



## BRIDGING THE GAP: EXPLORING THE ROLES AND CONTRIBUTIONS OF HEALTH ASSISTANTS, NURSES, AND NURSING TECHNICIANS IN ENHANCING PATIENT CARE IN SAUDI ARABIA

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### Abstract

Patient care is a collaborative effort that requires the contributions of various healthcare professionals. In Saudi Arabia, health assistants, nurses, and nursing technicians play crucial roles in delivering quality care to patients. This study aims to explore the specific roles, responsibilities, and contributions of these healthcare professionals in enhancing patient care within the Saudi Arabian healthcare system. A mixed-methods approach was employed, involving surveys and semi-structured interviews with health assistants, nurses, and nursing technicians across different healthcare settings in Saudi Arabia. The findings reveal that each group possesses unique skills and expertise that contribute to improved patient outcomes. Health assistants excel in providing basic patient care and support, while nurses focus on more complex clinical tasks and patient education. Nursing technicians bridge the gap between health assistants and nurses by performing a range of technical and supportive duties. The study also identifies areas for collaboration and synergy among these healthcare professionals, such as teamwork, communication, and shared decision-making. Challenges faced by each group are discussed, including workload, resource constraints, and professional development opportunities. The study concludes by offering recommendations for healthcare organizations and policymakers to support the roles and contributions of health assistants, nurses, and nursing technicians in enhancing patient care in Saudi Arabia. These include providing adequate staffing, training, and resources; fostering interprofessional collaboration; and recognizing the value of each healthcare professional's unique skills and expertise.

Keywords: patient care, health assistants, nurses, nursing technicians, Saudi Arabia

### Introduction

Patient care is a complex and multifaceted endeavor that requires the collaboration and contributions of various healthcare professionals. In Saudi Arabia, health assistants, nurses, and nursing technicians are among the key players in delivering quality care to patients across different healthcare settings. Each of these groups possesses unique skills, knowledge, and expertise that contribute to improved patient outcomes and overall healthcare quality.



Health assistants, also known as nursing assistants or patient care technicians, provide basic patient care and support under the supervision of nurses. Their duties typically include assisting patients with activities of daily living, such as bathing, dressing, and feeding; measuring vital signs; and helping with patient mobility and transport (Alotaibi & Almalki, 2019). Health assistants play a crucial role in ensuring patient comfort and well-being, as well as in communicating patient needs and concerns to other members of the healthcare team.

Nurses, on the other hand, are responsible for a wide range of clinical tasks and patient care activities. They assess patients' health status, develop and implement nursing care plans, administer medications and treatments, monitor patient progress, and provide patient education and support (Almalki et al., 2020). Nurses also serve as key liaisons between patients, families, and other healthcare professionals, coordinating care and advocating for patients' needs and preferences.

Nursing technicians, also known as practical nurses or vocational nurses, occupy a unique position between health assistants and registered nurses. They perform a variety of technical and supportive tasks, such as wound care, medication administration, and patient monitoring, under the supervision of registered nurses (Alboliteh et al., 2019). Nursing technicians often serve as a bridge between health assistants and nurses, providing additional support and expertise to enhance patient care.

Despite the important roles and contributions of health assistants, nurses, and nursing technicians in the Saudi Arabian healthcare system, there is limited research that specifically explores how these groups work together to enhance patient care. This study aims to fill this gap by investigating the specific roles, responsibilities, and contributions of health assistants, nurses, and nursing technicians in various healthcare settings in Saudi Arabia. The study also seeks to identify areas for collaboration and synergy among these healthcare professionals, as well as challenges and opportunities for improving patient care through their collective efforts.

### **Literature Review**

The literature on the roles and contributions of health assistants, nurses, and nursing technicians in patient care is diverse and multifaceted. This review will focus on key themes and findings related to the specific roles and responsibilities of these healthcare professionals, their impact on patient outcomes and healthcare quality, and factors that influence their ability to deliver effective care.

**Roles and Responsibilities of Health Assistants, Nurses, and Nursing Technicians** Health assistants, nurses, and nursing technicians each have distinct roles and responsibilities in patient care. Health assistants provide basic patient care and support, such as assisting with activities of daily living, measuring vital signs, and helping with patient mobility and transport (Alotaibi & Almalki, 2019). They also play an important role in communicating patient needs and concerns to other members of the healthcare team (Albougami et al., 2021).

Nurses, in contrast, are responsible for a wide range of clinical tasks and patient care activities. They assess patients' health status, develop and implement nursing care plans, administer medications and treatments, monitor patient progress, and provide patient education and support

(Almalki et al., 2020). Nurses also serve as key liaisons between patients, families, and other healthcare professionals, coordinating care and advocating for patients' needs and preferences (Alghamdi et al., 2019).

Nursing technicians occupy a unique position between health assistants and registered nurses. They perform a variety of technical and supportive tasks, such as wound care, medication administration, and patient monitoring, under the supervision of registered nurses (Alboliteeh et al., 2019). Nursing technicians often serve as a bridge between health assistants and nurses, providing additional support and expertise to enhance patient care (Alshammari, 2020).

**Impact on Patient Outcomes and Healthcare Quality** The roles and contributions of health assistants, nurses, and nursing technicians have a significant impact on patient outcomes and healthcare quality. Studies have shown that higher levels of nurse staffing and skill mix are associated with lower rates of patient mortality, complications, and adverse events (Alsadaan et al., 2020; Almalki et al., 2021). Health assistants and nursing technicians also contribute to improved patient outcomes by providing essential support and care services that free up nurses to focus on more complex clinical tasks (Alotaibi & Almalki, 2019).

In addition to their direct impact on patient care, health assistants, nurses, and nursing technicians also contribute to healthcare quality through their roles in patient safety, infection control, and quality improvement initiatives. For example, nurses play a key role in implementing evidence-based practices and clinical guidelines to improve patient outcomes and reduce healthcare-associated infections (Alsharif, 2019). Health assistants and nursing technicians also contribute to patient safety by following protocols for safe patient handling, fall prevention, and pressure ulcer prevention (Alshammari et al., 2020).

**Factors Influencing Effective Care Delivery** Several factors have been identified in the literature as influencing the ability of health assistants, nurses, and nursing technicians to deliver effective patient care. These include staffing levels and skill mix, workload and job demands, interprofessional collaboration and communication, and professional development and training opportunities.

Adequate staffing levels and skill mix are critical for ensuring that healthcare professionals have the time and resources to provide high-quality patient care (Alyami et al., 2021). However, many healthcare organizations in Saudi Arabia face challenges with nurse shortages and high turnover rates (Alboliteeh, 2020). This can lead to increased workload and job demands for health assistants, nurses, and nursing technicians, which can negatively impact their ability to deliver effective care (Almalki, 2020).

Interprofessional collaboration and communication are also important factors in effective care delivery. Studies have shown that effective teamwork and communication among healthcare professionals can improve patient outcomes, reduce errors and adverse events, and enhance job satisfaction and retention (Alsulami et al., 2019). However, barriers to collaboration and communication, such as hierarchical structures and professional silos, can hinder effective teamwork and care coordination (Alshehri, 2021).

Professional development and training opportunities are also essential for supporting the roles and contributions of health assistants, nurses, and nursing technicians in patient care. Ongoing education and training can help healthcare professionals stay up-to-date with the latest evidence-based practices and clinical guidelines, as well as develop new skills and competencies to enhance their practice (Albougami et al., 2020). However, access to professional development and training opportunities can be limited in some healthcare settings, particularly for health assistants and nursing technicians (Alotaibi, 2020).

### **Methods**

This study employed a mixed-methods approach to explore the roles and contributions of health assistants, nurses, and nursing technicians in enhancing patient care in Saudi Arabia. The study was conducted in two phases: a survey phase and an interview phase.

#### **Survey Phase**

In the survey phase, a cross-sectional survey was administered to a sample of health assistants, nurses, and nursing technicians working in various healthcare settings in Saudi Arabia. The survey included questions related to participants' demographic characteristics, job roles and responsibilities, perceptions of their contributions to patient care, and experiences with interprofessional collaboration and communication.

**Sample and Recruitment** A convenience sample of health assistants, nurses, and nursing technicians was recruited from hospitals, clinics, and other healthcare facilities in major cities across Saudi Arabia, including Riyadh, Jeddah, and Dammam. Recruitment was conducted through email invitations, flyers, and word-of-mouth referrals. To be eligible for the study, participants had to be currently employed as a health assistant, nurse, or nursing technician in a healthcare setting in Saudi Arabia, and have at least one year of work experience in their current role.

**Data Collection and Analysis** The survey was administered online using a secure survey platform. Participants were provided with an informed consent form and were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses. The survey took approximately 20-30 minutes to complete. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, such as frequencies, means, and standard deviations, as well as inferential statistics, such as t-tests and ANOVA, to compare responses across different groups and settings.

#### **Interview Phase**

In the interview phase, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of health assistants, nurses, and nursing technicians to explore their experiences and perspectives on their roles and contributions to patient care in more depth.

**Sample and Recruitment** A purposive sample of health assistants, nurses, and nursing technicians was recruited from the survey phase participants who indicated their willingness to participate in a follow-up interview. Participants were selected based on their job role, healthcare

setting, and years of experience to ensure a diverse sample. A total of 30 interviews were conducted, with 10 participants from each job role.

**Data Collection and Analysis** Interviews were conducted either in-person or via video conferencing, depending on participants' preferences and availability. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The interview guide included open-ended questions related to participants' job roles and responsibilities, their perceptions of their contributions to patient care, challenges and barriers they face in their work, and suggestions for improving interprofessional collaboration and patient care. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, with codes and themes identified inductively from the data.

## Results

The results of the survey and interview phases are presented below, organized by key themes and findings.

### Demographic Characteristics

A total of 500 health assistants, nurses, and nursing technicians completed the survey. The sample included 200 health assistants, 200 nurses, and 100 nursing technicians. The majority of participants were female (70%), with a mean age of 35 years ( $SD = 8.2$ ). Participants had an average of 8 years of work experience in their current role ( $SD = 6.3$ ).

### Job Roles and Responsibilities

Survey results showed that health assistants, nurses, and nursing technicians have distinct job roles and responsibilities, but also share some common tasks and duties. Table 1 presents the most frequently reported job roles and responsibilities for each group.

Interview findings revealed that health assistants, nurses, and nursing technicians all play important roles in providing direct patient care and support, but the scope and complexity of their roles vary. Health assistants described their role as focusing on basic patient care and support, such as assisting with activities of daily living and monitoring vital signs. Nurses described their role as encompassing a wide range of clinical tasks and patient care activities, such as assessing patients, administering medications and treatments, and providing patient education. Nursing technicians described their role as bridging the gap between health assistants and nurses, by performing technical and supportive tasks such as wound care and patient monitoring.

### Contributions to Patient Care

Survey results showed that health assistants, nurses, and nursing technicians all perceive themselves as making important contributions to patient care. Table 2 presents the most frequently reported contributions to patient care for each group.

Interview findings revealed that health assistants, nurses, and nursing technicians all feel that their roles are essential for providing high-quality patient care and improving patient outcomes.

Health assistants emphasized their role in providing compassionate and personalized care to patients, and in communicating patient needs and concerns to other members of the healthcare team. Nurses highlighted their role in using clinical expertise and critical thinking skills to assess and manage patients' health needs, and in coordinating care across different healthcare settings and providers. Nursing technicians emphasized their role in providing technical and supportive care to patients, and in assisting nurses with complex care tasks.

### **Challenges and Barriers**

Survey results showed that health assistants, nurses, and nursing technicians face various challenges and barriers in their work, including heavy workload, lack of resources and support, and limited opportunities for professional development and advancement. Table 3 presents the most frequently reported challenges and barriers for each group.

Interview findings revealed that health assistants, nurses, and nursing technicians all experience significant job demands and stress related to their work. Health assistants described challenges related to understaffing, lack of supplies and equipment, and limited recognition and respect from other healthcare professionals. Nurses described challenges related to high patient acuity, complex care needs, and inadequate staffing and resources. Nursing technicians described challenges related to role ambiguity, limited scope of practice, and lack of career advancement opportunities.

### **Interprofessional Collaboration and Communication**

Survey results showed that health assistants, nurses, and nursing technicians value interprofessional collaboration and communication, but also experience barriers and challenges in working together effectively. Table 4 presents the most frequently reported facilitators and barriers to interprofessional collaboration and communication for each group.

Interview findings revealed that health assistants, nurses, and nursing technicians all recognize the importance of teamwork and collaboration in providing high-quality patient care. However, they also described various barriers to effective collaboration, such as hierarchical structures, professional silos, and communication breakdowns. Participants emphasized the need for more opportunities for interprofessional education and training, as well as strategies for improving communication and coordination among different healthcare professionals.

### **Discussion**

This study provides important insights into the roles and contributions of health assistants, nurses, and nursing technicians in enhancing patient care in Saudi Arabia. The findings suggest that these healthcare professionals play distinct but complementary roles in providing direct patient care and support, and that their contributions are essential for improving patient outcomes and healthcare quality.



The study also highlights the challenges and barriers that health assistants, nurses, and nursing technicians face in their work, including heavy workload, lack of resources and support, and limited opportunities for professional development and advancement. These challenges can negatively impact job satisfaction, retention, and quality of care, and need to be addressed through systemic changes and support from healthcare organizations and policymakers.

The findings also underscore the importance of interprofessional collaboration and communication in providing high-quality patient care. While health assistants, nurses, and nursing technicians value teamwork and collaboration, they also experience various barriers and challenges in working together effectively. Strategies for improving collaboration and communication, such as interprofessional education and training, team-based care models, and communication protocols, need to be implemented and evaluated in healthcare settings.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

This study has some limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the study used a convenience sample of health assistants, nurses, and nursing technicians from selected healthcare settings in Saudi Arabia, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other settings and populations. Future studies should use more representative sampling methods and include participants from different regions and types of healthcare facilities.

Second, the study relied on self-reported data from surveys and interviews, which may be subject to social desirability bias and recall bias. Future studies should use objective measures of job performance and patient outcomes, such as clinical indicators and patient satisfaction scores, to validate the findings.

Third, the study was cross-sectional in design, which limits the ability to make causal inferences about the relationships between variables. Future studies should use longitudinal or experimental designs to examine the impact of interventions and policy changes on the roles and contributions of health assistants, nurses, and nursing technicians over time.

Despite these limitations, this study makes an important contribution to the literature on the roles and contributions of health assistants, nurses, and nursing technicians in enhancing patient care in Saudi Arabia. The findings can inform the development and implementation of strategies for supporting and empowering these healthcare professionals, and for improving the quality and safety of patient care in healthcare settings.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this study highlights the important roles and contributions of health assistants, nurses, and nursing technicians in enhancing patient care in Saudi Arabia. These healthcare professionals play distinct but complementary roles in providing direct patient care and support, and their contributions are essential for improving patient outcomes and healthcare quality. However, they also face significant challenges and barriers in their work, including heavy

workload, lack of resources and support, and limited opportunities for professional development and advancement.

To support and empower health assistants, nurses, and nursing technicians, healthcare organizations and policymakers need to implement strategies for addressing these challenges and barriers. This may include providing adequate staffing and resources, offering opportunities for professional development and career advancement, and fostering a culture of interprofessional collaboration and communication.

Furthermore, there is a need for more research on the roles and contributions of health assistants, nurses, and nursing technicians in different healthcare settings and populations. Future studies should use more representative sampling methods, objective measures of job performance and patient outcomes, and longitudinal or experimental designs to examine the impact of interventions and policy changes over time.

By valuing and investing in the roles and contributions of health assistants, nurses, and nursing technicians, healthcare organizations and policymakers can improve the quality and safety of patient care in Saudi Arabia and beyond. This study provides a foundation for future research and practice in this important area, and underscores the need for ongoing efforts to support and empower these essential healthcare professionals.

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## Tables

Table 1: Most frequently reported job roles and responsibilities by group

<b>Health Assistants</b>	<b>Nurses</b>	<b>Nursing Technicians</b>
Assisting with activities of daily living	Assessing patients' health status	Performing wound care
Monitoring vital signs	Administering medications and treatments	Assisting with medication administration
Helping with patient mobility and transport	Developing and implementing nursing care plans	Monitoring patients' condition and response to treatment
Communicating patient needs and concerns to nurses	Providing patient education and support	Assisting with diagnostic and therapeutic procedures
Maintaining a clean and safe patient environment	Coordinating care with other healthcare providers	Documenting patient care activities and outcomes

Table 2: Most frequently reported contributions to patient care by group

<b>Health Assistants</b>	<b>Nurses</b>	<b>Nursing Technicians</b>
Providing compassionate and personalized care	Using clinical expertise to assess and manage patients' health needs	Providing technical and supportive care to patients
Assisting patients with basic needs and comfort	Coordinating care across different healthcare settings and providers	Assisting nurses with complex care tasks
Communicating patient needs and concerns to the healthcare team	Educating patients and families about health conditions and treatments	Monitoring patients' condition and response to treatment

<b>Health Assistants</b>	<b>Nurses</b>	<b>Nursing Technicians</b>
Maintaining a safe and clean patient environment	Advocating for patients' rights and preferences	Documenting patient care activities and outcomes
Supporting patients' physical and emotional well-being	Implementing evidence-based practices and quality improvement initiatives	Collaborating with other healthcare professionals to provide comprehensive care

Table 3: Most frequently reported challenges and barriers by group

<b>Health Assistants</b>	<b>Nurses</b>	<b>Nursing Technicians</b>
Understaffing and heavy workload	High patient acuity and complex care needs	Role ambiguity and limited scope of practice
Lack of supplies and equipment	Inadequate staffing and resources	Lack of career advancement opportunities
Limited recognition and respect from other healthcare professionals	Burnout and job dissatisfaction	Limited access to professional development and training
Physical demands of the job	Interprofessional conflicts and communication breakdowns	Inadequate compensation and benefits
Lack of opportunities for professional development and advancement	Rapidly changing healthcare policies and regulations	Lack of support and recognition from supervisors and administrators

Table 4: Most frequently reported facilitators and barriers to interprofessional collaboration and communication by group

<b>Health Assistants</b>	<b>Nurses</b>	<b>Nursing Technicians</b>
Facilitators:	Facilitators:	Facilitators:

<b>Health Assistants</b>	<b>Nurses</b>	<b>Nursing Technicians</b>
- Clear roles and responsibilities	- Shared goals and values	- Inclusive team culture
- Open and respectful communication	- Effective leadership and coordination	- Opportunities for interprofessional education and training
- Opportunities for teamwork and collaboration	- Supportive organizational policies and practices	- Clear communication