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The work pattern of care workers in residential aged care facilities in Australia: A time and motion study

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The work pattern of care workers in residential aged care facilities in Australia: A time and motion study

Abstract

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Keywords

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The work pattern of care workers in residential aged care facilities in Australia: a time and motion study

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To examine whether care workers in residential aged care facilities follow an identifiable work pattern and if so, what that pattern is.

Background: It is important to understand the work patterns of care workers employed in residential aged care facilities because this can enable managers to decide on staff scheduling and task allocation, and help them to evaluate the impact of any proposed or implemented changes in care workers' practice. Moreover, the information is useful for developers and implementers to design and adopt ICT in aged-care facilities to support care works. But, in fact, there are few studies which have investigated this area.

The observation was conducted in two residential aged care facilities. A trained observer continuously monitored one morning shift care worker at a time during one observation day. For Site 1, the observation was from 7.00 am to 2.00 or 3.00 pm for 14 days, and For Site 2, the observation was from 10.00 am to 5.00 pm for 16 days. Using predefined categories of activities, the observer recorded each activity and the precise time devoted to it. A total of 86 and 106 hours of observation were recorded for Site 1 and Site 2, respectively.

Results: Care workers in residential aged care facilities constantly engage in multi-tasking. An average of 333 and 422 activities were observed on each

observation day for Site 1 and Site 2, respectively. The duration for more than 70% of activities was less than one minute. For Site 1, the most frequently occurring activity was "Equipment set-up". For Site 2, the most frequently occurring activity was "Communicating with a resident".

Conclusion: Although the major job of care workers is direct care, the most frequently occurring activities are not direct care. This may imply that these indirect care activities are crucial for the completion of direct care. The disordered workflow of care workers in residential aged-care facilities may indicate that they are constantly interrupted and seldom complete one task before starting a new one. This information is important because when attention is split, it increases the cognitive load, thus lead to nursing burden. This again may have potentially detrimental consequences on the quality of care. The problem may need to be addressed through work process redesign and the introduction of innovative ICT solutions. And the information about the workflow of care workers in residential aged-care facilities may help to develop specific ICT solutions in aged care.



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Siyu Qian is a Masters by research student at the School of Information Systems & Technology, University of Wollongong. She holds a Bachelor degree in Electronic Commerce. Siyu Qian's research field is e-health. She is supervised by Dr Ping Yu and Dr David Hailey.