

ABSTRACT

This critical ethnographic study sought to explore the experiences of nurse managers within a large public Norwegian hospital and to make space from which they could speak of their experiences. The research question sought to answer how nurse managers experience leadership and management of their profession and services after a health service reform of unitary management was introduced in public hospitals. Furthermore the research also sought to understand how this health reform has influenced nurse managers' leadership, ideals and roles and how nurse managers influenced managerial decisions in the new hospital organisation. Seven nurse managers from two hospital departments participated in field studies and individual interviews collected over a three month period.

Nurse managers reported that working pressure and required documentation had increased significantly following the introduction of the Hospital Reform. Nurse managers invested in good working environments, advocated respect and tolerance, took pride in nursing and worked strategically to develop a strong and visible nursing service. Economy and budget control had a stronger emphasis with the new reform and economic language had made its entry into the hospital world. Whilst nurse managers reported positively of experiencing improvement in cooperation and communication with the physicians the ward nurses depended entirely on a nurse at a supervisor level who could coordinate and represent the nursing services. The nurse managers on the supervisor level experienced becoming more isolated in the hospital system. The introduction of unitary management had created for them vulnerability in depending on a department manager supportive to nursing.

The study demonstrated that the new reform has implications both for individuals, for the profession of nursing and therefore also the quality of patient care delivery. Whilst nurse managers were working very hard to maximise patient care quality under the new reform further research and mechanisms for nurses to gain voice, be supported and contribute their perspectives to the new health system is required.