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Evolving Role of Nurses: Can They Deliver Both Clinical Excellence and Hospitality?

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ABSTRACT:

The healthcare landscape is rapidly evolving, significantly impacting the roles and responsibilities of nurses. Traditionally focused on clinical tasks, nurses now face increased documentation and administrative duties, driven by the need for meticulous patient records and regulatory compliance. This shift has led to the delegation of clinical tasks to roles such as General Duty Assistants (GDAs) and nursing assistants, aiming to optimize the use of highly skilled nurses for complex care. The integration of technology, including Electronic Health Records (EHRs) and telehealth, promises efficiency but adds complexity to nursing roles, necessitating continuous technical skill updates. Specialization within nursing is flourishing, reflecting the increasing complexity of patient care. However, there is a growing concern about whether nurses are equipped to deliver not only clinical excellence but also a hospitable experience. Research indicates a gap in nursing education regarding communication, empathy, and patient interaction, which are crucial for meeting patient and family expectations. This article explores the skills gap between technical training and the softer skills needed for a patient-centred experience, examining current trends in nursing education and proposing solutions to bridge this gap.

Key words:- Electronic Health Records (EHRs), General duty assistants (GDAs), quality of work life (QWL), Competency-Based Education(CBE)

INTRODUCTION:

The healthcare landscape is undergoing a rapid transformation. Nurses, traditionally considered the backbone of patient care, now face a reality far beyond solely performing clinical tasks. Nurses are increasingly burdened with documentation and administrative tasks. This shift is driven by the need for meticulous patient records and compliance with healthcare regulations. A study highlighted that nurse spend a significant portion of their time on documentation, which can detract from direct patient care¹. As healthcare demands rise, clinical tasks are being delegated to roles such as General duty assistants (GDAs) and nursing assistants. This delegation aims to optimize the use of highly skilled nurses for more complex care². The integration of technology in healthcare promises efficiency and accuracy but also adds complexity to nursing roles. Technologies such as Electronic Health Records (EHRs), smart pumps, and telehealth are transforming nursing practice. These tools enhance patient care but require nurses to continuously update their technical skills^{3,4}. Specialization within nursing is flourishing. Roles such as wound care nurses, infection control nurses and nurse trainers are becoming more common, supplementing traditional nursing roles. This trend reflects the increasing complexity of patient care and the need for specialized knowledge⁵.

However, in this ever-evolving environment, an important question emerges: Are nurses equipped to deliver not just excellent clinical care, but also a hospitable experience? Research indicates that while nurses are well-trained in clinical skills, there is often a lack of emphasis on communication, empathy, and patient interaction in nursing education^{6, 7}. Patients and their families now expect more than just medical expertise. They seek comfort, personalized service, and genuine care. Meeting these expectations requires nurses to possess strong interpersonal skills and the ability to create a hospitable environment⁸.

This article explores the critical issue of the skills gap between the technical training nurses receive and the softer skills needed to create a truly patient-centred experience. It explores whether current nursing education adequately addresses this aspect and proposes potential solutions to bridge this gap.

The Changing Role of Nurses

Historically, nurses focused primarily on clinical tasks such as administering medications, monitoring vital signs, and assisting with procedures. However, the modern healthcare environment has significantly expanded their scope of responsibilities. Nurses today are involved in extensive documentation, continuous patient monitoring, and various administrative duties⁹. The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine's report "The Future of Nursing 2020-2030" emphasizes the expanded roles of nurses in improving healthcare access and quality. It highlights the need for nurses to work to the full extent of their education and training to address the social determinants of health and provide patient-centred care⁹.

The introduction of roles such as General Duty Assistants (GDAs) and nursing assistants has been a strategic move to support nurses in their expanded duties. These roles help distribute the workload, allowing nurses to focus on more specialized tasks 10. However, this shift also requires nurses to be adept at supervising and coordinating with these new roles, adding another layer of responsibility to their jobs¹¹.

There is ongoing debate about the impact of these emerging roles on the quality of patient care. Some studies suggest that if not properly managed, the introduction of roles like GDAs and nursing assistants can dilute the quality of care due to inadequate training and inconsistencies in patient care¹². Conversely, other research indicates that with proper training and integration, these roles can enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of healthcare delivery, ultimately benefiting patient outcomes¹³.

The evolving roles and responsibilities of nurses underscore the importance of continuous professional development. Nurses must adapt to new roles and responsibilities, which requires ongoing education and training¹⁴. A scoping review on the adaptation of newly graduated nurses highlights the need for organizational support, a conducive work environment, and the development of personal attributes such as confidence and proactivity to facilitate effective adaptation to new roles¹⁵.

The Impact of Technology

The integration of technology in healthcare has brought about significant improvements in efficiency and accuracy. Electronic health records (EHRs), telemedicine, and advanced monitoring systems have streamlined many aspects of patient care. For instance, EHRs have made it easier to track patient histories, reducing the likelihood of errors and improving the continuity of care 16, 17. It streamline administrative tasks, allowing healthcare providers to spend more time on direct patient care¹⁸. Telemedicine has expanded access to healthcare, allowing nurses to provide care to patients in remote areas 19, 20.

However, the adoption of technology also presents challenges. Nurses need to be proficient in using these new tools, which requires ongoing training and adaptation²¹. The constant evolution of technology means that nurses must continuously update their skills to keep pace with advancements²². This can be particularly challenging for older nurses who may not be as comfortable with technology as their younger counterparts²³. Additionally, the reliance on technology can sometimes detract from the human aspect of nursing, as nurses may find themselves spending more time interacting with screens than with patients 18.

Specialization in Nursing

Specialization within nursing has become increasingly common, with roles such as wound care nurses, nurse trainers, and nurse practitioners emerging to meet specific patient needs. Specialization allows nurses to develop expertise in particular areas, leading to improved patient outcomes and more efficient care delivery. For instance, wound care nurses are trained to manage complex wounds, reducing the risk of infections and promoting faster healing²⁴. Studies have shown that specialized nursing roles lead to better patient outcomes and higher job satisfaction among nurses²⁵.

While specialization offers many benefits, it also presents challenges. Specialized nurses must balance their focused duties with the broader responsibilities of general nursing, which can lead to increased workload and stress²⁶. Additionally, the demand for specialized nurses can create staffing shortages in other areas, exacerbating the overall nursing shortage²⁷.

The demand for specialized nursing roles is growing, particularly in areas such as behavioural and mental health nursing, nurse midwifery, and nurse practitioners. This trend is driven by the aging population and the increasing complexity of patient care needs²⁸. One downside of increased specialization is the potential for fragmentation of care,

where patients may see multiple specialists without a cohesive care plan²⁹. This can lead to communication issues and a lack of continuity in patient care.

Patient and Family Expectations

As healthcare costs continue to rise, patients and their families are increasingly investing significant sums in their care. With this financial investment comes heightened expectations for comfort, service, and medical expertise. Patients expect not only excellent clinical care but also a hospitable experience that includes compassionate communication, personalized attention, and a supportive environment.

Current nursing training often falls short in addressing these expectations. While technical skills are emphasized, there is a lack of focus on hospitality and soft skills. Nurses are trained to perform clinical tasks with precision, but they may not receive adequate training in areas such as communication, empathy, and customer service. This gap can lead to dissatisfaction among patients and their families, who may feel that their emotional and psychological needs are not being met.

Research supports the need for integrating soft skills into nursing education to meet patient and family expectations. Studies have shown that effective communication and empathy are critical components of patient satisfaction³⁰. For instance, quality communication has been linked to improved patient-centred outcomes, including better selfmanagement and overall satisfaction. Additionally, compassionate and empathetic interactions are essential for building trust and ensuring a positive healthcare experience³¹.

Some argue that the primary focus of nursing should remain on clinical skills, as these are essential for patient safety and outcomes. They believe that while soft skills are important, they should not overshadow the technical competencies required in nursing³². However, the integration of soft skills does not necessarily detract from clinical training; rather, it complements it by enhancing the overall quality of care provided.

Current trends in nursing education are beginning to address this gap. There is a growing emphasis on incorporating soft skills into the curriculum. For example, modern nursing programs are increasingly using technology-based learning, virtual simulations, and interprofessional education to enhance both technical and soft skills³³. These innovations aim to prepare nurses for the complex and multifaceted demands of contemporary healthcare.

The Need for Hospitality Training

To create a truly patient-centred experience, it is essential to integrate hospitality training into nursing education. Soft skills such as communication, empathy, and customer service are crucial for enhancing patient satisfaction and improving overall care. Research has shown that these skills are essential for effective patient interactions and can significantly impact patient outcomes³⁴. For instance, effective communication helps in accurately assessing patient needs and conveying treatment plans, which is vital for patient trust and satisfaction³⁵.

Many current nursing programs do include modules on communication and patient interaction, but they often lack the depth needed to fully prepare nurses for the demands of the job³⁴. This gap can lead to nurses being clinically proficient but lacking in the soft skills necessary for delivering compassionate and supportive care³⁶.

Integrating hospitality training into nursing curricula can help bridge this gap. Hospitality training focuses on customer service, empathy, and effective communication, which are directly transferable to patient care³⁷. Studies have shown that training programs focused on cultural competence and communication skills significantly improve patient satisfaction and care quality³⁴. According to current trends, the use of virtual simulations and online classes is becoming more prevalent that allow for more flexible and comprehensive training in both clinical and soft skills³⁸. Interprofessional Education encourages collaboration among healthcare professionals to enhance communication and teamwork skills³⁹. Competency-Based Education focuses on ensuring that nursing students achieve specific competencies, including soft skills, before graduating⁴⁰. Critics argue that adding more training requirements could overwhelm nursing students and detract from essential clinical training³⁴. However, a balanced approach that integrates soft skills training without compromising clinical education can address this concern.

Workload and Unrealistic Expectations

Nurses today indeed face immense pressure to achieve clinical excellence while managing a wide range of responsibilities. Studies have shown that the high workload nurses face significantly impacts their quality of work life (QWL). For instance, a study found that increased workload is inversely related to QWL, with physical and mental demands being the most taxing⁴¹. This high workload often leads to burnout and job dissatisfaction, which are major factors contributing to the high turnover rates among nurses⁴².

The quality of nursing care is directly affected by the workload. Increased workload can lead to implicit rationing of nursing care, where essential care tasks are delayed or omitted due to time constraints. This not only affects patient outcomes but also increases emotional exhaustion among nurses⁴².

To address these issues, several trends are emerging in the healthcare industry. The use of technology, such as smart wearable sensors and electronic medication management systems, is helping to reduce the time nurses spend on routine tasks, thereby decreasing burnout⁴³. Improved delegation of tasks and better organizational support are being recognized as crucial for managing nursing workload more effectively⁴⁴. National surveys and studies are being conducted to understand and address the nursing workforce crisis, aiming to create more sustainable and meaningful careers for nurses⁴⁵. Research suggests that better management and support systems can mitigate the issues of high workload and burnout. For example, providing adequate and fair compensation, improving work and living conditions, and increasing organizational support can significantly enhance the QWL of nurses⁴¹. These findings underscore the need for systemic changes to support nurses better, ensuring they can provide high-quality care without compromising their well-being. Addressing these challenges is essential for the sustainability of the nursing profession and the overall quality of healthcare.

Curriculum and Practical Training

The current nursing curriculum is comprehensive, covering a wide range of topics from anatomy and physiology to pharmacology and clinical skills. However, there is often a disconnect between the theoretical knowledge taught in classrooms and the practical skills needed in real-world healthcare settings. Studies have shown that there is often a gap between the theoretical knowledge taught in classrooms and the practical skills needed in real-world healthcare settings. This gap can lead to nursing graduates feeling unprepared for the complexities of modern healthcare 46.

Practical training, including clinical rotations and internships, is crucial for bridging this gap. Research highlights that hands-on experience is essential for consolidating theoretical knowledge and improving patient care⁴⁷. Clinical rotations provide students with the opportunity to apply their knowledge in real-world scenarios, which is vital for their professional development⁴⁸.

The quality and scope of practical training can vary widely. Some students receive extensive hands-on training, while others have limited opportunities to practice their skills. Ensuring consistent and comprehensive practical training is crucial for preparing all nursing students for the demands of the job⁴⁹.

There is a growing trend towards incorporating technology in nursing education, such as simulation-based learning, which provides a safe environment for students to practice their skills⁴⁶. Interprofessional education involves training nursing students alongside other healthcare professionals to promote teamwork and improve patient outcomes³⁹. Competency-Based Education focuses on ensuring that nursing students achieve specific competencies before graduation, rather than just completing a set number of hours³⁹.

While practical training is essential, some argue that the current curriculum is already overloaded. Adding more practical training requirements could be challenging and may require a revaluation of the existing curriculum to balance theoretical and practical components effectively⁴⁶.

The Vicious Cycle

The gap between nursing education and industry needs indeed creates a challenging cycle impacting both nurses and healthcare institutions. Recent studies highlight a decline in the initial preparedness of new nurses, emphasizing the need for competency-based education to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical skills⁵⁰. The disparity between what is taught in nursing schools and the realities of clinical practice is a universal issue. Solutions like synchronizing classroom and clinical training, and reducing paperwork during clinical training, have been suggested to address this gap⁵¹. Thus, Hospitals need to invest heavily in upskilling nurses, providing ongoing training and professional development opportunities.

High workloads and low salaries are significant factors contributing to trained nurse turnover. The stress and demands of the job often lead to burnout, prompting nurses to seek better working conditions or higher pay⁵². Studies show that turnover rates for newly licensed registered nurses can be as high as 25% annually, with factors like emotional exhaustion, job satisfaction, and peer support playing crucial roles⁵³. High nurse turnover negatively impacts patient care quality. Increased turnover rates are associated with higher incidences of medical errors, unit-acquired pressure ulcers, and lower patient satisfaction⁵⁴. Consistent nurse turnover disrupts continuity of care, leading to decreased quality metrics and less experienced nursing staff, which can compromise patient outcomes⁵⁵.

However, without addressing the root causes of turnover, such investments may not yield long-term benefits⁵⁶. Creating a supportive workplace culture that addresses financial, intellectual, and psychological needs of nurses can help reduce turnover and improve retention⁵².

Summary:

This article delves into the changing landscape of nursing, highlighting the expanded roles and responsibilities of nurses in modern healthcare. Nurses are increasingly burdened with documentation and administrative tasks, driven by the need for meticulous patient records and regulatory compliance. To optimize the use of highly skilled nurses for complex care, clinical tasks are being delegated to roles such as General Duty Assistants (GDAs) and nursing assistants. The integration of technology, including Electronic Health Records (EHRs) and telehealth, enhances patient care but requires nurses to continuously update their technical skills. Specialization within nursing is on the rise, reflecting the increasing complexity of patient care.

Despite these advancements, there is a critical skills gap in nursing education concerning communication, empathy, and patient interaction. Patients and their families now expect not only clinical expertise but also compassionate and personalized care. The article discusses the need for integrating hospitality training into nursing education to bridge this gap. It also addresses the challenges of high workloads, low salaries, and high turnover rates among nurses, emphasizing the importance of creating a supportive workplace culture. The article concludes by highlighting the need for continuous professional development and systemic changes to support nurses in delivering both clinical excellence and a hospitable experience.

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