Nursing workload and potential risks to inpatient safety

**Purpose**

Although there are international initiatives for measuring nursing workload and establishing minimum nursing staff for inpatient care, Brazilian institutions still face a long path toward evidence-based approaches to nursing workload and patient safety. Challenges in nursing human resources and workplace conditions in Brazilian hospitals call for inquiry into the relationship between nursing workload and patient safety from a systems perspective.

**Objectives**

At the conclusion of this presentation the participant will be able to:

1. To identify critical aspects of the nursing work process
2. To explore nursing professionals ideas and experiences related to nursing workload and patient safety
3. To elicit the ideas and experiences of Brazilian nursing professionals related to nursing workload and patient safety in medical and surgical wards.

**Abstract**

In our mixed-methods, sequential explanatory study, we employed a quantitative first stage with a retrospective cross-sectional study design and a qualitative second stage with participatory photographic methods adapted from the field of ecological restoration at a large (>500 beds) teaching hospital in Southern Brazil. This paper focuses on the results from the second qualitative stage where we conducted practitioner-led photo walkabouts with photo narration and photo elicitation focus groups. The study population encompassed nursing staff (nurses, nurse technicians and nurses aides) from one inpatient ward. Visual and textual data were analyzed in an iterative manner for thematic content. Data obtained through focus group discussions, field observation notes, and the photo walkabouts were grouped into three categories: a) Caring for patients and relatives workload and hazards; b) (Lack of) coordination with support services and physical structure of the ward; c) Workload and patient safety job characteristics and coping strategies. When viewed through a restorative lens, participants identified critical aspects in the work process which posed potential risk to inpatients and employees. The risk of medication error was associated with the high number of medications for each patient and the elevated number of patients assigned to each nurse technician (7 patients per day shift; 9 patients per night shift). Risks related to medication dispensation, transport, and storage were also pointed out in both the
pharmacy and the ward. Errors in physicians prescription were also highlighted. Patient fall risks were mainly reported during bed bath and transport.

References