in South Carolina were interviewed individually or in focus groups. Sessions were audio-recorded and transcribed. Data were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach, and included iterative readings of the transcripts, code identification, and theme generation.

Results: Findings revealed influences from all 14 domains of the Theoretical Domains Framework; however, those that appeared most often and had the most relevance to shift-work nurses in hospitals were: 1) Environmental context and resources; 2) Social/professional role and identity; 3) Memory, attention, and decision processes; 4) Social influences; 5) Emotion; and 6) Behavioral Regulation. Further analysis revealed four major themes that had the most influence on eating behaviors for hospital-based shift work nurses were: 1) Nursing role and responsibilities restrict freedom of movement and minimize individual control over dietary practices; 2) The Hospital Food Environment is oppressively unhealthy; 3) Free food is currency and influences consumption; and 4) Shift work is a major barrier to healthy eating.

Implications: Diet is the leading contributing factor in long-term health promotion and chronic disease prevention, and should take priority in programs targeting nurses’ health (Murray et al., 2013). Nurses in the hospital setting, especially those working long shifts, experience unique influences on dietary choices. These findings should inform hospital food policies, workplace wellness programs, nursing administration practices, and nursing education. To achieve healthy eating practices in the workplace, nurses need supportive systems and policies that target and reduce the many barriers inherent in hospital-based nursing shift work.
Keywords:
dietary behaviors, hospital environment and shift work nurses

References:


Abstract Summary:
Targeting improved dietary behaviors in nurses starts with exploring and understanding the unique challenges that nurses face due to shift work and the hospital setting. Through qualitative inquiry, nurses revealed the predominant influences on eating habits in the workplace: nursing role, food environment, free food, and shift work.

Content Outline:

1. Introduction:
   1. Importance of healthy nurses
   2. Importance of diet for health
   3. Nurses’ dietary practices
   4. need for research
2. Research Methods
   1. Theoretical Domains Framework
   2. Qualitative Thematic analysis
   3. ethics
   4. inclusion criteria and sample demographics
Findings: Shift work nurses have to “run the gauntlet” to achieve healthy eating in hospitals
   1. Theoretical Domains Framework findings
      1. 1) Environmental context and resources 2) Social/professional role and identity 3) Memory, attention, and decision processes 4) Social influences 5) Emotion and 6) Behavioral Regulation
2. Nursing Role and Responsibilities restrict freedom of movement and minimizes individual control over dietary practices
   1. no break in responsibilities for the duration of the shift
   2. stress from the nursing role and responsibilities decreases nurses’ abilities to make the healthy choice
   3. workflows based on patient care needs – the nurse comes last
   4. pocket foods/eating while working
      1. restrictions on food/drink in patient care areas
      2. nurses confined to bedside or in close proximity
3. The Hospital Food Environment is oppressively unhealthy
   1. limited hours and options and long distances for healthy foods
   2. over abundance of junk foods available 24/7 and close by- often fast food restaurants available inside the hospital or very close outside the hospital and available 24/7
4. Free food as currency
   1. valued at same level as money
   2. readily available
   3. typically not a healthy choice
   4. overwhelming temptation – forces a choice
   5. social aspects of free foods
      1. given in appreciation, as bribe, as reward, for comradery, to celebrate, as consolation, and to boost morale
5. Shift work is a major barrier to healthy eating
   1. need food for energy
      1. exhaustion influences decisions
      2. types of foods eaten
      3. caffeine
      4. hurried eating
   2. 30 minute break limits choices
      1. hurried eating
      2. types of foods eaten
      3. can’t wait in line
      4. restricts distance to obtain foods
      5. long periods without food influences behaviors
      6. best strategy: bring healthy foods/snacks but time constraints from shift work limits self-efficacy for prep/planning healthy meals
   7. eat and go to bed
6. Conclusion
   1. Implications
      1. programs for dietary behavior change need to take priority and include breaks in the chains that prevent nurses from successfully eating healthy while at work
      2. more research is needed to implement and test various interventions addressing nursing specific barriers in hospitals

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