

Significance of Patient Participation in Nursing Care

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ABSTRACT

Patient participation, an international requirement according to the World Health Organization and other international bodies, is a must in nursing care. It involves patient engagement in making their own treatment decisions, participating in the development and evaluation of services and taking part in policy development. Patient participation on the individual, organizational and policy development levels has been discussed. Facilitators of and barriers to active patient participation, as well as ways to enhance it, were also included in this review. Poor communication, a paternalistic approach, time constraints, lack of encouragement and lack of information-sharing

are some of the challenges associated with poor patient participation in nursing care. Facilitators of patient participation include empowering patients, involving them in making decisions and policy making, understanding their perspective about their role in their care and empowerment through leadership. Patient participation in nursing care has numerous benefits including effective healthcare services, improved patient safety, enhanced quality of care, fewer medication errors, more medication adherence and assessment of the care services received. (*Altern Ther Health Med.* 2021;27(5):115-119).

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INTRODUCTION

According to the World Health Organization and other national bodies, promoting patient participation is an international priority.¹ Patient participation in nursing care is a must to ensure the provision of quality care, and it ensures that patients can make decisions regarding their own care. However, lack of recognition of its importance is a major cause of patient non-participation.²

Patients can avail themselves of their most significant nursing care rights if they are involved in all decision-making, and must exercise all their fundamental rights while receiving care. The best quality of care will be provided if there is patient participation.³ For example, the importance of patient participation can easily be seen in the management of chronic illnesses and making treatment decisions.⁴

The role of patients in healthcare has evolved from passive beneficiary to informed, empowered and active participant in care, including decision-making and the development of safety

procedures.⁵ However, few patients are actively involved in the planning, delivery, monitoring and evaluation of their care.

According to the International Association for Public Participation, patient participation is divided into five sections: information, consultation, involvement, collaboration and empowerment.⁶ Patient participation requires the utilization of strength, knowledge, expertise and responsiveness concerning their own treatment during care.⁷ Per concept analysis, there are four attributes of patient participation in nursing care: an effective relationship between nurse and patient, the handover of a certain amount of control or power to patients, mutual engagement in physical and intellectual activities and the sharing of knowledge and information.⁸ Hospitals are endorsing patient-centered care, in which patient participation is a major factor. Patients can avail themselves of their healthcare rights through active participation that supports them making their own health decisions.⁹ Active patient participation can also increase quality of care and patient safety.¹⁰

Hospitals endorse patient participation, but this practice has not been completely implemented. Nurses are not providing a supportive environment for active patient participation and need to develop certain strategies to encourage participation.¹

Mutual and active patient engagement can be achieved through the physical, mental and verbal involvement of patients in their own care.¹¹

Several studies have discussed the perspective of patients and nurses on patient participation in care, and diverse tools have been developed to assess patients' perspective regarding their participation.¹² According to nurses, patients are not completely aware of the significance of their participation in making decisions. Patients using services have a major role in and responsibility to recognize their own requirements, which can be handled with the support of their healthcare providers.¹³ In addition, patients feel that the behavior of nurses acts to both promote and inhibit active patient participation;¹⁴ observational studies have shown that all nurses are not encouraging patient participation.

METHODS

Literature Search

We searched PubMed, EMBASE, Web of Science and CNKI (a Chinese Database) to identify studies on or before Jan 20, 2016 using the following search terms: “nurse,” “hospital,” “patient care,” “cardiac disease,” “cancer” and “infection”. The references of all retrieved studies were scanned for additional eligible publications. Primary studies were eligible if they reported any information on patient nursing without restriction or regard to study type or design. We excluded studies that focused on infection in infants, did not report original data or clear diagnostic criteria and did not have reliable clinical data. Two independent reviewers screened the literature search and assessed each study for inclusion. Any disagreement regarding inclusion was resolved by consulting a senior investigator.

Levels of Patient Participation

Patient involvement in nursing care can be utilized on various levels:

Self-care/direct level. Ranges from receiving basic information about their disorder to treatment to becoming an active partner in goal-setting and making decisions.

Organizational level. Patients can work with healthcare professionals to propose, deliver and assess care. They can also take part in the development of services, planning and care evaluation.¹⁴ For instance, patients can propose how to improve the quality of care they receive during hospitalization. They can assist with setting a care agenda and be empowered to make decisions in conjunction with healthcare professionals.¹⁵

Policy level. Clear guidelines can be developed that give patients the opportunity to take an active part in the decision-making process. The inclusion of patients in their own care is a new concept that should be integrated into healthcare policy. Patients can participate in the development, implementation and assessment of policies developed at the local, state and national level in order to achieve quality patient outcomes. It is also indispensable for the improvement of the quality and safety of healthcare.¹²

Factors Affecting Patient Participation

The eagerness, opportunities and ability of patients to take an active part in their nursing care depends upon several factors (see Figure 1).

Patient-related:

- Sense of control
- Ability to implement safety-related behaviors
- Acceptance of safety benefits
- Anticipation of positive results obtained from participation
- Understanding their current condition
- Preference for receiving traditional paternalistic care

Health-care worker related:

- Skills and knowledge
- Perception regarding patient participation
- Motivation and encouragement of patients
- Nature of work
- Not involving patients in care planning and treatment
- Time constraints

Challenges to Patient Participation

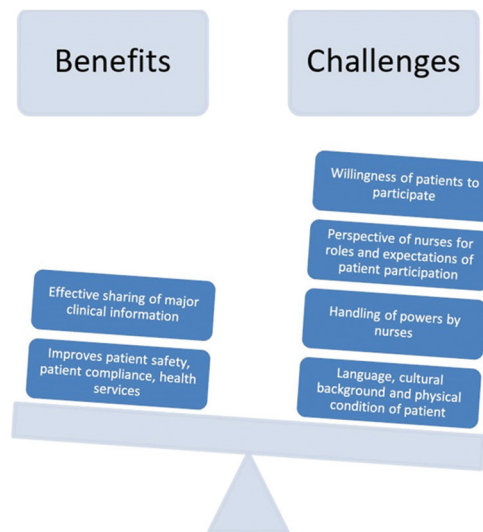
There are several factors that are responsible for less patient participation in nursing care.

Paternalistic Culture. The traditional paternalistic treatment of patients is a major obstacle to patient participation. In a paternalistic culture, patients are not encouraged to take an active part in their care, despite the support of several policies. This culture is being used in decision-making in healthcare settings,¹⁶ and is based on the belief that decisions are completely dependent upon the knowledge and experience of healthcare professionals. Patients are not involved in the process; healthcare professionals provide treatment without obtaining their consent.

These days, patients are refuting this passive role in their care.¹⁷ The paternalistic approach needs to be left behind in favor of patient-centered care in which patients can make decisions regarding their own care.

Leadership inadequacy. The ability of nurses to provide patient-centered care has a significant impact on patient

Figure 1. Benefits and challenges associated with patient participation¹⁸



participation. Healthcare professionals working in an environment in which patient safety is a must can take the lead in encouraging active patient participation in safety practices.¹⁸

Healthcare organizations do not provide the required support to inculcate leadership qualities in nurses and do not possess the quality improvement infrastructure needed to do so. Patients feel that the task-oriented approach is being followed by nurses;⁵ their opinions are not validated by nurses and they have a passive role in their own care.

Nurse leadership plays a significant role in supporting patient participation in patient safety and needs to be strengthened.

Little or No Communication. There is no interprofessional collaboration or teamwork between healthcare professionals and patients, and sufficient time is not available for effective communication between nurses, physicians and patients.¹⁹

In some cases patients feel there are cultural and linguistic barriers to effective communication with nurses, and without this communication they find it difficult to involve themselves in their own care. On the other hand, there are cases in which a patient is not in a physical or mental state that allows effective communication with nurses.²⁰ The lack of effective communication between healthcare professionals and patients leads to poor patient participation.

Lack of Education and Encouragement. One of the major factors neglected in nursing care is the ability to meet the educational requirements of patients with regard to their disorder and its treatment. Studies have shown that nurses are not educating patients and thus not promoting patient participation. Patients are not receiving encouragement and support from healthcare professionals regarding their participation in their own care, and without proper education and encouragement, there will be less patient participation.²²

Both healthcare providers and patients must have the right skills, attitude and knowledge, and there must be a supportive environment for sharing that knowledge.²³ Healthcare providers must have a positive attitude and provide a supportive environment that encourages patient participation. They must understand and respect patients' knowledge regarding their own treatment plan¹ (see Figure 2).

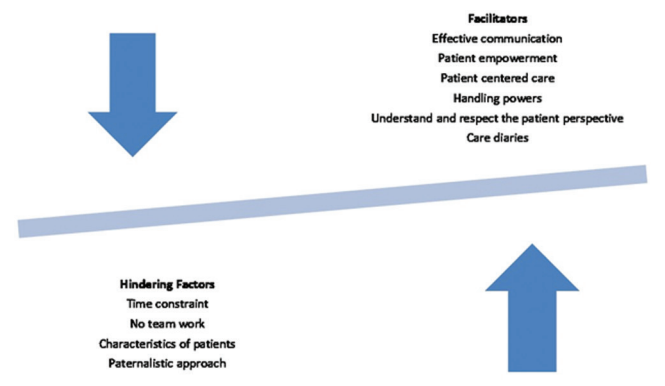
How Can Patient Participation Be Enhanced?

The World Health Organization emphasizes that the improvement of quality outcomes in the delivery of healthcare services cannot be achieved by healthcare providers alone; they need patient participation to ensure the provision of quality healthcare services.¹⁹ However, research has shown that patient participation is not always being completely integrated into nursing care.

Patient participation can be increased if patients feel they are partners in their own care. Achieving active patient participation in clinical practice is not easy, but can be achieved with the support and encouragement of the nursing staff.⁷

The healthcare team can promote patient participation in making treatment decisions, and sufficient resources including

Figure 2. Facilitators and challenges to patient participation.³⁶



time and money must be available to facilitate this. Providing patients with multifaceted information access and tools can enhance their participation in decision-making, and there needs to be a positive relationship between the two.²⁴

Nurses must give a certain amount of control or power to their patients, and there must be a sharing of information between the two.¹⁶ Thus, patients can be involved in treatment decision-making and other aspects of care including monitoring their own progress and sharing their suggestions for improving care with the nursing staff.

Interventions

It is important to understand the perspective of patients regarding participation in their care.²⁴ This can help in the identification of effective interventions that can help increase the ability and willingness of patients to take an active part in their own care.²⁶

There are several strategies that can enhance medication safety worldwide. Think Safe and Speak Up! are two campaigns that have been shown to enhance patient understanding and tool development, such as patient logbooks to assure medication safety. Patients also act as vigilant medication monitors through dose inquiries.¹⁹ The US Joint Commission's Speak Up! program suggests that patients take the initiative in preventing healthcare errors by being actively involved with their healthcare team. It is also recommended that they know the name, purpose, route, frequency, dose, and duration of every medication they take. Having this knowledge can help patients minimize medication errors and adverse effects.²⁷

DISCUSSION

Respect the Patient's Perspective

Studies show that understanding a patient's perspective in order to accomplish specific tasks and complete goals is a prerequisite for active patient participation.²⁸ Patients who have positive experiences with healthcare services actively participate in their own care, regardless of gender, age and profession.¹¹

Nursing Competency

Nursing staff must be competent to promote patient participation—competencies can help them analyze and remove

Figure 3. Patient as partner in nursing care.⁴²



barriers associated with active patient participation.²⁹ It can also help nursing professionals meet the requirements needed to encourage patient participation. Encouragement and support from nursing staff can enhance active patient participation.¹⁷

The encouragement of patient participation by healthcare professionals is vital for supporting the treatment of chronic disorders. Handling chronic disorders necessitates self-management and strong treatment adherence by patients, which can be easily achieved through active patient participation.³⁰ Patient use of self-management can also provide more cost-effective healthcare.¹⁶

Designate Powers

Nurses must support patients and provide them with resources that lead to the development of an active patient participation environment. Patients should be encouraged to take an active part in their own treatment decisions, and can also be involved in the treatment development and evaluation processes.³¹

Sharing power between nurses and patients has been the subject of several research papers. However, the attitude and dominance of nurses is a major hindrance to active patient participation.²¹

Sharing Knowledge

Nurses must share knowledge regarding symptoms, procedures and concerns with their patients. For instance, making brief comments about patients' vital signs can be a major part of sharing knowledge.⁶ Information must be easy to understand, useful and adapted to the individual patient. The act of sharing their concerns and symptoms with their nurses can also reveal patients' level of understanding regarding their situation.³² Several reviews have confirmed the enhancement of patient participation when nurses share information with their patients and respect their knowledge.¹⁴

Effective communication

The relationship between nurse and patient can be increased through effective communication. Nurses can initiate informal communication with patients in order to identify their current ability to perform activities of daily living and establish safe and quality practices.³³ Nurses can find out the level of a patient's knowledge before sharing detailed explanations about the nursing procedures they are about to initiate.²⁵ The reasons for starting a procedure and upcoming care plans can be discussed with patients.

Access records

Healthcare professionals can use written communication tools such as I-pads and care diaries for electronic medical record documentation, and patients can access their medical records via I-pads.³⁵ Patients can also gain an understanding of their treatment through brochures. Nurses must review the information available in brochures periodically to ensure that it is updated and relevant.⁶ Care plans are also a significant tool through which patients can access their health records³⁶ (see Figure 3).

Significance of Patient Participation

Patient participation is fundamental to patient-centered healthcare.³⁷ Active patient participation can have a positive impact on patient safety due to fewer adverse effects and safer medications.⁴ It can have a positive impact on quality of care, along with resulting in more patient satisfaction. Patient participation can also help in the development of quality decisions and patient democratization.²⁴

Better health services

Involving patients in treatment decision-making can result in providing better health services³⁸ and enhanced treatment responses. It also improves diabetes control, effective physical functioning in rheumatic disorders and leads to better patient compliance.¹

Nursing plan changes

Patient participation plays an important role during nursing care planning as patients can request changes in the plan such as in the timing of medication administration.^{2,39}

Self-care

Patients can handle their own care through patient participation;⁴⁰ they can administer medications including eye drops, metered dose inhalers and topical creams. Nurse supervision can ensure that patients are administering the correct medications and doses.²⁰ Self-care helps patients gain knowledge about their disorders, including symptoms and possible adverse effects of their medications.

Evaluation of service

Through patient participation, patients can contribute to their own safety by evaluating the services they receive, which can lead to improved services.⁴¹ It also give patients the opportunity to lodge complaints about services they are not satisfied with.⁴²

Improved patient safety and quality of care

Medication adherence and medication errors are the major quality and safety concerns in the acute care setting,¹⁰ which can result in more patients being admitted to hospitals due to adverse events. Active patient participation can defend against medication errors and improve medication adherence.⁴³

CONCLUSION

Patient participation is a major requisite for quality nursing care, and international organizations working towards patient safety recommend patients' participation in their care. The role of patients at the individual, organizational and policy level can have a significant impact on the safety and quality of care. Inadequate knowledge, lack of communication and a paternalistic model in which patients do not have the power to make decisions are accountable for less patient participation. There is a need to develop an effective relationship between nurses and patients in which nurses encourage, educate and empower patients to take an active part in their own care. Various interventions such as Speak Up! work to enhance patient participation. Initiation of this process with informal communication, understanding the patients' perspective, providing access to medical records, listening to patient concerns and taking measures to satisfy them are some strategies to increase patient participation. Better patient outcomes, a smaller number of hospital readmissions, shorter hospital stays, diminished mortality and improvement of patients' functional status are some of the outcomes associated with patient participation in nursing care.

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