

# Nursing workforce activities in the Family Health Program in Brazil: a prospective observational study

Daiana Bonfim, Lianne Jeffs, Fernanda M T Fugulin, Raquel R Gaidzinski

## Abstract

**Background** Although the actions of health workers strongly affects health outcomes, nurses do not often make decisions based on scientific investigation. We analysed the activities of nurses and nurse assistants.

**Methods** We did a multicentre observational study of the primary health-care workforce involving 27 Family Health Units across Brazil. We used a work sampling technique in which we noted nurses' activities every 10 min for 8 h daily during 5 days in each Family Health Unit. We coded observations with the Family Health Team Intervention tool consisting of 39 interventions, unit-related activities, personal activities, standby time, and time not present. We collected data from April to October, 2013. We used descriptive statistics to analyse the results. We calculated productivity on the basis of frequencies of interventions and unit-related activity. Potential productivity was the productivity plus standby time plus the percentage of time not present.

**Findings** We recorded 27 846 observations involving 34 nurses and 66 nurse assistants. Nurses spent their time as follows: 59% on interventions (30% direct, 29% indirect care), 7% on unit-related activity, 13% on personal activity, 3% on standby time, 15% not present, and 3% was not observed. Nurse assistants spent their time as follows: 41% on interventions (25% direct, 16% indirect care), 13% on unit-related activity, 16% on personal activity, 16% on standby time, 12% not present, and 2% was not observed. Time spent of interventions was highest in the southeast (68% of nurses and 54% of nurse assistants) and the north (64% of nurses and 42% of nurse assistants). The productivity of nurses and nurse assistants was 66% and 55%, respectively, and potential productivity 84% and 83%, respectively.

**Interpretation** Our findings provide an overview of the nursing activities in Family Health Units and can be used to improve nursing and to influence public policies for planning nursing in primary care.

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## Contributors

DB wrote the abstract. DB, RRG, and FMTF designed the study. DB collected data. DB, LJ, FMTF, and RRG analysed and interpreted data. LJ, FMTF, and RRG revised the abstract. All authors have seen and approved the final version.

## Declaration of interests

We declare no competing interests.

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University of São Paulo,  
São Paulo, SP, Brazil  
(D Bonfim PhD,  
Prof F M T Fugulin PhD,  
Prof R R Gaidzinski PhD); and  
University of Toronto, Toronto,  
ON, Canada (L Jeffs PhD)

Correspondence to:  
Dr Daiana Bonfim, Av Dr Enéas  
de Carvalho Aguiar 419,  
05403-000, São Paulo, SP, Brazil  
daianabonfim@usp.br

For the the Family Health Team  
Intervention tool see  
[http://143.107.173.8/orh/  
administrator/components/  
com\\_jresearch/files/publications/  
instrumento\\_dimensionamento.  
pdf](http://143.107.173.8/orh/administrator/components/com_jresearch/files/publications/instrumento_dimensionamento.pdf)