

Chapter for the book series titled IIPV3EBS16_G20 Futuristic Trends in Pharmacy and Nursing under IIP

Reference: Editor: *Dr. Prof. Rajamanickam Rajkumar. ID IIPER 1655445444*

The Role of Nurses in the Quality of Healthcare

Paviya M, (MD) ¹, Rajamanickam Rajkumar MD, PhD ²

1. Postgraduate Student,

2. Professor & Publication Guide,

*Dept. of Community Medicine, Meenakshi Medical College Hospital & Research Institute,
Meenakshi Academy of Higher Education and Research – MAHER,*

Kanchipuram, Tamil Nadu, India

Abstract

Introduction: Nurses, the central system of healthcare, play a vital role in the promotion of health, the prevention of disease, and the provision of primary and community healthcare. They deliver care in crisis situations and are essential to achieving universal health coverage. To achieve universal health, there must be an adequate number of nurses and midwives who are educated, controlled, and supported, and who are paid and recognized in accordance with the services and level of care they deliver².

Aim: To present nursing competencies and the nursing profession's role in quality healthcare.

Methods: The review was supported by a thorough literature search in databases and a keyword-focused library search.

Conclusion: Nurses have an important role in achieving universal health coverage. For this, nurses should address their role in health care, undergo adequate training, and develop the skills required to improve patient satisfaction.

Keywords: Quality, Health Care, Nurse role, Nurses and Midwives, Goal of Healthcare.

Introduction

Nurses and midwives are crucial in providing basic healthcare as they often are the first and perhaps the only healthcare providers that patients consult about their ailments. Hence, The effectiveness of their initial evaluation, care, and treatment is still crucial to the calibre of medical care.

Nursing is defined by The International Council of Nurses (ICN) as

- “Nursing encompasses autonomous and collaborative care of individuals of all ages, families, groups and communities, sick or well and in all settings.
- Nursing includes the promotion of health, the prevention of illness, and the care of ill, disabled and dying people.
- Advocacy, promotion of a safe environment, research, participation in shaping health policy and in-patient and health systems management, and education”.

According to WHO, In the world, there are about 27 million nurses and midwives working. Despite there being a scarcity of healthcare workers globally, this makes up over 50% of the global health workforce. In order for all nations to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 3 (SDG 3), which focuses on health and well-being, the WHO predicts that an additional 9 million nurses will be required globally.

There is an increase in demand for healthcare both in quantity and quality due to various factors such as rapid urbanization, environmental changes, emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases, drug resistance, population ascent and economic development leading to lifestyle changes which superimpose the rise in non-communicable diseases. In rapid global evolution, nurses and midwives have a key role in delivering quality health care.

Quality of healthcare

Quality of care is “The degree to which health services for individuals and populations increase the likelihood of desired health outcomes and are consistent with evidence-based professional knowledge”⁷. This notion of quality of care includes palliation, rehabilitation, treatment, promotion, and prevention. It indicates that quality care can be measured and improved by evidence-based care in an account of service users (patients, families and communities)⁸.

“Effective, Secure and customer-focused health services should be provided worldwide. Health services must be timely, egalitarian, integrated and efficient in order to reap the rewards of high-quality care”⁸

In 2001 IOM proposed six domains of health care quality, a framework which is more influential than the other existing ones, adopted these principles as six dimensions of health

Domains of healthcare quality

The six domains of healthcare quality are:

- **Safe:** Preventing patients from being harmed by the care that is meant to be helpful to them.
- **Effective:** Delivering services based on scientific knowledge to everyone who could benefit

from them while avoiding those who are unlikely to benefit (prevent underuse and misuse, respectively).

- **Patient-centered:** Ensuring that all clinical choices are informed by patient values and delivering treatment that is respectful of and attentive to each patient's unique preferences, requirements, and values.
- **Timely:** Minimizing wait periods and occasionally dangerous delays for both recipients and providers of care.
- **Efficient:** Preventing waste, including waste of tools, materials, concepts, and energy.
- **Equitable:** delivering care that is uniformly high-quality regardless of a patient's gender, race, region, or socioeconomic status⁹.

Nurses' Role in Healthcare Quality

Nurses, being the first responders to the people who seek healthcare at the community level, have a critical function in the outcome of the healthcare delivery system.

Donabedian defined quality as “the ability to achieve desirable objectives using legitimate means¹⁰” Adding to that, he insisted on the importance of assessing healthcare quality at different levels such as Individual practitioners, care settings, and care received by the patients and by the community¹¹. Nurses have a major role at all these levels in driving clinical outcomes and improving healthcare.

At the level of community, Nurses work in wide areas ranging from

- 1) Healthy people - Health education, disease prevention efforts, health interventions such as screening programs, vaccination, health promotion, etc.,
- 2) Sick patients - Acute care for sickness, timely management of emergencies, preventing disabilities.
- 3) To people with a limited functional capacity as a disability - Rehabilitation services.
- 4) In general - Acts as a bridge between community and healthcare, makes healthcare accessible, implements government schemes and programs to reach the community, health education, emotional and social support.

For "promoting and maintaining health, preventing and managing disease, reducing unnecessary disability and premature death, and achieving health equity, access to quality health care services and equitable access to care are required¹² .”

According to WHO, Sixty percent of deaths from illnesses requiring medical attention in low- and middle-income nations are caused by inadequate care, while the remaining deaths are brought on by underuse of the health system. It is imperative to understand that neither an effective healthcare system/policy nor the healthcare providers can determine the country's overall health outcome. There should be equitable access all through the community to improve the quality of healthcare. 'Accessibility' to healthcare had been proposed along with 'Quality' by WHO framework of “building blocks¹⁴”.

People have difficulty accessing healthcare due to distance from health centres, lack of healthcare providers, lack of financial, emotional and social support, lack of education, awareness or other reasons. To bridge this gap between the health care system and people, Nurses are a lifeline to meet this demand.

Nurses connect people by reaching underserved areas, providing health facilities at their homes, implementing government schemes from documents to the field, connecting to schools and communities, telehealth, and health records maintenance.

In addition to primary care, they provide valuable inputs in natural disasters and public health emergencies to meet the need¹³. The traditional nursing competency is evolving from primary care to a greater extent, of preventive management.

Challenges faced

Despite various measures and strategies framed by government and non-government organizations, healthcare professional still faces challenges in delivering quality healthcare. The limitations are due to staff shortages, lack of adequate training and education, bureaucratic red tape, emerging new infectious diseases, public health emergencies such as the recent COVID-19 pandemic and violence against health professionals.

In terms of quality care, the challenges are to meet the domains of healthcare quality concerning accessibility to remote areas, time delay or increased wait time, ineffectiveness, inefficiency, bias or inequity. Nurses need to overcome all these hurdles in the community to provide quality care.

How to enhance the quality of healthcare

Quality professionals can provide quality care. According to the American Nursing Association, the quality of nurses includes good communication skills, empathy and compassion, critical thinking, problem-solving skills, time management skills, patient advocacy and willingness to learn. With proper guidance, training, knowledge and practice, nurses can improve the care given to patients.

Patient satisfaction is merely a proximal or an indirect indicator of how well a hospital or doctor is performing¹⁴. It affects the timely, efficient, and patient-centered delivery of quality health care. It is the most important and effective tool to assess the quality of a health facility.

Patient satisfaction, being a qualitative term is intricate. Achieving this needs a team effort rather than an individual attempt. Despite team effort, Nurses connect with the team and have been predominantly involved in improving patients satisfaction as they directly interact with patients and spend most of their time with the patients. Patient satisfaction can be improved by ensuring adequate staff recruitment in health facilities, increasing the time spent with patients so that they feel extreme care has been given, and routine training to nurses for effective communication, time management and on patient-centric approach.

Desirable Outcomes of Quality Care

Quality is the ultimate goal of the health system according to many frameworks constructed on healthcare. But the most noteworthy of all is the framework is the one which was designed by WHO in 2006.

It foresees the 'Building blocks' of the health system, such as service provision, the health

workforce, information, medical products, financing, and leadership and governance. As a corollary, quality and safety with access and coverage are intermediate goals to achieve the desirable outcome. On achieving these intermediate goals, the overall outcome has been described as improved health, responsiveness, financial protection and improved efficiency¹³.

Conclusion

Right from the ground level to the administration, Nurses operate in addressing the cause of poor health and work towards its prevention. Being frontline workers, they have the ability to gain the trust of the community and make them march towards healthcare facilities as and when required..

Quality is emphasized as being a crucial component of universal health coverage (UHC) in the Sustainable Development Goals. SDG target 3.8 asks nations to achieve UHC, which includes access to high-quality basic healthcare services as well as financial risk protection. Universal health coverage via quality health services is possible through the profession of nursing as they are at the basal level in improving patient satisfaction.

Quality assessment and its enhancement is vital in shaping medical services as patient-centric and understanding the patients' needs. The profession of Nursing is evolving enormously from historical competency as a caregiver for patients to a wide range of services in the medical field.

Henceforth, Nurses need adequate training in all dimensions of quality healthcare and involve themselves in various actions for the development. So that they achieve the desirable outcome by joining hands with other health professionals, Government and Non-Government organizations. Regardless of the setting in which they work, nursing schools must place a high priority on preparing all nurses to address social determinants of health and provide care accordingly.

References

1. Hertz K, Santy-Tomlinson J, editors. Cham (CH): Springer; 2018. chapter, 12.1: International Council of Nurses (ICN) Definitions of Nursing and a Nurse Fragility Fracture Nursing: Holistic Care and Management of the Orthogeriatric Patient [Internet].
2. WHO, Health topics- Nurse and Midwifery/Fact sheets.
3. Institute of Medicine (IOM). Crossing the Quality Chasm: A New Health System for the 21st Century. Washington, D.C: National Academy Press; 2001.
4. Institute of Medicine (IOM). Performance Measurement: Accelerating Improvement. Washington, D.C: National Academy Press; 2005.
5. WHO. Quality of care: a process for making strategic choices in health systems. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2006b.
6. IOM. Medicare: A Strategy for Quality Assurance: Volume 1. Washington (DC), US: National Academies Press; 1990.
7. WHO. Handbook for national quality policy and strategy – A practical approach for developing policy and strategy to improve quality of care. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2018.
8. Six domains of Healthcare Quality. Content last reviewed December 2022. Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, Rockville, MD.
9. Donabedian A. The Definition of Quality and Approaches to Its Assessment. Vol 1. Explorations in Quality Assessment and Monitoring. Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA: Health Administration Press; 1980.
10. Donabedian A. The quality of care. How can it be assessed. Journal of the American Medical Association. 1988;260(12):1743–8. [PubMed]
11. ODPHP (Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion). Healthy People 2020. 2020. [April 13, 2020]. Discrimination. <https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/topics-objectives /topic/social-determinants- health /interventions-resources /discrimination>
12. National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine; National Academy of Medicine; Committee on the Future of Nursing 2020-2030; Flaubert JL, Le Menestrel S, Williams DR, et al., editors. Washington (DC): National Academies Press (US); 2021 May 11.
13. WHO. Everybody's business: Strengthening health systems to improve health outcomes: WHO's framework for action. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2006a.
14. Tabbish S. Oxford: Oxford University Press; 2001. Hospital and Health Services Administration Principles and Practice; p. 699.