

---

# *INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF SCIENCE ARTS AND COMMERCE*

---

## **EI - THE HEALTH CARE INITIATIVE FOR EMOTIONAL LABORS**

**J. VENKATESH1 AND D. BALAJI**

Associate Professor,

School of Management Studies, Anna University of Technology Coimbatore, Jothipuram Post,  
Coimbatore - 641 047. Tamil Nadu, INDIA.

---

### **ABSTRACT**

*This paper aims to appraise the literature on emotional labor in the health-care sector and the remuneration and expenditure of such concert for together the career and the patient. The aim is to expand a new health care initiative of emotional labor that has suggestions for health-care management in expressions of guiding principle and education as well as for potential research in this perspective. This discriminates between types of emotional disagreement to which emotional labor-inducing events in health-care settings might guide. The negative and positive consequences, explicit to health-care situations, of emotional labor presentation are also delineated. Emotional labor ought to be properly acknowledged as a key ability in assisting the patient expedition, with emotional skills being qualified in innovative ways outside the official classroom setting. Health-care professionals should be obtainable training on coping up with the belongings of emotional labor performance. Finally, more research should be carried out to auxiliary develop the association, chiefly in recognizing reasons of emotional labor inside health-care settings and in differentiating the effects that dissimilar kinds of emotional labor presentation might encompass.*

**KEY WORDS:** Health services, Emotional Intelligence, Patients

### **INTRODUCTION**

Emotional labor was first defined by Hochschild (1983) and has more recently been described as the effort involved when employees “regulate their emotional display in an attempt to meet organizationally- based expectations specific to their roles”. These “expectations”, or display rules, specify either formally or informally, which emotions employees ought to express and

which ought to be suppressed. Whilst many employees want to portray emotions in accordance with display rules because they care about their clients, there are likely to be many occasions when genuinely felt emotions do not concur with desired emotions. It is this emotional dissonance that leads to emotional labor. Hochschild argued that emotional labor is performed through either surface or deep acting. Surface acting involves managing the expression of behavior rather than feelings. This is accomplished by careful presentation of verbal and non-verbal cues such as facial expression, gestures and voice tone in a way in which the person knows that are only acting. Deep acting, on the other hand involves the actor attempting to actually experience or feel the emotion that they wish (or that they are expected) to display. Feelings are actively induced as the actor “psyches” him/herself into the desired persona. Emotional labor is thought by many to be an important part of the role of many health care professionals and it has been the focus of much debate and empirical enquiry within a range of health care settings, especially within nursing. However, the research to date is limited in a number of important ways. First, as mentioned, much of the existing focus is limited to the nursing profession, despite the recognition that emotional labor is likely to be an important feature of other health-care settings. Second, a theoretical model driving the research direction seems to be lacking, resulting in a range of varied and interesting studies that are difficult to relate into a coherent whole. The aim of this paper is to evaluate the extensive literature on emotional labor within health-care settings in order to develop a health care model of emotional labor. This model should be able to drive future research enquiry (including that examining professions other than nursing) as well as highlighting those parts of the process into which health-care management interventions might best be placed. The current paper will begin with an evaluation of the literature on emotional labor, particularly within the health-care sector, before the new model is proposed. Implications of the model for research and practice will be outlined.

## **EMOTIONAL LABOR IN HEALTH CARE**

Although emotional labor has been the focus of much debate and empirical enquiry within a range of health-care settings over the past decade or so, the most prominent of these is nursing with studies conducted in the context of general nurses (de Castro, 2004; de Raeve, 2002; Smith and Gray, 2000; Kelly et al., 2000; Henderson, 2001; Staden, 1998; Rafaeli and Sutton, 1987), learning disability nurses (Mitchell and Smith, 2003), mental health nurses (Mann and Cowburn, 2005; Majomi et al., 2003), midwives (Hunter, 2001), gynaecology nurses (McCreight, 2004; Bolton, 2000) and hospice nurses (James, 1989). The reasons for the preoccupation with nursing in this context are well-defined (and will be expanded upon next), but it is worth mentioning that other health care professions examined have included medical students (Smith and Kleinman, 1989; Lief and Fox, 1963) and clinical psychologists (Mann and Jones, 1996).

### **Emotional Labor and Nursing**

Emotional labor has been an important topic of debate in nursing since of its apparent significance to those involved in the delivery of health care and to the patients who receive that care (Phillips, 1996). Mitchell and Smith (2003, p. 111) in their review of emotional labor within learning disability nursing add that emotional labor has always been “part of the image of nursing”. A range of reasons for this is offered; according to Smith and Gray (2000), within nursing, the length and uncertainty of some treatments, together with the often repressed feelings that the patient and nurse may have about a very difficult medical experience, mean that professionals inevitably have to adopt strategies to manage emotions. In addition, nurses may well at times feel negative emotions such as disgust, irritation and anger, the expression of which would not be conducive to the patient experience. If the patient is to feel cared for then these latter emotions must be controlled, managed, or suppressed (McQueen, 2004). Thus, when nurses do not feel as they think they ought to in a particular situation they engage in emotional labor to ensure that their emotional displays match patient or social expectation (display rules). For example, interactions with angry, hostile or uncooperative patients are emotionally charged and pose a “great demand on nurses to suppress or alter their emotions” (de Castro, 2004, p. 120); as one nurse commented in Smith and Gray’s (2000, p. 48) study, “some patients are really horrible and even disgusting, which means you have to really emotionally labor”. Despite the examples of emotional labor inducing events provided by the above review, there is a lack of clarification in terms of why such events are emotionally charged. For example, why and under what circumstances are patients hostile or uncooperative? What kinds of things do elicit disgust in nurses or health careers? Why do nursing staff get irritated with patients? It is the lack of this kind of clarification that makes managerial attempts to control emotional labor performance more difficult; if the general categories of emotional labor inducing events were documented, it would be somewhat more realistic for health-care managers to try to implement interventions at this stage. This issue will be returned to with the development of the health-care model of emotional labor. Nurses themselves acknowledge the centrality of emotional labor to the concept of caring within their job role. In their qualitative study of nurses’ experiences of emotional labor, Smith and Gray (2000) comment that all of the nurses identified emotional labor as a chief part of the nurse’s role in making patients feel “safe”, “comfortable” and “at home”. Bolton (2001, p. 86) describes nurses as “emotional jugglers” who are able to match face with situation but not necessarily with feeling; she talks of nurses being able to present a “sincere face” whereby feeling matches face, or a “cynical face” to mask feelings they believe should not be displayed (during an interaction of sorrow, for example). She takes this idea further in her own study of 45 nurses by distinguishing the “professional face”, the “smiley face” and the “humorous face” which she feels nurses use to manage some of the emotional demands made of them. Various studies highlight the importance of a nurse’s ability to manage emotion and to present the desired demeanor in a number of health-care settings; for example, James’ (1989, 1992) study of nursing the dying shows how working on one’s emotions can be described as “hard” and “productive” work; Staden (1998, p. 149) used three case studies to “recognize and

value emotional labor” whilst Phillips (1996) commented on the gap that seems to have appeared between the supposed elevated status since the 1970s of the emotional components of nursing and the reality; Smith (1988, 1991, 1992) notes how student nurses have to learn to be competent emotional laborers and Strauss et al. (1982) were one of the first to coin a phrase, “sentimental work”, in recognition of the emotional component of the role. More recently, attention has been drawn to the changing organizational context of nursing work in the UK (Bolton, 2001, p. 86) where the introduction of a “managerialism and markets mentality” means that nurses now have an added dimension to their work and are being asked to manage their emotions in much the same way as those in the private sector. Charles et al. (1999) suggest that an increasing interest in partnership in patient-professional relationships is associated with the rise in consumerism with patients seeing themselves as consumers with associated rights and expectations. McQueen (2000) highlights that the changing terminology reflected in the medical literature from patient to client implies participation and the “buying” of a service with the expectation, by patients, of certain standards; these standards usually include an expectation with regard to the emotional way in which the medical care is carried out.

Nurses of course, may well perform emotional labor because they want to (in which case display rules give way to feeling rules) rather than because of organizationally prescribed display rules. That is, they want to offer authentic caring behavior because they feel that this is a desirable skill of their job-role and because they derive satisfaction from doing so. However, this desire to feel certain emotions (hence, feeling rules) does not necessarily preclude the performance of emotional labor, since there must be many occasions when such people are unable to genuinely offer appropriate emotions (perhaps because of competing distractions from their personal lives, or due to depersonalization effects of burnout - see later section). In these cases, it could be that performance of emotional labor has quite severe negative consequences on their mental well-being (see later section too) since the dissonance is such that they want to genuinely feel emotionally appropriate but simply cannot. If feeling the right emotions is intimately linked in their minds to being good at their job, how will they feel when they do not feel these emotions but have to, instead, rely on faked expression in order to fulfill their own criteria of doing their job well? It is possible that this could affect their self-esteem and self-efficacy more than the worker who is performing emotional labor only to meet organizational demands (and who thus does not expect that genuine feeling is an indication of being good at the job).

### **Emotional Labor and Other Health-Care Providers**

Perhaps surprisingly, there have been few empirical studies examining the role or presence of emotional labor in health-care settings outside of nursing. This is probably due to the assumed centrality of emotion to the nursing role, which perhaps distracts from that in other health care areas. In addition, emotional labor has traditionally been seen as “female” work which is an extension of the emotional caring within family life. Thus, the “maleness” of other health professions, such as doctors, excludes this type of work (Smith and Gray, 2000). Another reason that the study of the emotional arena within the medical profession is very underdeveloped is

probably because doctors have traditionally been involved in the communication of technical procedures and interventions - leaving the more emotive aspects of caring to nurses (McCreight, 2004); as one nurse commented “doctors are detached from that sort of thing and leave nurses to pick up the emotional pieces” (Smith and Gray, 2000, p. 49). This is confirmed by a general practitioner in the same paper who observes that “feelings can get in the way if you’re trying to make a diagnosis . . . you’ve got to try and remain objective. It’s better to get on with the medicine and let the nurse’s deal with the emotions”. Because of the degree of potentially heightened emotion that can occur within the medical relationship, doctors and consultants often attempt to limit their emotional investment with precautionary or protective strategies (Lupton, 1997). An example of this is given in McCreight (2004) who noted that although the consultant tends to deliver bad news of pregnancy loss, it is left to the nurses to deal with the patient’s subsequent emotional distress. One study that did look at emotion management amongst doctors (albeit medical students) was that of Smith and Kleinman (1989).

They note that there are no courses in the medical curriculum that deal directly with emotion management, yet the culture of medicine does support certain unspoken rules with regard to emotional display. Smith and Kleinman note that emotion management is vital for helping doctors deal with unwanted feelings such as disgust or even sexual arousal, and that medical students draw upon a range of strategies to help them perform this work; including transforming the patient or the procedure into an analytic object or event, empathizing with patients and use of humor. Another study that has examined emotional labor outside of the nursing arena involved assessing the degree to which clinical psychologists performed emotional labor during patient sessions. Using a questionnaire the study revealed that 80 per cent of patient interactions involved the performance of emotional labor by the clinical psychologists (Mann and Jones, 1996). Clearly, although studies examining emotional labor outside of the nursing professions are rare, the evidence that there suggests that emotion management is just an important part of these health-care settings and should be considered just as much within health-care management.

### **Emotional Labor and the Patient Experience**

Emotional labor in health care has considerable significance for the patient who experiences pain, fear, anxiety or even panic (Phillips, 1996). The nurse who performs emotional labor is able to manage the reaction of her patient by both providing reassurance and allowing an outlet for their emotions - thus directly impacting on their psychological and physical well-being and recovery. At its simplest level, emotional labor performance maintains a “cheerful environment” (Mitchell and Smith, 2003, p. 114) which makes patients feel safe and comfortable. Many nurses in Smith and Gray’s (2000, p. 41) review point out that emotional labor makes the nurse and patient contact easier in “moving things along” and in “oiling the wheels of nursing work”. Emotional labor, they say, is the “almost invisible bond that the nurse cultivates with the patient” and many nurses felt that their emotional labor performance even helps the patient to manage disclosures of an emotional nature. Within the caring professions, expressing genuine emotion is

not always the most helpful response - in some cases performing emotional labor might be more beneficial to the client. For instance, a maternity nurse reported by Henderson (2001, p.

132) is reported as saying “You have to have a rational detachment otherwise you could become involved . . . and then it would not benefit yourself or this woman”. As McQueen (2004, p. 104) puts it, “if one is overcome with emotion, cognition and behavior can be adversely affected”.

## **EXISTING MODELS OF EMOTIONAL LABOR**

An examination of the literature reveals very little in the way of causal frameworks or models of the origins, consequences or moderators of emotional labor. One model, that of Harris (2002) that has been proposed is in the specific context of barristers and suggests a framework of the origins, content and consequences of emotional labor for barristers. Within this model, origins include “structural change”, “audience expectations”, “occupational acculturation”, “self-image” and “nature of the work”. These contribute to either private (during interactions with solicitors, barristers and court clerks) or public (during interactions with clients, witnesses and judges) emotional labor, or to emotional suppression. The consequences proposed by the model include negative impacts (such as stress and fatigue) and positive effects (such as efficiency and professionalism). Whilst this is undoubtedly a useful model, it is limited in its application to a certain client group. Interestingly, it makes the distinction between private emotional labor (performed with colleagues or others within the same profession) and public emotional labor (performed with clients or those outside of the profession). Whilst this distinction is likely to apply within the health-care setting too, it is probably a less important feature as the existing literature suggests that most emotion management in this setting occurs at the interface with patients. The fact that the barrister model also distinguishes between positive and negative outcomes of emotional labor is also clearly important for a health care model.

## **IMPLICATIONS OF THE MODEL FOR HEALTH-CARE MANAGEMENT**

The aim of health-care managers in respect of emotional labor must be to attempt to reduce its negative consequences whilst retaining the positive outcomes for both patient and career. There are thus two parts of the model where input from managers would be most valuable. First, at the “emotional labor inducing event” stage; what can health-care managers do to reduce either the number or impact of such events? Second at the “outcomes” stage; what can they do to moderate the negative consequences of emotional labor performance? The answer to both questions must lie within the range of educational and training initiatives currently offered to health careers. Emotional labor still remains largely implicit within most health services; emotional labor is rarely being explicitly recognized or taught. Still today, the tendency in research and in nursing

practice is to concentrate on more visible, measurable aspects of care and medical procedure. After all, as one nurse commented, “you can’t put feelings of intimacy in the patient’s notes or record”. Emotions continue to be professionalized in order to present a detached, impersonal image of medicine. If emotional labor continues to be devalued then the health service risks becoming blind to the emotional needs, not only of its patients, but also of its staff, with the associated negative implications on patient outcome and staff health and well-being. Acknowledgement of the role of emotions in terms of education within health-care training certainly appears to be patchy, with some provision better than others. A gynecological nurse in Northern Ireland comments in McCreight’s recent paper that she was not given guidance on dealing either with her own or her patient’s emotions and consequently felt that she was inadequately prepared for a part of her job that is central to her role; for example, nurses were trained in recognizing symptoms of miscarriage as well as appropriate forms of medical intervention, but not in the emotional aspects of such incidents. Nurses in Henderson’s study also frequently expressed their “profound disappointment in the failure of nursing education to address the emotional requirements of the work”; none of Henderson’s nurses felt that their nursing education has “in any way” prepared them for the emotional cost of nursing. In a similar vein, a psychiatrist in the *British Medical Journal* laments that “much of medical training seems to be focused on how to deal with things . . . rather than how to cope with people”. But how might this emotional training be achieved? Many nurses feel that these skills are best learned vicariously from more experienced colleagues: “there are very experienced staff here. . .and basically what you do is you learn from them”. This seems to reflect little change from the views of student nurses in 1992 who suggest that the skills needed to perform emotional labor are most frequently learnt informally in the workplace (Smith, 1992). This suggests that placements and other in situ elements of the training process are the best place to learn the emotional requirements of the job. Another suggestion is offered by McCreight who notes that training for gynecological nurses which involved visits from bereaved parents was regarded as very helpful in helping nurses see things from the patient’s perspective; this idea of “patient-centered” emotional skills training could be delivered across a wider range of disciplines; recovered patients, for example, could attend formal training days to share their experiences on the emotional aspect of the care delivery. McQueen, in her 2004 meta-analysis of emotional intelligence in nursing work, suggests that the training focus on self-awareness, self-regulation and social skills, whilst Cook (1999) points out that the current financial pressure on universities to teach in large groups is not conducive to these aims. Smith and Gray (2000) advise that reflective learning (including mentoring and storytelling techniques) is a useful way to learn these skills (although the emotional labor inherent in these learning processes themselves must be recognized).

Initiatives leading to changes in the organization of care in recent years may inadvertently affect the levels of emotional labor performed by care workers and this should be considered when considering future policies. For example, a drive to provide “continuity of care” from midwives in the Department of Health’s *Changing Childbirth* report (1993) may have important

implications for a midwife's personal life that can result in increased emotional labor as they attempt to juggle home and work roles. This leads to the issue of the effects of emotional labor on the laborer which has been outlined in detail earlier in this paper. It seems undisputed that continuous and chronic emotional labor performance can have significant negative outcomes on the health and well-being of the laborer, yet if emotional labor is barely acknowledged in the health service, how can its effects be monitored and treated? Thus, it is not just performance of emotional labor that needs to be taught in a formally recognized way, but also coping with the effects. Strategies that could be introduced to counteract the negative effects of emotional labor performance need to be both training and policy-led; for example, peer support programmers, changes in patient and resource allocation systems, stress management interventions, "downtime" schedules, work rotation schemes and debriefing programmers.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

There is a profound need to bridge the gap between medical and emotional aspects of care. The aim of this paper was to develop a health-care model of emotional labor that could be used to help health-care managers' better deal with the causes and consequences of emotional labor for staff and patients. It has been shown that emotional labor is a crucial part of the role of many health care professionals, especially nurses, and that these skills are not adequately taught within health-care education programmers. Similarly, the stress and effects of mental health of emotional labor performance have also not been sufficiently acknowledged or addressed. Specific recommendations from this review include the following: The study of emotional labor should be widened to include other professions outside of nursing such as doctors, counselors, clinical psychologists and other health-care providers. Emotional labor and emotion management should be formally recognized as a key skill in facilitating the patient journey and training, policy and education within health-care systems should reflect this recognition. . Emotional skills should be taught in innovative ways outside of the formal classroom setting and in small, appropriate groups encompassing reflective learning, mentor-led experiences and patient-centered sharing. Health-care professionals ought to be presented a training and education on coping with the effects to themselves of emotional labor performance both as part of initial entry-level training and as part of continuing professional development. . More research must be carried out to promote knowledge and awareness, particularly in identifying causes of emotional labor within health-care backgrounds and in discriminating the effects that different kinds of emotional labor performance might have.

## **REFERENCES**

1. Albrecht, K. and Zemke, R. (1985), *Service America! Doing Business Is the New Economy*, Dow Jones-Irwin, Homewood, IL.
2. Ashforth, B. and Humphrey, R. (1993), "Emotional labor in service roles: the influence of identity", *Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 18 No. 1, pp. 86-115.
3. Beutler, L.E., Engle, D., Oro-Beutler, M.E., Daldrup, R. and Meredith, K. (1986), "Inability to express intense affect: a common link between depression and pain", *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, Vol. 54, pp. 752-9.
4. Charles, K., Gafni, A. and Whelen, T. (1999), "Decision making in the physician-patient encounter: revisiting the shared treatment decision-making model", *Social Science and Medicine*, Vol. 49 No. 5, pp. 651-61.
5. Cook, S.H. (1999), "The self in self-awareness", *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, Vol. 29 No. 6, pp. 1292-9.
6. Freud, S. (1961), *The Problem of Anxiety*, Psychoanalytical Quarterly Press, New York, NY.
7. Fridlund, A.J., Newsome, J.B. and Gibson, E.L. (1984), "Putting emotion in behavioral medicine: discrete emotion psychophysiology and its relevance for research and therapy", in Van
8. Harris, L.C. (2002), "The emotional labor of barristers: an exploration of emotional labor by status professionals", *Journal of Management Studies*, Vol. 39 No. 4, pp. 553-84.
9. Henderson, A. (2001), "Emotional labor and nursing: an under-appreciated aspect of caring work", *Nursing Inquiry*, Vol. 8 No. 2, pp. 130-8.
10. Hochschild, A. (1983), *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*, University of California Press, Berkeley, CA.
11. Hunter, B. (2001), "Emotion work in midwifery: a review of current knowledge", *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, Vol. 34 No. 4, pp. 436-44.
12. James, N. (1989), "Emotional labor: skill and work in the social regulation of feelings", *Sociological Review*, Vol. 37, p. 1542.
13. Kahn, W.A. (1990), "Psychological conditions of personal engagement and disengagement at work", *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 33 No. 4, pp. 692-724.
14. Kelly, D., Ross, S. and Gray, B. (2000), "Death, dying and emotional labor: problematic dimensions of the bone marrow transplant nursing role?", *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, Vol. 32 No. 4, pp. 952- 60.

15. McQueen, A. (2000), "Nurse-patient relationships and partnership in hospital care", *Journal of Clinical Nursing*, Vol. 9, pp. 723-31.
16. McQueen, A. (2004), "Emotional intelligence in nursing work", *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, Vol. 47 No. 1, pp. 101-8.
17. Mann, S. (2004), "People-work: emotion management, stress and coping", *British Journal of Counselling and Guidance*, Vol. 32 No. 2, pp. 205-21.
18. Mitchell, D. and Smith, P. (2003), "Learning from the past: emotional labor and learning disability nursing", *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, Vol. 7 No. 2, pp. 109-17.
19. Pelletier, K.R. (1985), *Mind as Healer, Mind as Slayer*, Delacorte Press, New York, NY.
20. Phillips, S. (1996), "Laboring the emotions: expanding the remit of nursing work?", *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, Vol. 24, pp. 139-43.
21. Smith, A.C. and Kleinman, S. (1989), "Managing emotions in medical school: students' contacts with the living and the dead", *Social Psychology Quarterly*, Vol. 52, pp. 56-69.
22. Smith, P. (1991), "The nursing process: raising the profile of emotional care in nurse training",
23. Staden, H. (1998), "Alertness to the needs of others: a study of the emotional labor of caring", *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, Vol. 27, pp. 147-56.
24. Van Maanen, J. and Kunda, G. (1989), "Real feelings; emotional expression and organizational culture", in Cummings, L.L. and Staw, B.M. (Eds), *Research in Organizational Behavior*, Vol. 11, JAI Press, Greenwich, CT, pp. 43-103.
25. Wharton, A.S. and Erickson, R.J. (1993), "Managing emotion on the job and at home: understanding the consequences of multiple emotional roles", *Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 18 No. 3, pp. 457-86.