



THE ROLE OF GERIATRIC NURSES IN MANAGING POLYPHARMACY

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Abstract

The phenomenon of polypharmacy is becoming a growing health problem among the elderly population, leading to several health hazards. Nurses play a crucial role in facilitating medication management and enhancing drug safety in various healthcare environments. The objective of this research is to conduct a meta-synthesis of qualitative studies that examine the viewpoints and encounters of nurses in the provision of care for older individuals who have polypharmacy. A search was conducted in electronic databases such as PsycArticles, CINAHL Complete, MEDLINE, and ERIC. The potential studies were assessed based on predetermined criteria for inclusion and disqualification. We included peer-reviewed publications that presented data on the experiences of nursing workers in various situations. research using any qualitative methodology were included, and the incorporated research were examined and evaluated utilizing a theme synthesis methodology. The examination of study quality was conducted utilizing the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme checklist specifically designed for qualitative research. Nine trials, including a total of 91 nurses, were included. Four primary themes were identified: the prevalence of polypharmacy among older persons, the significance of multidisciplinary teams, the role of nursing in caring for older adults, and the challenges associated with adopting polypharmacy management. Healthcare providers must be mindful of the effects of polypharmacy on the lives of older persons and recognize the significance of team-based polypharmacy care in providing assistance to older adults. Nurses have a crucial role in providing care for older persons who are taking several medications, a condition known as polypharmacy. As a result, it is important to empower nurses and include them in the administration of medicine.

Keywords: nurse; elderly population; multiple medication use; theme synthesis



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1. Introduction

As a result of increasing health problems among elderly individuals, the practice of polypharmacy has grown increasingly prevalent. Polypharmacy refers to the use of several drugs, either in terms of quantity or in terms of superfluous prescriptions [1]. Polypharmacy, which refers to the concurrent prescription of five or more medications, is prevalent in both clinical and community settings. Among older persons, the reported frequency of polypharmacy is roughly 50.1% in China [2], 65.1% in the United States [3], and ranges from 26.3% to 39.9% in European nations [4].

While it may be clinically acceptable to use many drugs or engage in polypharmacy in some situations, there have been reports of detrimental clinical outcomes associated with polypharmacy. Elderly individuals who are taking many medications (polypharmacy) are more likely to have drug-drug interactions [5] and adverse events due to medication [6]. Studies have also shown a connection between polypharmacy and frailty, frequent hospitalizations, cognitive decline, decreased physical ability, and death [7]. Qualitative research indicated that the use of many medications (polypharmacy) may significantly impact the lives of older individuals and lead to unpleasant emotions. For instance, Eriksen and colleagues [8] discovered that older individuals may have difficulties and obstacles in handling polypharmacy. Moreover, they observed that having polypharmacy had a negative impact on the quality of life and adherence of older persons.

Nurses have a crucial role in identifying individuals with polypharmacy and aiding the reduction of associated risks [9]. A comprehensive evaluation found three key aspects of the nursing role in medication management during transitional care: the implementation of medication reconciliation, collaboration with other healthcare professionals, and providing support to healthcare receivers [10]. Emerging research suggests that programs led by nurses may play a role in effectively managing medication and reducing mistakes in drug administration. As an illustration, Yang et al. [11] performed a randomized controlled trial with 136 older adults who had multiple chronic conditions. They discovered that the group receiving the intervention exhibited higher levels of medication adherence, self-efficacy, knowledge regarding medication management and potential harm, and overall satisfaction with medication use.

Qualitative research is recommended as a suitable research methodology for gaining in-depth understanding of certain occurrences. Qualitative study findings may provide valuable insights into the efficacy, practicality, and acceptability of nursing practice [12,13]. Health care professionals' experiences, attitudes, and perceptions of polypharmacy can affect how they treat patients. As a result, more studies have been done on polypharmacy from the viewpoints of general practitioners, pharmacists, and a combination of health care professionals. Nevertheless, there is a lack of substantial data that documents the experiences of nurses with polypharmacy.

The aim of this study is to gather, evaluate, combine, and present previous research on the experiences of nurses linked to polypharmacy.

2. Evaluating existing knowledge and considering the practical implications

The first trend we saw is that nurses acknowledge that polypharmacy is a prevalent health issue among older individuals, which might potentially create difficulties and hardships in their everyday routines. This discovery aligned with the perspectives and convictions of patients with multimorbidity [13,14], as well as the opinions of general practitioners [15]. Therefore, in line with previous quantitative data [16,17], it is important for health care providers to comprehend the challenges faced by patients and be motivated to support face-to-face methods and evidence-based strategies in order to enhance the effectiveness of therapies for polypharmacy.

Consistent with other studies [13], our findings indicate that nurses recognize the significance of a multidisciplinary team and acknowledge the potential advantages of cooperation. This suggests that active participation in a team might be a crucial skill for nurses while providing care for older persons with polypharmacy. A polypharmacy multidisciplinary team promotes cooperation among doctors, pharmacists, and other healthcare workers. A prior research conducted a retrospective analysis that demonstrated the effectiveness of a multidisciplinary team in reducing the use of several drugs and possibly unsuitable treatments [18].

During the intervention, the team members assessed the patient's symptoms by conducting physical and neurological tests (performed by doctors) and monitoring changes in symptoms and bodily function (done by nurses). They also addressed the potential for deprescribing. Each member assessed the patient's issues based on their own knowledge and talents. Nevertheless, nurses also expressed challenges in collaborating with other healthcare providers. This is analogous to previous research, which found that the allocation of duties for ensuring the safety of medications was ambiguous among healthcare professionals [19]. Therefore, it is crucial for interprofessional team members to have a clear understanding of their roles and protocols in order to have a shared agreement on each skill required when implementing a multidisciplinary team, particularly in the context of polypharmacy in older persons.

A significant number of healthcare professionals feel incapable of effectively managing and advocating for better results in patients who are dealing with polypharmacy, mostly because they have not received formal training on this specific issue [19]. An explanation for this is because the concept of polypharmacy is diverse in the literature, and this complexity hinders the assessment of polypharmacy and its resulting association for experts [1]. Our research revealed that nurses had challenges in comprehending and handling polypharmacy when delivering healthcare services to elderly individuals. Furthermore, nurses have indicated that organizational problems might hinder their efforts in addressing polypharmacy [20].

Nursing is a vital component of healthcare services, and highly skilled nurses may make significant contributions to the health and welfare of patients [21]. Consequently, education and training programs for managing polypharmacy should cater to the varied requirements of nurses. Considering the increasing number of elderly individuals, it may be necessary to prioritize the enhancement of knowledge, skills, and competencies related to medication practice in the training of geriatric nurses.

Prior research has elucidated the crucial function of nurses in the administration of medicine [22,23,24]. Our research revealed that nurses see their duties at two distinct levels: the individual level, where they see themselves as autonomous professionals, and the institutional level, where they view themselves as a crucial connection. Nevertheless, doctors may suggest that nurses have a subordinate role in medication management [25]. A study conducted on medication cessation among doctors revealed that more than one-third of physicians disregarded the opinions of nurses about the withdrawal of drugs [26]. Nurses' responsibilities in drug management may be influenced by factors such as their education, prior experiences, and local regulations [27,28]. Hence, it is essential for other healthcare practitioners to acknowledge the significance of nurses and their valuable contributions in providing care for patients with polypharmacy. It is advisable to promote the participation of nurses in medication management and empower them to assume additional duties.

3. Prospective investigation

Not all of the studies included in the analysis provided evidence about nurses' prescribing behaviors. Researchers have shown that nurses are crucial in managing drugs, although the specific arrangements for prescription work between nurses and medical experts differ among nations. Furthermore, it is important to thoroughly assess the proficiency of nurses in the act of prescription drugs.

There is a lack of research on how to include important individuals in the administration of several medications for older folks. Nurses had diverse viewpoints on the efficacy of multidisciplinary teams in managing polypharmacy. Nevertheless, the long-term care of older folks requires the involvement of many tiers of healthcare professionals, such as general practitioners, nurses, pharmacists, and others. Ensuring the involvement and cooperation of all three specializations in real practice presents obstacles.

It is crucial to develop optimal strategies for managing polypharmacy in various healthcare environments in order to enhance the well-being of elderly individuals. Conduct research to discover the most effective methods and provide education on polypharmacy-related awareness and deprescription to older persons and healthcare professionals. Furthermore, the process of identifying obstacles and facilitators will aid in the creation and implementation of optimal strategies for older individuals experiencing polypharmacy.

4. Summary

Through an analysis of the little existing research and the wide range of nursing standards worldwide, this meta-synthesis has identified four primary themes: the weight of polypharmacy, the importance of multidisciplinary teams, the responsibility of nurses, and the intricacy of medication management. It is advisable for healthcare professionals to understand the difficulties and outcomes associated with polypharmacy in the daily lives of older persons. They should strive to foster cooperation among different professions, including general practitioners, nurses, and pharmacists, in order to develop effective polypharmacy care plans. Effective treatment of polypharmacy requires critical multidisciplinary teamwork and communication among diverse healthcare practitioners. Nurses play a vital role in the healthcare team when assessing polypharmacy and drug management.

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