

Chapter 6

Research results: supplies and equipment, wheelchairs and telephones, additional cost containment measures in public hospitals

6.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter the results of the research analysis about the following issues are displayed and discussed:

- control of stock, including supplies and equipment
- specific issues of importance in hospitals – misuse of wheelchairs and telephone services
- additional cost containment measures

6.2 CONTROL OF SUPPLIES, EQUIPMENT AND STOCK LOSSES

6.2.1 Control of supplies

The cost of supplies in hospitals also plays a major role in hospitals' cost-effectiveness. By changing their focus of attention, nurses can make a true paradigm shift. "If the nursing

profession wants to control costs rather than allow others to do so for us, we have to change the focus to \$. That means more than looking at costs. We have to make our decisions based on the dollars spent for the outcomes produced. The power of the nursing profession will grow stronger as each leader accepts the challenge of managing cost per unit of service” (Spitzer-Lehmann 1994:276).

◆ **Importance of controlling supplies in order to contain costs**

Respondents were requested to indicate whether they considered each method of control of supplies to contain costs to be important or unimportant. These responses and percentages are reflected in table 6.1

Table 6.1: Importance of specific methods concerning the control of supplies to contain costs

STATEMENT	n	IMPORTANT	%	UNIMPORTANT	%
It is important to provide monthly in-service education for nurses as a method of control in cost containment.	200	198	99,0	2	1,0
Proposals should be requested from nurses concerning the control of supplies.	211	207	98,1	4	1,9
Monthly discussions with nurses are important for controlling cost containment.	211	205	97,2	6	2,8
The prices of commonly used items should be available to all categories of staff in each unit to effect cost containment.	211	203	96,2	8	3,8
Standardised procedures should be applied to achieve cost containment.	211	200	94,8	11	5,2
Periodic inspections of stock cupboards are important to maintain cost containment.	211	197	93,4	14	6,6
Periodic inspections of ordering books are important to achieve cost containment.	211	192	91,4	18	8,6
Keeping the keys of supply cupboards on your person while on duty controls costs.	211	187	88,6	24	11,4

Monthly in-service education	Requesting proposals
Discussions with nurses	Prices: commonly used items
Standardised procedures	Inspections: stock cupboards
Inspections: ordering books	Keys kept on person

Figure 6.1
Importance of specific methods concerning
the control of supplies to contain costs (n = 211)

Hospital costs can be successfully controlled by the wise selection, purchase and use of supplies and equipment. The nurse manager, as the leader, should be experienced in the use of supplies and equipment and should know what is necessary for specific services. Comparison of prices for supplies and equipment would help the nurse manager to choose affordable but good-quality equipment that would last for a reasonable period of time.

As regards supplies and equipment, in-service education of staff is important to prevent breakages and to ensure the supplies and equipment are properly used, as pointed out by 99,0% (198 out of 200) of the respondents. Discussions with nurses on a monthly basis could provide new ideas for implementing cost containment measures. This was also a method highly favoured by the respondents. Nurses could assist in formulating policies for the care and use of supplies and equipment. Marking each piece of equipment with the name of the unit or department for easy tracing could reduce losses, according to the perceptions of 200 (94,8%) of the nurse managers.

The majority of the 211 respondents (200 or 94,8%) knew about the importance of standardised procedures to keep costs down. Periodic inspections of stock cupboards (197 or 93,4%) and inspecting the ordering records (192 or 91,4%) in order to pick up any errors of recording and storage were also considered important in managing the equipment and supplies effectively. A high level of importance (187 or 88,6%) was also attached to keeping keys of supply cupboards on the person while on duty, in order to prevent stock losses. Keeping supplies under lock and key, and especially keeping the keys on one's

person, could combat stock losses, but could also be impractical in busy units.

Employees should be made aware of the fact that unauthorised removal of supplies and equipment from the services means that patients will be disadvantaged by such losses and that the country's health status may be compromised by these actions. Staff members need to assume ownership of hospital supplies and equipment so that they can be aware that stealing from the hospital means actually stealing their own equipment. Staff members should be aware of the costs of all items they use in their own units and departments. Such knowledge would help staff to exercise caution in using the items to prevent breakages, waste and unauthorised removal of items. Perhaps they would understand that such removal of items actually means that everybody loses – losses are ultimately addressed by increased taxation, and the provision of even less finance to appoint additional staff members, to ease the plight of the overburdened ones. Employment of security officers to deal with unauthorised removal of property in the health care centres would also help to reduce stock losses.

Additional suggestions for controlling supplies, as listed by respondents in an open-ended question, included:

- Order sufficient supplies each time.
- Identify supplies by marking each item with the name of the specific hospital unit.
- Keep supplies under lock and key.
- Use appropriate procedures for effective treatment.
- Prevent unnecessary cancellation of operations.

6.2.2 Control of equipment

Respondents were requested to indicate the relative importance of each method of control of equipment for effective cost containment. The responses were grouped into categories relevant to the control of

- general equipment
- stock losses

