

HEALTHCARE SUPPORT PERSONNEL'S UNDERSTANDING OF RADIATION SAFETY MEASURES IN RADIOLOGY DEPARTMENTS: AN EXPLORATORY DESCRIPTIVE STUDY

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Abstract

Introduction. In public and private radiology departments, healthcare support personnel such as receptionists, porters and cleaners play an important role within the departments. Shortage of radiation personnel in these radiology departments often leads to radiographers calling on healthcare support personnel to assist with holding immobile patients or the image receptor during radiological examinations.

In a study done in the Northern Gauteng state hospitals in South Africa, non-radiology healthcare workers were found to have rather little knowledge on ionising radiation. The latter is hazardous thus it is imperative that appropriate safeguards are taken to mitigate against the risks posed in instances of being exposure to ionising radiation.

Several studies that investigated radiation knowledge in other healthcare professions were explored. There is however limited literature available on the understanding of healthcare support personnel with respect to radiation safety measures.

Aim. The aim of this study was to explore and describe the healthcare support personnel's understanding of radiation safety measures in radiology departments.

Methodology. An exploratory-descriptive qualitative research study was conducted to identify what is understood about radiation safety measures through seeking the viewpoints of the participants. A purposive sampling was used to enable the researchers to select the sample based on their understanding of the phenomenon. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to permit follow up questions regarding the phenomenon. The participants were selected from both the private and public sector with a total of 23 participants. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed by the researchers. Data were analysed through content analysis to identify similar patterns, categories, and themes. The study adhered to trustworthiness and ethical principles.

Findings and recommendations. The three themes that emerged from the data analysis were (a) healthcare support personnel's understanding of radiation safety measures; (b) healthcare support personnel's understanding towards the concept of radiation; and (c) the need for radiation safety training among healthcare support personnel. These themes were then further examined into various categories to draw research conclusions.

Based on the findings, the researchers came to the conclusion that the healthcare support personnel have limited understanding of radiation safety measures and suggested that training be given. The findings enabled the researchers to comprehend the healthcare support personnel's understanding of radiation safety measures through different perspectives as narrated by the participants.

This research highlights the need for radiation protection for all and should not be limited to radiation workers. These findings should encourage departments to take notice of their support staff and to provide training opportunities at the level of the individuals. These can be in the form of CPD meetings and assessments as a method of providing a practical and effective way of rendering education on radiation protection to all personnel in radiography departments.

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