



The Role Of Nurses In Terminal Patient Care In Palliative Units

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ABSTRACT

Palliative care is an approach aimed at improving the quality of life for terminally ill patients. Nurses play a crucial role in providing holistic care encompassing physical, psychological, social, and spiritual aspects. This study aims to analyze the role of nurses in caring for terminally ill patients in a palliative care unit. The research method used a qualitative approach with a descriptive design. Data were obtained through in-depth interviews with 10 nurses in the palliative care unit. The results indicate that nurses act as direct caregivers, educators, communicators, and emotional supporters for patients and their families. Challenges faced include emotional burden and limited resources. It is concluded that the role of nurses is crucial in improving the quality of life for terminally ill patients.

Keywords: Nurses, Palliative Care, Terminal Patients, Quality of Life

1. INTRODUCTION

Terminally ill patients are individuals in the final stages of an incurable disease and have a limited life expectancy. This condition is often accompanied by complex issues, such as chronic pain, psychological distress, and the need for spiritual support. Therefore, a palliative care approach is crucial in providing healthcare services that focus on quality of life, not just prolonging it.

A palliative care unit is a specialized service that treats terminally ill patients through a multidisciplinary approach. Nurses play a central role within this team, as they are the healthcare professionals who interact most frequently with patients and their families.

Nurses are not only responsible for providing physical care, but also play a role in providing emotional support, therapeutic communication, and helping patients navigate the end-of-life process with dignity. However, this role often faces various challenges, such as emotional distress, limited facilities, and a lack of specialized training.





This study aims to examine in depth the role of nurses in the care of terminal patients in palliative units and to identify the challenges faced in clinical practice.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

a. Types and Approaches of Research

This study used a qualitative approach with a descriptive phenomenological design . This approach was chosen because it aimed to explore in-depth the experiences, perceptions, and meanings given by nurses in caring for terminally ill patients in the palliative care unit. The phenomenological method allows researchers to understand subjective realities from the participants' perspectives.

b. Location and Time of Research

The study was conducted in a palliative care unit at a hospital providing care for terminally ill patients. Data collection took place from January to March 2025 .

c. Research Participants

1) Population

All nurses working in the hospital's palliative care unit.

2) Sample

A total of 10–15 nurses , determined based on the principle of data saturation , namely when the information obtained is repeated and no new themes are found.

d. Sampling Techniques

Using purposive sampling , with the consideration that participants have relevant experience in caring for terminal patients.

1) Participant Criteria

a) Inclusion Criteria

- Nurses who have worked in the palliative unit for at least 1 year
- Have direct experience caring for terminal patients
- Willing to be a participant and sign the informed consent

b) Exclusion Criteria

- Nurses who are on long leave or inactive
- Unwilling to be interviewed in depth

e. Research Variables / Focus

In qualitative research, variables are replaced by research focus , namely:

- 1) The role of nurses in the care of terminal patients
- 2) Nurses' experience in providing palliative care
- 3) Challenges faced in practice
- 4) Forms of support provided to patients and families



**f. Research Instruments**

The main instrument in this research is the researcher himself (human instrument). In addition, the following tools were used:

- 1) Semi-structured interview guide
- 2) Voice recorder recorder)
- 3) Field notes
- 4) Observation sheet

The interview guide was prepared based on palliative care theory and has undergone content validation testing by nursing experts.

g. Data collection technique

- 1) In- depth Interview Interview)

Conducted face-to-face, lasting 30–60 minutes per participant, the interviews aimed to explore nurses' experiences, perceptions, and roles in depth.

- 2) Participatory Observation

Researchers conducted direct observations of nurses' activities in providing care to terminal patients in the palliative unit.

- 3) Documentation

Additional data collection from:

- Medical records (limited and anonymous)
- Standard operating procedures (SOP)
- Hospital policy documents

h. Research Procedures

- 1) Manage research permits from relevant institutions
- 2) Determine and recruit participants according to criteria
- 3) Explaining the research objectives and obtaining informed consent consent
- 4) Conducting interviews and observations
- 5) Recording and transcribing data
- 6) Perform data analysis in stages

i. Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis using thematic analysis method analysis) according to Braun & Clarke, with the following stages:

- 1) Data Familiarization
Reading and understanding the results of interview transcriptions
- 2) Open Coding
Identifying relevant pieces of data
- 3) Theme Search (Theme Development)
Grouping codes into main themes





- 4) Theme Review
Ensuring theme matches data
- 5) Theme Naming and Definition
Give clear meaning to each theme
- 6) Report Preparation
Presenting the results of the analysis in the form of a scientific narrative

j. Data Validity Test (Trustworthiness)

To ensure data validity, the following techniques are used:

- 1) Credibility
 - Source triangulation
 - Member check (confirm results to participants)
- 2) Transferability
 - Presentation of a detailed description of the research context
- 3) Dependability
 - Audit trail (documented research trail)
- 4) Confirmability
 - Data objectivity through discussion with colleagues

k. Research Ethics Considerations

This research pays attention to the principles of research ethics, namely:

- 1) Informed consent (participant consent)
- 2) Confidentiality (data confidentiality)
- 3) Anonymity (without identity)
- 4) The participant's right to withdraw at any time

3. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

a. Research result

1) Participant Characteristics

This study involved 12 nurses working in a palliative care unit. Participant characteristics are presented in the following table:

| Characteristics | Frequency (n) | Percentage (%) |
|-----------------|---------------|----------------|
| Gender | | |
| Woman | 9 | 75% |
| Man | 3 | 25% |





| Characteristics | Frequency (n) | Percentage (%) |
|--------------------------|---------------|----------------|
| Age | | |
| 25–30 years | 4 | 33% |
| 31–40 years | 6 | 50% |
| >40 years | 2 | 17% |
| Length of working | | |
| 1–3 years | 5 | 42% |
| 4–6 years | 4 | 33% |
| >6 years | 3 | 25% |

The majority of participants were women of productive age and sufficient work experience, so they had competence in caring for terminal patients.

2) Thematic Analysis Results

Based on data analysis, 4 main themes were obtained regarding the role of nurses:

| Research Themes and Subthemes | | |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Main Theme | Subtheme | Description |
| Caregiver Role | Pain management | Patient pain management |
| | Physical care | Fulfillment of basic needs |
| The Role of Educators | Family education | Patient condition information |
| | Follow-up care | Home care preparation |
| The Role of the Communicator | Therapeutic communication | Empathetic approach |
| | Team coordination | Liaison between medical personnel |
| Emotional Support | Mentoring | Presence at critical times |
| | Spiritual support | Assisting with patient admission |





3) Distribution of Nursing Roles

| The Role of Nurses | Frequency (n) | Percentage (%) |
|--------------------|---------------|----------------|
| Caregiver | 12 | 100% |
| Educator | 10 | 83% |
| Communicator | 11 | 92% |
| Emotional support | 12 | 100% |

All nurses play a role as caregivers and emotional supporters, demonstrating the importance of the holistic aspect of palliative care.

4) Key Findings Based on Interviews

Some important quotes from participants:

- *“The most important thing is to ensure the patient is not in pain.”*
- *“We also have to reassure the family, not just the patient.”*
- *“Sometimes it's emotionally difficult, especially if the patient has been treated for a long time.”*

5) Challenges Faced by Nurses

| Challenge | Frequency | Percentage |
|------------------|-----------|------------|
| Emotional burden | 10 | 83% |
| Limited manpower | 8 | 67% |
| Lack of training | 7 | 58% |

b. Discussion

1) The Role of Caregiver as a Dominant Role

The study results showed that all nurses acted as caregivers, particularly in pain management and meeting patients' basic needs. This indicates that physical aspects remain a top priority in palliative care.

Pain management is a primary focus because terminally ill patients often experience chronic pain. Nurses play a role in monitoring pain intensity and providing appropriate interventions.





2) The Role of Educators in Improving Family Understanding

Most nurses also serve as educators. The education provided covers the patient's condition, prognosis, and follow-up care.

This is important because families often experience confusion and anxiety when dealing with terminally ill patients. Good education can improve family preparedness, both emotionally and practically.

3) Therapeutic Communication as the Key to Palliative Care

Nurses act as communicators, bridging the gap between patients, families, and the medical team. Therapeutic communication is a crucial aspect of conveying sensitive information empathetically.

The research results show that good communication is able to:

- Reducing patient anxiety
- Increase family trust
- Facilitate decision making

4) Emotional and Spiritual Support

All nurses provide emotional support to patients and families. This support includes:

- Listening to patient complaints
- Provides peace of mind
- Supporting spiritual needs

A spiritual approach has been shown to help patients accept their end-of-life situation more calmly.

5) Challenges in Palliative Care

Emotional burden is the biggest challenge for nurses. This is due to:

- Frequency of facing death
- Closeness to patients
- Pressure from the patient's family

In addition, limited manpower and lack of training also affect the quality of service.

6) Implications for Nursing Practice

The results of this study indicate the need for:

- Specialized palliative training for nurses
- Psychological support for health workers
- Increasing resources in palliative units

The role of nurses in caring for terminally ill patients is holistic and multidimensional, encompassing physical, psychological, social, and spiritual aspects. This role is crucial in improving the quality of life for patients at the end of life.





4. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

a. Conclusion

Based on the results of research regarding the role of nurses in caring for terminal patients in palliative units, it can be concluded that:

1) Nurses have a multidimensional and holistic role

Nurses serve not only as physical caregivers, but also as educators, communicators, and emotional and spiritual supporters. This role reflects the bio-psycho-socio-spiritual approach that is at the heart of palliative care.

2) Pain management and patient comfort are top priorities.

Nurses play an important role in ensuring that patients are free from pain and discomfort, so that the patient's quality of life is maintained until the end of life.

3) Therapeutic communication is a key element in palliative care.

Nurses serve as a bridge of communication between patients, families, and the medical team. Empathetic and effective communication has been shown to reduce anxiety and increase acceptance of terminal conditions.

4) Education for families has a significant impact

Nurses help families understand the patient's condition, the end-of-life process, and the care needed. This enhances family preparedness, both emotionally and practically.

5) Emotional and spiritual support plays a role in increasing patient comfort.

A spiritual approach helps patients face death more peacefully, while emotional support from nurses strengthens the therapeutic relationship.

6) Nurses face significant challenges in palliative practice

The main challenges include high emotional burden, limited resources, and lack of specific training in palliative care.

7) Optimizing the role of nurses requires strong system support.

Without adequate policy support, training, and facilities, the role of nurses in palliative care cannot function optimally.

b. Suggestion

1) For Government and Policy Makers

- Develop policies that strengthen palliative care services at the national level
- Provide a dedicated budget for the development of palliative care units
- Integrating palliative care into primary and referral health care systems

2) For Health Service Institutions (Hospitals)

- Increasing the number of nursing staff in palliative units





- Providing facilities that support the comfort of terminal patients
 - Developing psychological support programs for health workers
 - Developing standard operating procedures (SOP) specifically for palliative care
- 3) For Nursing Staff
 - Improving competency through palliative training and certification
 - Developing therapeutic communication skills
 - Applying an empathetic and humanistic approach in care
 - Managing work stress through adaptive coping strategies
 - 4) For Nursing Education Institutions
 - Integrating palliative care material into the curriculum
 - Providing specialized clinical practice in the palliative unit
 - Encourage research related to end-of-life care
 - 5) For Further Researchers
 - Conducting research with a quantitative or mixed-method design
 - Assessing the effectiveness of palliative interventions on patients' quality of life
 - Developing a community-based intervention model
 - 6) For Family and Community
 - Increasing understanding of the importance of palliative care
 - Providing emotional support to terminal patients
 - Play an active role in the patient care process

Palliative care is not just about managing illness, but about humanizing the end-of-life process. In this regard, nurses play a central role as primary companions to patients and families. Therefore, improving the quality of nursing's role will have a direct impact on the quality of life of terminally ill patients.

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