

Stretching the boundaries of safe medication administration in nursing homes: A qualitative study of the nurse role

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Introduction

Safe medication administration is a top priority in efforts to enhance patient safety across settings. Medication administration is a complex process dependent on local settings and inherent variations in the work system. The nurse has a central role in improving and maintaining medication safety. A resilience engineering perspective is prospective and focuses on what goes right, rather than what goes wrong.

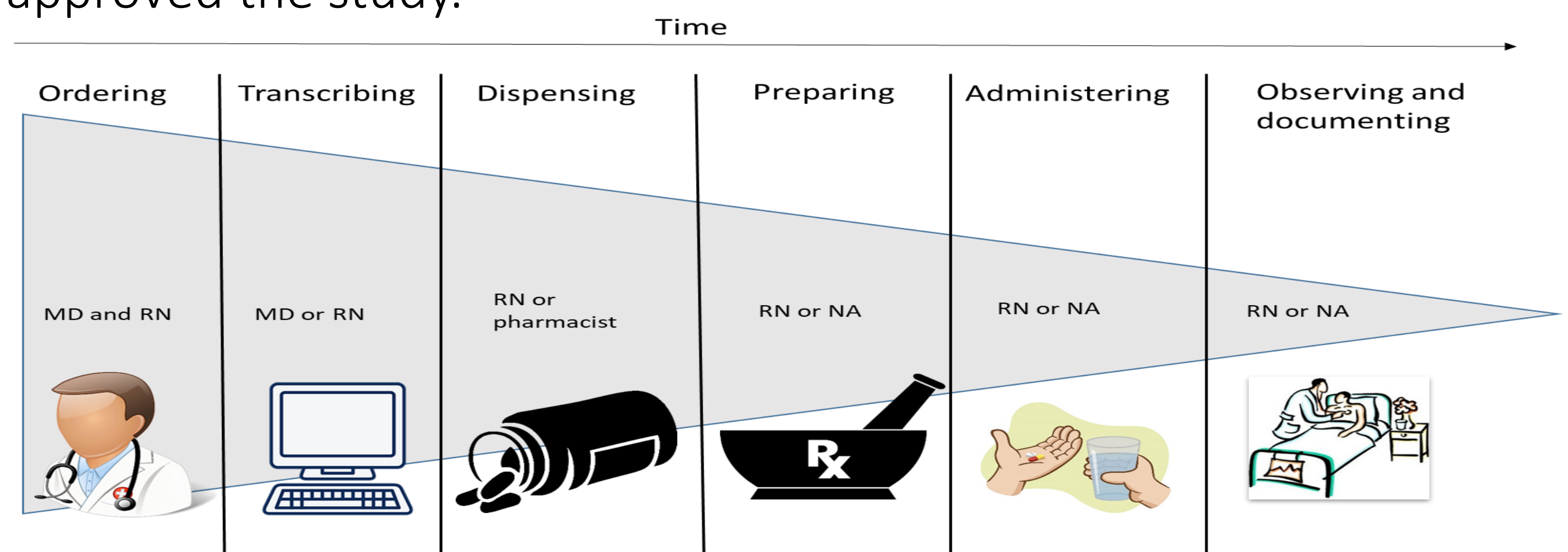
Objective

To expand the knowledge of the nurse role during medication administration in nursing homes.

Methods

A qualitative mixed study design was applied. 140 hours of partly participant observations in two nursing homes in 2016, supplemented with semi-structured interviews with nurses, nurse assistants and doctors. Data collection centred on the six stages of the medication administration process; prescribing, transcribing, dispensing, preparing, administering, and documenting. A qualitative inductive content analysis was performed.

The Norwegian Social Science Data Service (NSD) (No. 45389) approved the study.

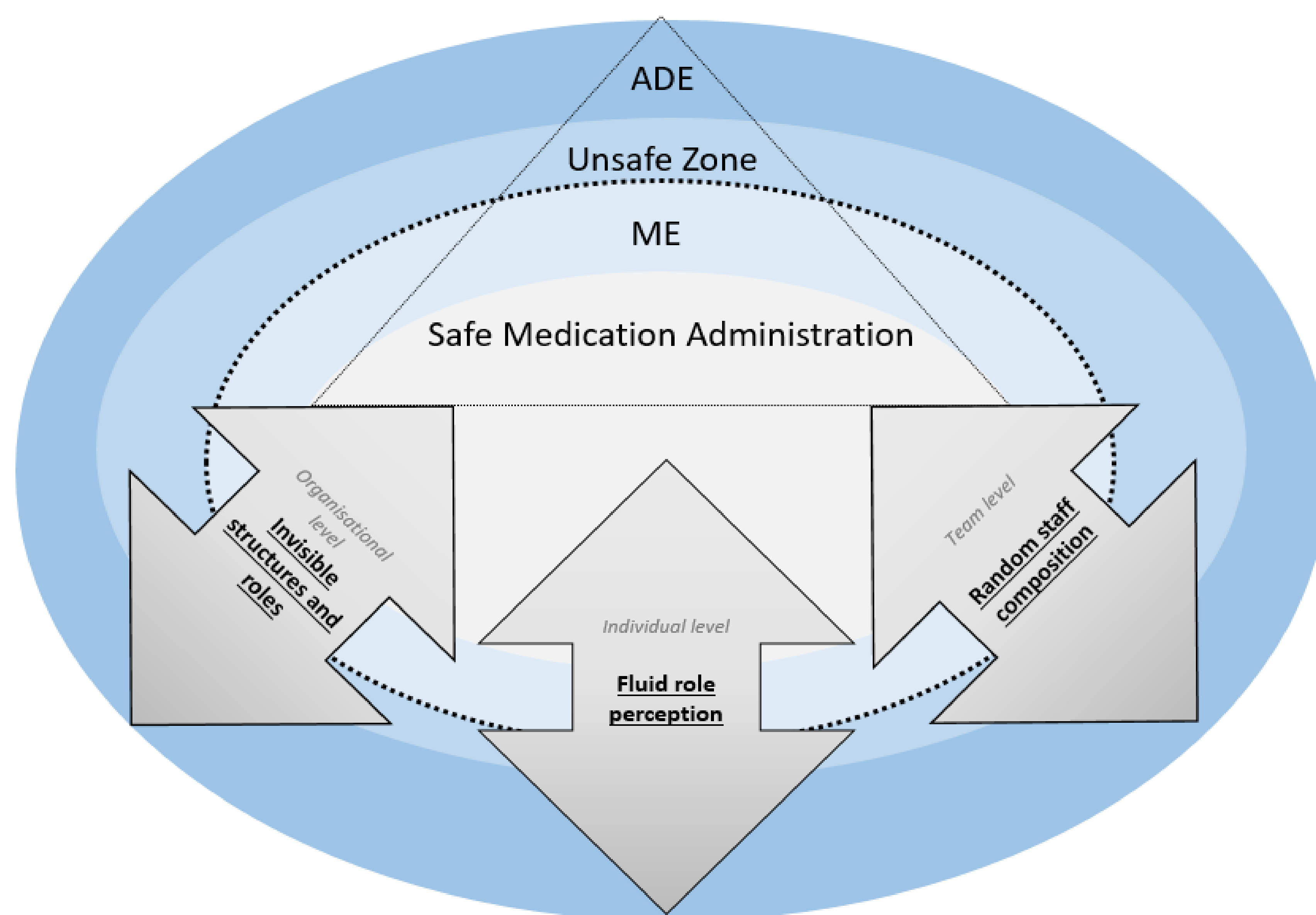


Results indicate that three central themes describe the nurse role during medication administration:

Invisible structures and rules are guiding how and where the staff performs medication-related tasks.

Fluid role perception and random task delegation. Competencies in the surrounding colleagues determine what role the nurses undertake.

Random staff composition There are hidden barriers to performance variability that inhibits the staff's ability to meet the demands of the inherent system complexity.



Conclusion

The nurse role is flexible and adapts according to circumstances. Lack of leadership and fluid role perception may manifest as random staff composition and competence on the different shifts. This may lead to vulnerable conditions and situations with a potential risk for medication administration errors and adverse drug events. The staff seem to lack a definition of whether they operate within the boundaries of safe medication administration.