



Steinbeis Business Academy
SBA ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

Steinbeis-Hochschule Berlin
Steinbeis Business Academy



DGL Helix

Stiftung Kinderhilfe, Essen



BUNDESVERBAND
Kinderhospiz e.V.

Bundesverband Kinderhospiz
e.V., Freiburg

“Psychological Strains Of Full-Time Nursing Staff In Children’s Hospices”

– Results of a nationwide pilot study –

Authors: Dipl.-Psych. Dina Philipp and Dipl.-Psych. Prof. Dr. Christian Loffing

The children staying in a children’s hospice and their families find themselves in a psychologically and physically extremely difficult situation, which shakes their foundations. In this phase of life - which is the final one for the children- all those supporting and caring for the children and their families also need a lot of strength and courage. This study by D. Philipp and Prof. Dr. C. Loffing is dedicated to these very helpers, namely to the full-time nursing staff and family assistants of the children’s hospices. With the support of the Bundesverband Kinderhospiz e.V. six of the (in 2007) eight existing children’s hospices could be included in this pilot study. The aim of the study was the recording of the prevailing psychological strains as well as their coping strategies and the resources which are required to enable staff members to work in a children’s hospice on a long-term basis. The main as well as the secondary questions examined were, if the full-time nursing staff and the family assistants differed from the standard random sample concerning their strain and relaxation, their work-related behavioural and emotional pattern and how they personally experience dying and death. The random sample of the main study consisted of 87 persons aged between 21 and 60 years. Apart from quantitative data of the employees also qualitative data was collected; this was done with half-standardized interviews as well as with questionnaires to the managers of the participating children’s hospices. The evaluation of the hypotheses showed that - referring to “social tension” and “emotional strain” – the examined random sample differed significantly from the corresponding standard random sample. These results could be interpreted as factors of risk, because the staff members suffered more often from arguments and quarrels within the team as well as from anger, anxieties or loneliness. It was found out that the examined random sample showed a significantly

higher ability for distance and a significantly lower willingness to overexert oneself. Furthermore, highly significant results became evident in a much lower distinctness in the subtest “Fear of the death of important persons in your life” among nursing staff and family assistants of children’s hospices compared with the standard. The qualitative results supported the fact that social tension, conflicts, lack of exchange and information were the greatest strain for the employees – after insufficient working and organizational conditions. Referring to working and organizational conditions, the main factors of strain were lack of structure, unorganized procedures and undefined areas of responsibility as well as unreliable working hours. The nursing of the children and the partly difficult dealing with the families were given third and fourth position in the ranking of strains. Also by the experts bad communication and staff shortage were considered to be sources of strain, but not social tension or structural conditions. For coping with stress the employees mainly demanded changes in the interpersonal area, as for example team work, open communication and discussion as well as mutual respect. As far as structures were concerned, the nursing staff and family helpers mainly needed reliable working hours, unambiguous areas of responsibility, agreements and lucidity. For themselves the employees wished – among others – more compensation as well as more esteem from colleagues, managers and society in general. As far as required changes were concerned, the most frequently mentioned aspects were team meetings and activities, and also possibilities of self-reflection, relaxation and reduction of stress. Supervision, which was top priority for the experts, was only given fifth position by the staff. As a consequence, recommendations for the areas “team”, “leadership”, “communication and agreements”, “structure and scheduled arrangements” as well as “offers” could be developed. Here the focus was – among others – concentrated on team development, transparent communication, esteem, flexible leadership, unambiguous distribution of assignments as well as a good work-life-balance. The results and recommendations of this pilot study can only be a first step towards the further development of work in children’s hospices and for a better stress-coping strategy of the employees. This study could contribute a first, important step towards a further professionalization of work in children’s hospices and the preservation of health of the nursing staff – people who are urgently needed.

For further information as well as insight into the complete study you are welcome to contact: dina.philipp@gmx.de.