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Systems Impact of Implementing and Using Nursing Best Practice Guidelines (BPGs) in 3 Canadian Hospitals

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Background: The Registered Nurses Association of Ontario (RNAO), Canada in partnership with the Ontario Ministry of Health has taken a leadership role in developing and implementing numerous guidelines for nursing and health care professional practice.

Purpose: This study seeks a better understanding of the complex processes involved in implementing and using the RNAO Breastfeeding guidelines in 3 acute care Canadian hospitals and the system impact (client, unit, interprofessional, organizational and community impact).

Methods: Constructivist grounded theory was used to guide the development of a theoretical model of Breastfeeding guideline implementation and use in 3 Canadian hospitals. Purposive and then theoretical sampling resulted in the recruitment of 100 health care providers (nurses, physicians, midwives, senior administrators...) and clients. Triangulation of data types occurred through in-depth interviews, documents and field notes. Concurrent data collection/analysis occurred. Two researchers analyzed data and confirmed codes and categories.

Results: Essential processes for the implementation and use of the RNAO breastfeeding guidelines include:

1. Being Supported from many perspectives including passionate leadership
2. Learning and Knowing why, how and that,
3. Being Expected to and Accountable to incorporate the guidelines into practice.

The perceived impact of implementing the guidelines includes enhancing - inter-professional collaborative relationships, organizational image, nursing practice, and the unit breastfeeding culture. Nurses perceived that the guidelines - improved and supported their practice, fostered recognition of nursing work as valued, credible knowledge work and enhanced their autonomy, confidence, knowledge, problem solving and professional pride. Improved consistency of breastfeeding teaching/practices enhanced both patient and nurse satisfaction.

Discussion: The RNAO Breastfeeding BPGs resulted in important local and system impact when effective implementation processes were used. Implementation processes illuminated in this study were fundamental to the guideline uptake in these contexts.

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