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## The professional image of a nurse as seen by parents of children hospitalized in the oncology department

### Abstract

**Introduction.** The professional image of a nurse which is influenced by a whole variety of factors is the main subject of this work. The social attitudes toward nurses are related to people's own beliefs, opinions, stereotypes, as well as the nurses' professional, personal and interpersonal skills. The proper image of a nurse is very important. Patients are becoming increasingly demanding toward nurses which poses new challenges for nurses attempting at creating a positive image of this profession.

**Aim.** The aim of this work was to elicit the opinions about nurses' work from parents of children hospitalized on the oncologic ward.

**Material and methods.** The authors used a questionnaire of their own making and conducted a literature analysis. The literature review was made using the data taken from Main Medical Library. The research group consisted of 50 parents of children hospitalized in Oncology, Hematology and Child Transplantology Department in Lublin. All the parents were advised about the aim of the study and informed that the questionnaire is anonymous and voluntary. The obtained results have then undergone a statistical analysis, using a Chi<sup>2</sup> test. Statistical significance was reached at the level of  $p < 0.05$ .

**Results.** The most important factors affecting the professional image of a nurse are as follows: the parent's sex, their place of residence, nurse's appearance, as well as the following traits: being nice, protective and friendly.

**Discussion.** The image of a nurse as someone who is smiling, friendly and calm appears to be the closest to an ideal picture of such a professional. This pertains not only to parents but to the society as a whole. The nurse should pay attention to patients' physical needs and expectations, as well as their spiritual side.

**Conclusions.** The researched group provided a positive opinion about the work of nurses at the Department. They paid special attention to their being nice, protective and friendly. It is the nurses' physical appearance that sheds a positive light on them, as competent and friendly professionals. Even though most people perceive nursing as a rather unattractive profession, there is a huge deal of respect for nurses.

**Keywords:** professional image, nurse, parents, opinion.

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### INTRODUCTION

The professional image of a nurse is determined by the society as a system of beliefs, opinions and views on a given professional group [1]. This can somehow be regarded as a nurses' "business card" of some sort. It exerts huge influence over human relationships which is essential for nursing as a whole. These relations are based on helping those whose life or health is under threat [2]. To put it another way, it is related to the values that are most important for humans. Also, the nurses' professional image is related to acting in a way that is expected out of them [3].

Other than that, a couple of factors influence the professional image of a nurse: the expertise, professional experience and the nurse's ability to build relationships [4,5]. Parents of the children undergoing hospitalization, as a group remaining in close contact with the nurses, tend to have a different attitude toward nurses, at least when compared to the rest of the society [4]. Parents believe that the following traits play the most important role in building a positive image of a nurse: features related to this profession (scrupulousness), personal traits (being nice and sensitive), interpersonal skills (ability to build trust) and a socio demographic factor (the nurse's age) [6]. The way the nurses are perceived is not always dependent

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on the quality of their work but also on the conditions that the particular hospital offers. This pertains to the availability of medication or access to some specialist procedures [7]. As research shows, in spite of the changes in social attitudes toward nursing, there are still numerous stereotypes surrounding the work of nurses. This is mainly related to the fact that nurses usually engage in a few, simple actions, like injections, drug administration, as well as the fact that doctors have a much higher rank in medical hierarchy [5].

Some comprehensive suggestions can be found in the research by Gallup Institute in the USA. They are providing statistical information concerning the most honest and ethical professions. According to their findings, nurses have ranked on the first place since 1999 (except 2002). This means that in spite of low attractiveness of such a career path, people tend to value nurses' work very highly, showing respect and trust to them [8,9].

A child's stay in a hospital arouses fear both in children and their parents. They are concerned as to whether they would be able to cope with situations requiring lots of strength or self-denial, happening whenever a long-term hospitalization is needed or when they are waiting for the doctors' prognosis. Parents remain uncertain as to whether they would be able to fulfill the needs of their children at the highest level possible, particularly when it comes to the nursing process. There is also the fear that they may unwillingly hurt the child or even have to alter their lifestyles totally. Usually, most doubts appear in parents of those children who expose their illness by mood swings or crying. Each piece of information that parents receive could become a valuable hint. This is why nurses are obliged to provide parents with comprehensive information regarding the child's health. The professional image of a nurse is built on a daily basis – through their everyday work and positive attitude. If nurses evoke positive emotions, children

would certainly gain lots of trust to them. Also, it would let the child gradually accept their illness and retain self-assurance.

## AIM

The aim of this work was to assess the professional image of a nurse among parents of children hospitalized in the oncologic ward.

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

The research was conducted in Professor Antoni Gębala Children's Clinical Hospital in Lublin among the parents of children undergoing hospitalization in Hematology, Oncology and Child Transplantology Department. The study group consisted of 50 parents of children due to be hospitalized for tumor for at least 3 weeks. A questionnaire of the authors' own making, consisting of 21 questions, was used in the study. The first part consisted of sociometrical data (questions 1-6), concerning the parents' age, sex, place of residence, education, professional activity and marital status. The second part consisted of questions regarding the introduction to the ward, learning about the ward's topography, code of conduct and daily schedule, reading the Children's Rights Charter and preparing for diagnostics. The questions 11-18 regarded the perception of nurses' personal traits, respecting children's rights, providing intimate conditions. The last 3 questions concerned: patient/family-nurse communication, fulfilling the child's basic needs, as well as the availability of medical staff during shifts. A numeric scale (1-4) was used, where 1 meant "very bad", 2 meant "bad", 3 – "good" and 4 – "very good". Prior to the filling the questionnaire, the parents read the Personal Data Protection Act (29.08.2002) and some instructions on Personal Data Protection in Children's Clinical Hospital in Lublin. Parents were also advised about the purpose of the study, while informing that the questionnaire is anonymous and voluntary. The results were looked at using a statistical analysis. The measurable parameters using values like an arithmetic mean, a median, as well as minimal or maximal values. The non-measurable values were presented using cardinality. A chi-square test was used for finding differences between the two compared groups. For measurable values, the U Mann-Whitney test was used, and in cases where there were more than two groups involved, the Kruskal-Wallis test was implemented. For measuring the correlation and dependence, the Spearman method was used to check the relationships between some variables. The statistical significance was determined at  $p < 0.05$ , showing that there are some statistically significant differences or dependencies. The database as well as the statistical research were done using the Statistica 9.1 software (by StatSoft, Poland).

## RESULTS

Most of the surveyed were parents over 37 who consisted 52% (26 individuals) of the whole group. These values are statistically significant with ( $p < 0.05$ ) (Table 1). Those surveyed were mainly women – 35 individuals (70%). Regarding the education of the survey participants, most of them were people with a university degree – 20 individuals (40%) and secondary educations – 19 individuals (38%). Some 18% of those surveyed (9 individuals) had vocational education, whilst 4% (2 individuals) had elementary

**TABLE 1. Sociodemographic data**

Sex	
Men	30.00%
Women	70.00%
Age	
Up to 36	48.00%
Over 37	52.00%
Education	
Elementary	4.00%
Vocational	18.00%
Secondary	38.00%
University degree	40.00%
Place of residence	
Rural areas	60.00%
Small Town	16.00%
Large city	24.00%
Work status	
Employed	72%
Unemployed	24%
Pensioners	4%
Marital status	
Married	88%
Single	12%

education only. When it comes to the place of residence, most parents (30 individuals – 60%) came from rural areas, while others came from large cities and small towns (20 individuals – 40%). Most parents were employed at the time the study was conducted (36 individuals – 72%). All the others do not work because of bad health (12 individuals – 24%) or having reached the retirement age (2 individuals – 4%). The majority of surveyed parents stayed in formal relationships (44 parents – 88%), while 6 others (12%) were single parents. The above data bears no statistical significance.

The next part was focused on parents’ expectations regarding children’s becoming accustomed to hospital conditions, like alleviating fear or tension, preparing for diagnostics, showing the ward’s topography, rules, daily schedules or Children’s Rights Charter and Patients’ Rights Charter. The findings are quite satisfactory. Most of the parents had a chance to know the documentation used in the ward. Receiving help in alleviating pain or tension, as well as preparing for diagnostic works, received 94% positive opinions. Some 44 individuals (88%) declared that they were informed about the topography, 43 parents (86%) had a chance to learn about the rules valid in the ward, while 39 parents (78%) learned about the daily schedule. At the same time, some 34 parents (68%) read the Patients’ Rights Charter whilst 35 parents (70%) read the Children’s Rights Charter. This data is shown in Figure 1.

The authors also attempted to find the relationship between personal features of the nurses and the quality of their work. The most frequently mentioned features describing nurses included: being nice (46 parents – 92%), competence (35 parents – 70%), sympathy (34 parents – 68%), caring (28 parents – 56%). Only 6 parents (12%) claimed that the nurses were indifferent to their needs. Overall, the work of the nursing staff was assessed very positively. Most parents (30 individuals – 60%) claimed it was very good, while the remaining 20 parents (40%) said it was good. These values are not statistically significant (Figure 2,3).

Parents were also inquired about the clarity of information provided by the nurses during the instrumental activities. Most parents (29 of them – 58%) were fully satisfied with the information they received, 19 parents (38%) were partly satisfied and 2 parents (4%) were not satisfied at all (Figure 4).

Another issue that was looked at concerned the nurses’ appearance. The authors of the questionnaire attempted at inquiring patients about the most important trait in the physical appearance of a nurse: make-up, hairstyle, protective clothes? Some 56% of parents claimed that physical appearance is important whilst in case of 76% of them, protective clothes are an important part of a profession. There was no statistical significance (Figure 5,6).

The authors also looked at parents’ satisfaction with the care their children received. It concerned: parents – nurses Communications, fulfilling children’s spiritual and physical needs, providing safety, quality of care or the availability of the nursing staff during the shifts. Parents had a high opinion about all these aspects. The medical staff availability was assessed as very good by 35 parents (70%) and good by 15 parents (30%). According to 34 parents (68%), nurses provided safety at a very good level, while 15 parents (30%) claimed it was simply good, and one parent (2%) claimed it was bad. The parents – nurses communication was assessed as very good (60%) and good (40%). Some 29 parents (58%) say that the nurses’ reaction time was very good, while the remaining 21 parents (42%) claimed it was good. Fulfilling the child’s

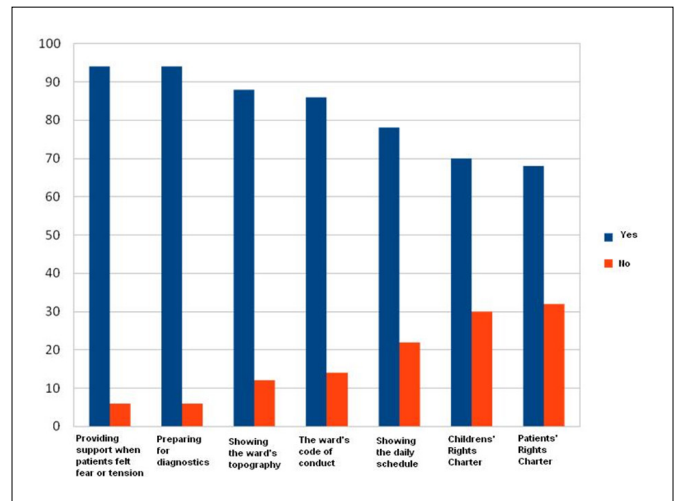


FIGURE 1. Parents’ opinions about what information nurses should provide.

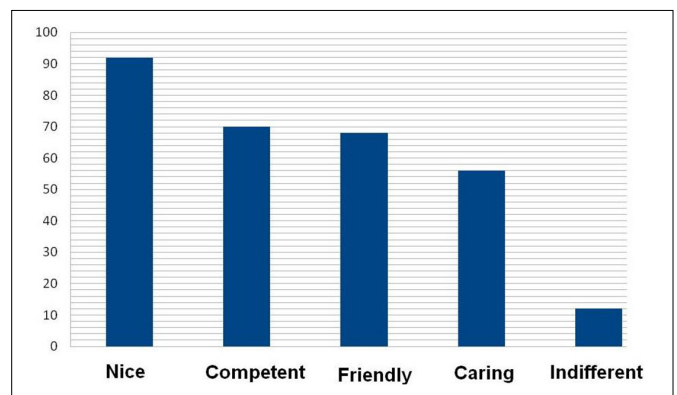


FIGURE 2. Nurses’ personal traits, as seen by patients.

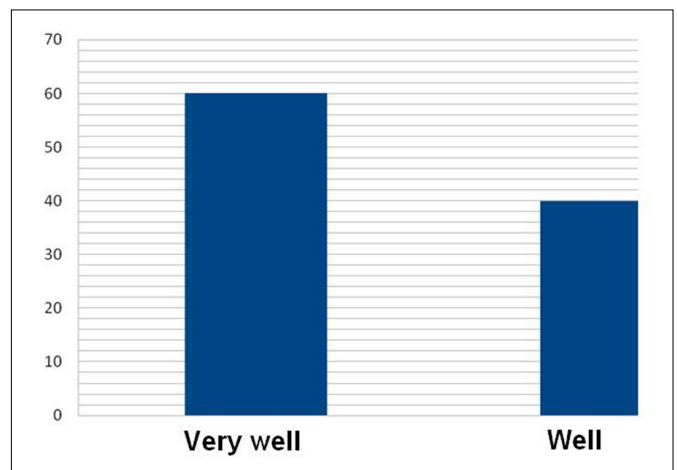


FIGURE 3. Patients’ assessment of nurses’ work.

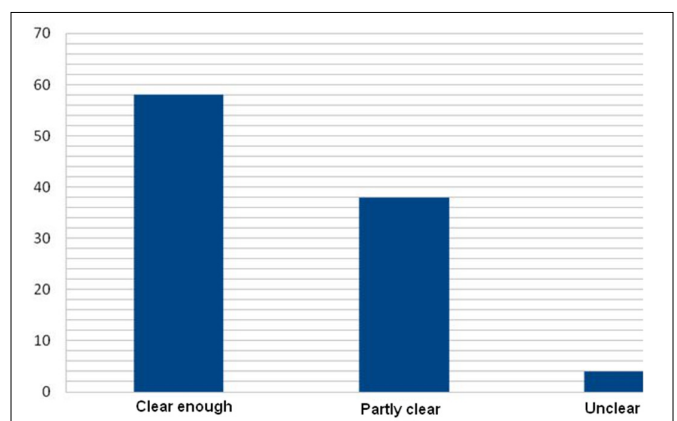


FIGURE 4. Clarity of information provided by nurses.

spiritual needs was done very good (25 parents – 50%), well (21 parents – 42%) and badly (4 parents – 8%). These values are not statistically significant (Figure 7).

Parents were also asked about how much time an average nurse spends on fulfilling all the procedures during one shift. The responses were quite unitary. Some 16 parents (32%) said it was 30-40 minutes, 13 parents (26%) claimed it was 40-50 minutes, 7 parents (12%) claimed it was 50-60 minutes, while 14 parents (28%) said it was over 60 minutes (Figure 8).

**DISCUSSION**

The challenges posed by everyday life are many a time too hard to fully respond to. People are living under constant pressure, not giving a thought about the meaning of life. Most people tend to see others through the lens of their own everyday life. However, only a distortion of that balance, like a child’s or relative’s serious illness evokes a feeling of guilt in most people. At the same time, it encourages humans to fight, to gain some humility and respect for others. Furthermore, throughout the recent years, the situation in the field of medical services, both in the public and private sector, has changed significantly. This evokes a question: how do parents of the children undergoing hospitalization perceive nurses? In order to provide an answer, there was a need for some research in the field.

Some 50 parents participated in the study. It was conducted in Hematology, Oncology and Child Transplantology Department in Children’s Clinical Hospital in Lublin. The findings have undergone a qualitative and statistical analysis.

A closer look at the data shows that there were some differences as per the educational status of the parents participating in the study. People holding a university degree were a slight majority (40%), whilst some 38% had secondary education, 18% had vocational education and the remaining ones had elementary education (4%). Most participants were residents of rural areas (60%), while 24% lived in small towns and 16% lived in large cities. Plus to that, some 88% of parents stayed in a formal relationship, while 12% were single. The authors found out that 72% parents were employed during the study, whilst the remaining 28% were no longer active (due to bad health or age).

As it is commonly known, every nurse providing care for child patients is obliged to introduce both the patient and their caretakers with the following documents: Children’s Rights Charter, Patients’ Rights Charter, ward’s code of conduct, daily schedule, ward’s topography.

Drózdź et al. show that only some 50 to 80% of patients receive information of that type [10,11]. Twarduś et al. found out that some 60% of nurses failed to inform the patients about their rights, 53% with the code of conduct and with the daily schedule [12,13].

R. Łukasik shows that some 91% of parents/caretakers claim that they know the procedures of how they should act in case they remain with the child on the ward. At the same time, 75% of them do not know the EACH Charter (European Association for Children in Hospital). This might be due to the fact that despite being aware of the hospital’s rules, the parents rarely obey them. It is possible that they are simply unaware of the threats or they follow only those rules that suit them best.

As Łukasik et al. show in their research, most parents have confirmed that they received support from the medical staff. However, there were also negative opinions about the help

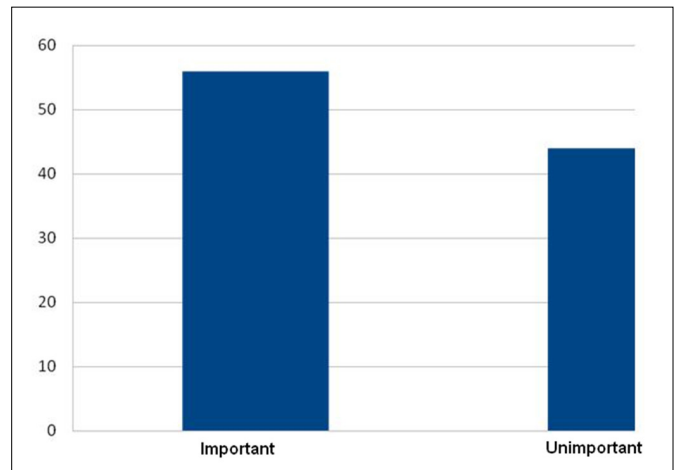


FIGURE 5. Importance of physical appearance.

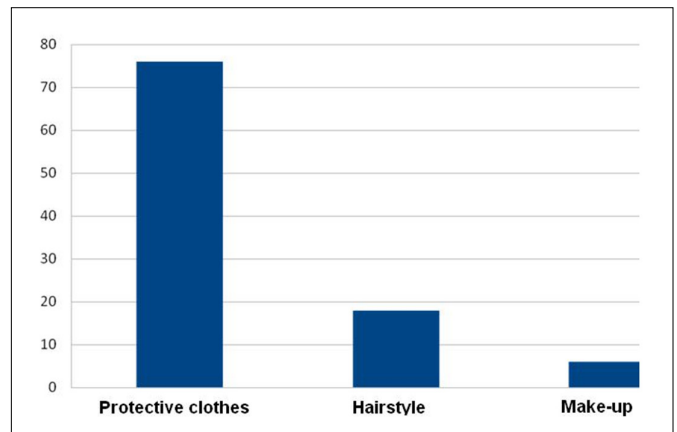


FIGURE 6. The most important part of nurse’s appearance.

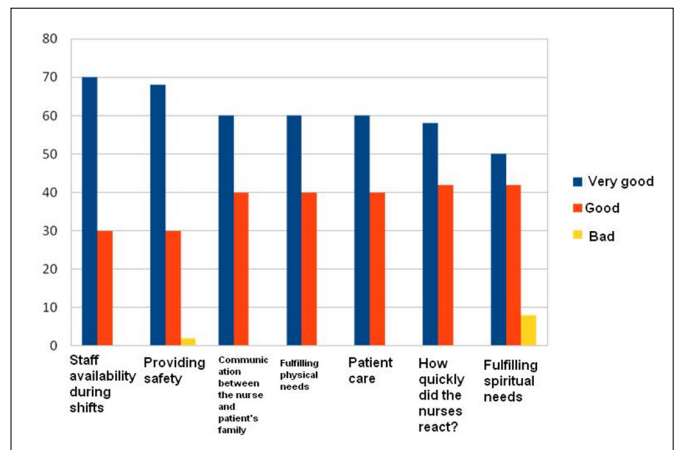


FIGURE 7. Overall assessment of nurses’ work.

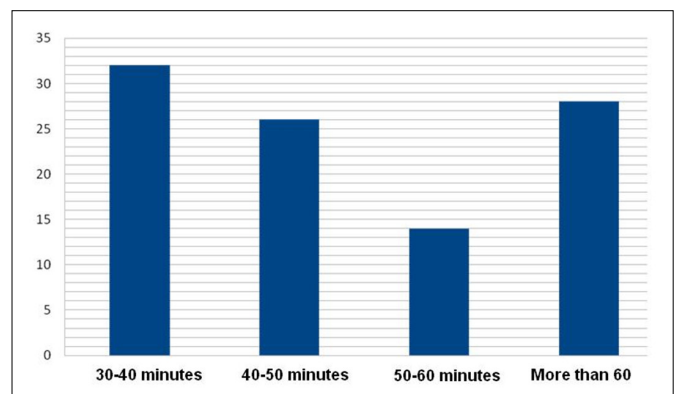


FIGURE 8. Amount of time that nurses devoted to patients.

from nurses (2% of the participants), as well as parents complained about the chaos on the ward (6% of the study participants) [14,15].

The authors' own research shows that parents were satisfied with emotional support, preparation for diagnostics (94% and 88% respectively). Some 86% of parents were acquainted with the ward's code of conduct, and 78% of them with the daily schedule. The regulations of the Children's Rights Charter were known to 70% of parents, while only 68% knew the Patients' Rights Charter. Even though none of the questions elicited a 100% positivity rate, the results are quite satisfactory. However, the reason behind these decisions remains unclear – perhaps, it might be either the amount of work that the nurses have or poor communicational skills. The stress factor present in such situations in parents is also important here.

Kuna and Tymecka claim that pediatric nurses should possess the following traits: patience, ability to control and understand others, ability to provide care or sympathy, be thoughtful [16]. The research conducted by Krawczyk and Karp shows that some 80% of parents think that medical staff should be able to create a warm and friendly atmosphere [12,17,18]. This theory is confirmed by the authors' own research. The most important personal traits of every nurse include: being nice (92%), being competent (70%), being sympathetic (68%) and caring (56%).

There are different opinions among Poles, as to the work of a nurse. The following works showed that Poles have a rather positive opinion about nurses: Cebulak and Adamik or Kapica. The authors show that Poles think nurses are focused on treating the patient well, tend to think about their needs and act in a nice way, as well as possess huge expertise. Conversely, Kuźmich shows that most of the respondents did not experience any sympathy or even interest from the medical staff. The nurses failed to fully perform their therapeutic function. They were rather focused on their work which automatically led to lack of satisfaction in patients [10,18,19].

The authors' own work show that 60% of parents assessed the work of nurses as very good, while 40% as good.

Regarding the patient-nurse communication, the findings of M. Marć were similar to the research done by the authors of this study. Marć proves that parents want nurse to answer almost every question in a way that is understandable and satisfactory for the parent [20]. The ability to make contact with both the child and the caretaker is what parents yearn for. Interpersonal skills are a key to provide high quality health care [16,21]. After all, the ability to talk with the patients makes it possible for the nurse to elicit information essential for the diagnosis. According to Twarduś et al, Dróżdż et al and Cebulak et al, most mothers are satisfied with the relations with nurses [10,11,13].

Research studies show that the respondents that the respondents have a high opinion about the patient-nurse communication – 60% parents think it was very good, while 40% think it was good.

In addition, authors like Lipiec, Bartoszewicz, Obuchowska claim that the nurse should not only care about the physical needs of the patient but also pay attention to their psychological or spiritual needs [22-24]. Studies by Kapala and Drygas show that patients require the nurse to possess expertise, provide permanent care, become interested in their problems and understanding for their needs, while assistance during toileting arrangements appears to be the least important thing [17,25].

The research analysis suggest that parents have similar expectations. The study participants claim that a nurse providing care for the children should pay attention not only to their physical needs but also their psychological and spiritual needs. The respondents assessed fulfilling the physical needs as very good (60% of cases) and good (40% of cases). Providing safety by the nurses was assessed as very good – 68% of cases, good – 30% of cases, and bad in only 2% of cases. Fulfilling spiritual needs was equally important. In that case, the study participants responded as follows: 50% very good, 42% good, and 8% as bad. Other than that, the nurse should fulfill all the procedures as required by the work at the ward, like providing all the documents, supervising the whole process, doing the diagnostic work, assisting by bone marrow aspiration, trepanobiopsy, lumbar puncture, cross section of the bone marrow, administering chemotherapy, etc. Obviously, these actions can happen in different times and their effectiveness depends on a whole variety of factors: the work of the team, number of nurses on duty, number of hospitalized children, their general condition, etc. The respondents were inquired about the following: How much time did the nursing staff spend on fulfilling the procedures during one shift? There were various answers. For some 32% of parents, it was 30-40 minutes, 40-50 minutes for 26%, for 14% it was 50-60 minutes, for 28% of parents it was longer than 60 minutes. These results are quite satisfactory.

It needs emphasizing that patients tend to grow even more demanding toward the medical staff. The quality of care provided by the nurses hugely influences the overall assessment of the service provided by the hospital or medical facility [25].

## CONCLUSIONS

The authors' research suggests that:

1. Most participants in the study are satisfied with the quality of care they received from nurses.
2. Nurse's personal traits, like sympathy, nice looks, competence, protectiveness and friendliness provide a full picture of the nurse.
3. The way the nurse looks has a huge impact over the way the nurse is perceived.
4. There is a correlation between the parents' sex or place of residence and their assessment of nurses' work.

There is a hope that the findings of this research can positively influence the way a nurse is perceived by patients' relatives, even in spite of All the challenges posed by the work on the oncology ward.

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