

Nurses' experiences in caring for dying patients: A literature review

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Article Review

ABSTRACT

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Every human will face death, and some patients can experience a critical condition during illness before death. Nurses are medical professionals who are expected to be able to care for a patient's critical condition. Studying experiences of nurses in dealing with a patient's critical condition is needed so that they can improve their services. This study aims to analyze articles that explain about nurses' experiences in dealing with dying patients. A literature review was conducted by searching articles from the PubMed and EBSCO databases (using keywords "dying AND nurse AND experience"). In the PubMed databases were found 563 articles, and in the EBSCO were found 1,632 articles. From the all the databases, only 10 articles met the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Results of the article reviews found that the experiences of nurses in caring for dying patients suggest nurses to have more empathy and to provide contextual moral encouragement for patients and their families. Nurses also need to prepare themselves with knowledge about end of life.

Setiap manusia akan menghadapi kematian, dan beberapa pasien dapat mengalami kondisi kritis saat sakit sebelum meninggal. Perawat adalah tenaga medis profesional yang diharapkan mampu merawat kondisi kritis pasien. Diperlukan kajian pengalaman perawat dalam menghadapi kondisi kritis pasien agar dapat meningkatkan pelayanannya.

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis artikel yang menjelaskan tentang pengalaman perawat dalam menangani pasien sekarat. Sebuah tinjauan pustaka dilakukan dengan mencari artikel dari database PubMed dan EBSCO (menggunakan kata kunci "sekarat DAN perawat DAN pengalaman"). Dalam database PubMed ditemukan 563 artikel, dan di EBSCO ditemukan 1.632 artikel. Dari semua database tersebut, hanya 10 artikel yang memenuhi kriteria inklusi dan eksklusi. Hasil review artikel menemukan bahwa pengalaman perawat dalam merawat pasien sekarat memberi kesan bahwa perawat memiliki empati yang lebih dan memberikan dorongan moral kontekstual bagi pasien dan keluarganya. Perawat juga perlu mempersiapkan diri dengan pengetahuan tentang akhir hayat.

INTRODUCTION

Death is a natural process that cannot be avoided, and every human will experience it.¹ Nearing death, some patients can experience a critical condition. Knowledge and attitudes of a health professional to care a patient's critical condition are needed to provide

optimal health services.² Health professionals who care for patients directly in a hospital need to be prepared to face a condition of terminal patients. Besides, they also need to understand that fear is a consequence they may experience.^{3,4} Nurses are health professionals who have a longer contact time together with

patients than other medical professionals.⁵ This fact requires nurses to be professional and adaptive to all condition experienced by patients, including terminally ill patients who will experience a process of death.⁶

Holistic care needs to be provided by paying attention to various aspects of the patients. These include physical, emotional, social, economic and spiritual needs and health as external causes of death and morbidity.⁷ Care for terminal patients is very important, and a hospital needs to improve its nursing service.⁸ The nurses have to anticipate some changes of the patients whether they are in recovery or in terminal condition. Dealing with terminal patients, the nurses are suggested to learn and identify processes and signs of death of their patients.^{10,11} Therefore, regarding the nurses' care for the patients, this study is to provide

an overview of nurses' experiences in dealing with dying patients.

METHODS

Articles chosen in this study were collected from accredited article sites such as Pubmed (www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed) and EBSCO (www.ebsco.com) with keywords "Dying AND Nurse AND Experience". From the both sites, 2,195 articles were obtained (563 articles from PubMed and 1,632 articles from EBSCO). Next, selections of the found articles was conducted by adjusting the inclusion criteria, including English only articles ranging from 2017 to 2018. At this stage, 24 suitable texts were found; however, after adjusting to the exclusion criteria (manuscripts in full text), there were only 10 articles acquired (Figure 1).

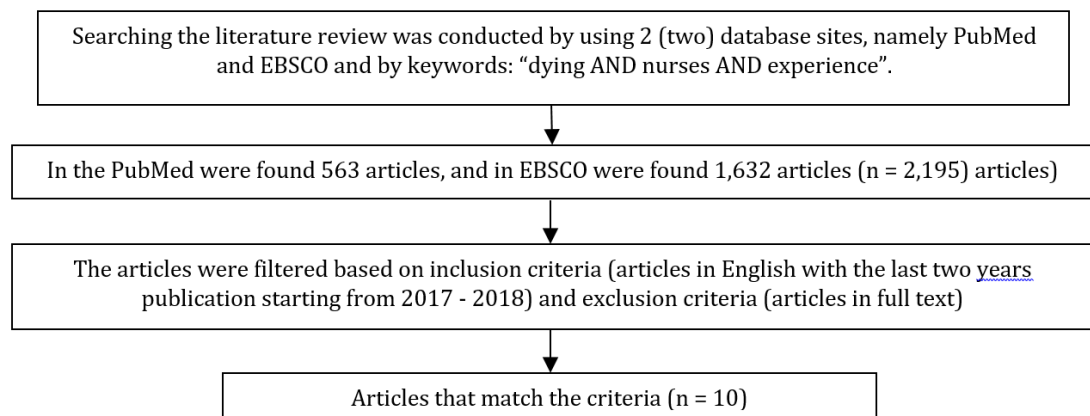


Figure 1. Article selection process

RESULTS

Of the 10 articles, there were 5 articles with qualitative designs and 5 articles with quantitative designs. The selected articles appear to represent several continents from Europe, Asia, Australia and America. From this literature study, it was found that nurses need to increase knowledge about care for dying patients and SOP in order to work professionally.^{3,4,6,9,10} Nurses also need to

increase their sense of empathy in dealing with conditions of terminal patients.⁵ Collaboration between health professionals is needed to determine continuation of care and medical treatment of patients either at the hospital or at home (home care).² Therapeutic relationships and communication between nurses, patients and families are needed to overcome denial, anger, bargaining and depression.^{1,2,8,11}

Table 1. Data of qualitative articles about nurses' experiences in dealing with critical patients.

No.	Title	Nurses' Experiences	Problems experienced nurses
1	Lived experiences of grief of Muslim nurses caring for patients who died in an intensive care unit: A phenomenological study. ⁶	Meanings of the experience of grief experienced by Muslim nurses in the ICU are as below: 1. Understanding a sense of empathy. 2. Understanding positioning of self. 3. Anticipating from grieving. 4. Imagining about the death that will happen to the patient.	Sadness can affect emotion, cognition, spirituality, relationship, and professionalism of nurses in dealing with critical patients in the future.
2	The Lived Experiences of Nurses Caring for Dying Pediatric Patients. ⁸	Experiences that arise from caring for critical pediatric patients include: 1. Empathy, feelings of uncertainty, and hope. 2. Getting inspiration. 3. Fostering a sense of care. 4. Professionalism in providing nursing care. 5. Emergence of sadness.	Nurses experience deep emotions when dealing with a dying pediatric patient.
3	Nurses' Experiences of Grief Following Patient Death. ⁵	The nurses experience feelings like: 1. sadness which is characterized by crying, anger, shock, rejection, fear and guilt that persist after a patient death. 2. helplessness for a patient's family reaction.	The nurses' emotional feelings about death can affect how to care for other patients.
4	Nurses' perceptions and experiences of caring for patients who die in the emergency department setting. ¹⁰	Some of the nurses' perceptions after facing the patient's death include: 1. End-of-life care is part of treatments for patients with critical conditions. 2. Occurrences of implementation problems during end-of-life care. 3. Lack of end-of-life education. 4. Unclear roles of nurses in end-of-life care. 5. Occurrences of emotional effects.	Lack of training for the end-of-life care will lead to problems for nurses to provide qualified service for a critical patient.
5	Exploring nurses' end-of-life care for dying patients in the ICU using focus group interviews. ⁹	Dealing with critical patients, nurses need to prepare themselves to face changes of the patients' condition because they directly accompany the patients. The need for nurses to be well prepared for the intensive care unit.	There are limitations of patients' family to involve in caring for critical patients in the intensive unit.

Notes: 1-4: semi-structured interview, 5: semi-structured interviews and focus group discussion (FGD)

Table 2. Table of quantitative data about nurses' experiences in dealing with critical patients.

No.	Title	Experiences faced by nurses	Constraints faced by nurses
1	Facing death in the clinical practice: a view from nurses in Mexico. ⁴	Patients in critical condition must know the prognoses of their diseases (one of which is death).	Doctors often delegate informed consent for patients (related to prognoses of their disease) to nurses.
2	Nurses attitudes towards death, dying patients and euthanasia: A descriptive study. ²	Nurse considers death as a terminal-phase patient. They are less aware of views of patients facing euthanasia.	Emotional disturbances and decreased job satisfaction can arise in nurses who care for critically ill patients with euthanasia.
3	Nurses' experience with relatives of patients receiving end of life care in nursing homes and at home: A questionnaire-based cross-sectional study. ³	Home care nurses often face and communicate with patient's family. They are uncomfortable about the patient's desire for lifelong treatment.	In home care nursing, there is no collaboration between nurses and doctors because of the service cost. It is also caused by problems of organizational structures, economy and culture in primary health cares.
4	Clinical nurses' attitudes towards death and caring for dying patients in China. ¹	Clinical nurses in China pay sufficient attention to critical patients' families, but not to the patients. Nurses do not have positive attitudes and sufficient communication skills to serve the patients. They also have poor judgment when it comes to avoiding patient deaths.	Education levels, fear of death, religious beliefs, and experiences of nurses in dealing with critical patients until death can affect their attitudes in caring for critical patients.
5	A Questionnaire Study on the Attitude towards Death of the Nursing Interns in Eight Teaching Hospitals in Jiangsu, China. ¹¹	Attitudes of nurses are influenced by education levels, fear of facing the patient's death, religious differences between the nurse and the patient, and previous knowledge of near death to death.	Among the nurses, there were differences of attitudes for death or caring for critical patients. The differences are based on society, ethnicity, education, socio-economic condition and religious differences.

DISCUSSION

Feelings experienced by nurses in dealing with dying patients include emergences of empathy and deeply emotional sadness.^{5,6} These experiences were faced by nurses who reject a thought about death which eventually may affect a quality care of the patients' end of life. Nurses must view the patients as complete human beings, who are living and welcoming the death. Therefore, nurses need to know about the end of life and signs of near-death to death.^{7,10} Nurses as a health care provider feel that patients who are critically ill need to get sufficient information regarding the near-

death event.^{8,9} Consequently, establishing good communication with the patients and their family is compulsory.¹ Nurses must also have positive attitudes although they have different opinions with the patients and their families.¹¹

Nursing care must meet the patients' physical, emotional, intellectual, social and spiritual needs.¹ Therefore, nurses need to have basic nursing knowledge and nursing skills. Besides, they need to have other related knowledge such as interpersonal relationship skills, psychology, human growth and development, communication skills and sociology. Their attitudes in dealing with patients who face

death is very important. Nurses can act as a facilitator by involving the family to support the patient care.¹⁵ They also play an important role in providing spiritual guidance to the patients to fulfill biopsychosocial needs of patients.³

Holistic care is significant for nurses, especially in caring for the terminal patients to improve the patient's quality of life.¹⁶ This can be conducted by reducing pain or overcoming other complaints from the patients. Nurses also have to meet physiological needs of the patients because the terminally ill patients have very high dependence on other people to take care and provide comfort.^{6,14} Besides, they need to maintain psychological and spiritual balance of the patients and keep them active until the end of their life. Furthermore, overcoming grief for the family is one of difficult tasks to perform by the nurses.⁵ Complete assistance given to dying patients is part of nursing care at the end of life to support comfort for the patients. Those difficult duties can only be done with ability, willingness or knowledge in providing good and holistic nursing care for patients.¹²

CONCLUSION

Exploring the experiences of nurses in dealing with dying patients can provide overviews for nurses to have more empathy and to provide contextual moral encouragement to the patients and their families. Nurses also need to prepare themselves with knowledge about end of life.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There is no conflict of interest.

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