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Assessment of patient safety culture in the theatre unit of an Irish tertiary maternity hospital

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Introduction

The practice of obstetrics requires effective multidisciplinary teamwork and systems to achieve optimal patient outcomes in high stress situations. Patient safety culture (PSC) is a core contributor to teamwork and communication. The Safety Attitudes Questionnaire (SAQ) has been validated to measure PSC. High scores in this questionnaire are associated with reduced staff turnover, infection rates and mortality[1].

Methods

Following ethical approval, we completed a quantitative cross-sectional study using a 35 item Likert response SAQ[1]. We examined the six sub-themes of:

- Teamwork climate
- Safety climate
- Job satisfaction
- Stress Recognition
- Stress recognition
- Perceptions of management

Respondents included consultant and non-consultant obstetricians, gynaecologists, neonatologists, anaesthesiologists, midwives, nurses and ancillary staff. We examined the results and compared response by role, grade and experience. We also compared to national and international benchmarks. Results are presented as percentage means and percentage agreement with the statements in the survey.

Results

Demographic data is presented in Figure 1. We collected 78 completed questionnaires yielding a 71% response rate.

- We scored highly across all sub-themes outperforming the international benchmark (Fig 2).[1]
- Our scores were comparable to national benchmarks (Fig 2).[2-4]
- The highest scoring sub-themes were job satisfaction (77%) and stress recognition (75%).
- In terms of job satisfaction, 95% of respondents feel our unit is a good place to work and are proud to work there (Fig. 3b-c).
- There was good stress recognition among staff. Most respondents agreed that fatigue and excessive workload impairs performance (Fig.3e-f).

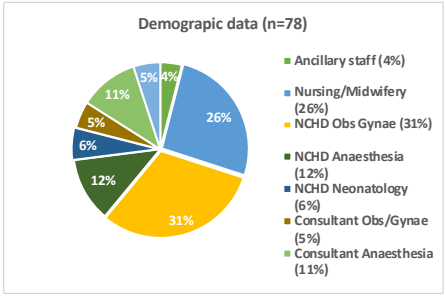


Figure 1. Demographic data

- We had a particularly high score in the sub-theme of perceptions of management compared to national and international benchmarks (63% v. 42-53%, Fig 2, 3d).
- Over 60% of staff surveyed feel management are doing a good job (Fig. 3d).
- Working conditions received the lowest score in the study (62%). Only 32% of respondents felt staffing levels were adequate (Fig. 3a).

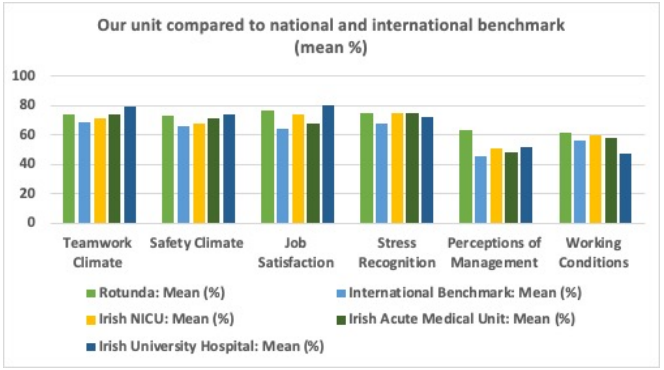


Figure 2. Our unit compared to national and international benchmarks

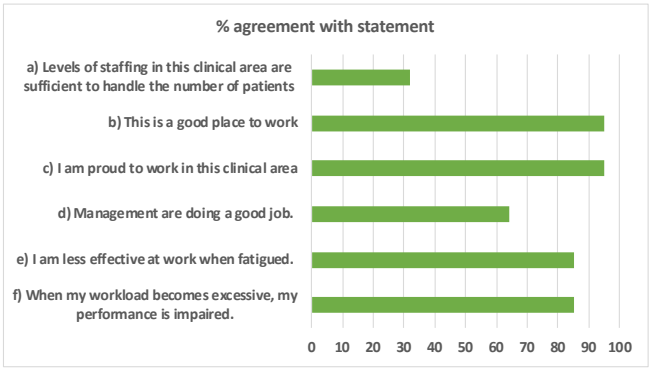


Figure 3. % agreement with statements in SAQ

Discussion

Our unit has a generally positive patient safety culture. We outperformed international benchmarks across all sub-themes and our results are comparable with national benchmarks. We scored well in the sub-theme of perceptions of management. We feel the Mastership model of management employed in our institution, whereby the CEO is a clinician, may contribute towards this high score. Our key area for improvement is working conditions. We know inadequate staffing is a contributary factor in adverse outcomes in healthcare and this is an area that needs to be urgently improved.[5] This is the first time patient safety culture has been assessed in our theatre unit and it has given us insight into the strengths and weaknesses of our department and will allow focused interventions to improve this important yet often overlooked aspect of patient safety.

References

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