

Quality of Nursing Care in Psychiatric Wards of University Hospitals in Northwest of Iran from the Perceptions of Nurses

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Nursing care is considered as an essential component of health services. Patients' health improvement depends upon the quality of nursing care. As an important principle, perceptions of nurses as well as their active participation in decision-makings has an important role in the quality of services. This study aimed to determine the perception of nurses toward the quality of nursing care in psychiatric wards. **Methods:** In this descriptive study, we used census sampling. Seventy-six nurses employed at psychiatric wards of university hospitals in Northwest of Iran participated in this study. Quality Patient Care Scale (QUALPAC) was used to collect data. The score of each aspect and total scores were categorized as desirable, partly desirable and undesirable. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. **Results:** Findings showed that 60.5% of nurses perceived the quality of nursing care as desirable, while 65.8% and 53.9% reported the quality of physical and communicational aspects of care as desirable. Moreover, 51.3% of nurses considered the quality of care in psychosocial aspect as partly desirable. **Conclusion:** Although research findings indicated the desirability of care quality from the perceptions of most nurses, designing and applying educational programs and continuous evaluation are necessary to improve nursing care quality especially in psychosocial aspects in these centers.

Introduction

Psychiatric patients are susceptible to receive low-quality medical cares. In fact, 40% of these patients do not receive sufficient care.¹ In addition, such people are faced with some barriers promoting good health and receiving a proper health care.² Patients with mental disorders usually die due to physical diseases. Their high mortality is associated with their inadequate medical care that resulted from several factors such as treatment barriers, non-adherence in treatment, patients' cognitive difficulties, and bias in providing care.³ Moreover, side effects of drugs, inappropriate diet, sedentary lifestyles, obesity, and smoking con-

tribute to disease of such patients. Therefore, it is of high importance for psychiatric patients to receive adequate cares.⁴

The twenty-four hour care responsibility makes nurses in high, direct contact with patients. Moreover, the large number of nurses and the budget dedicated to them have made nursing as one of the most expensive units in hospitals.⁵ Nowadays, the quality of nursing care in the world is faced with many challenges. A study in New York hospitals showed one in every 25 patients to be hurt by the provided cares, among which 13.6% led to death.⁶ However, most clients and patients demand high quality services due to increased knowledge about health as well as increased

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costs of health services.⁷ Providing high quality care in mental health ward not only may modify the past neglect and historical abuse of human rights seen in psychiatric institutions, but also may be very important to ensure effective and efficient care in the future.⁸

Knowing different perspectives of involved groups including care providers (such as nurses), patients, expenditure payers and the public is important in preparing desirable plans to improve the quality of services.⁹ Quality of provided cares for admitted patients in psychiatric wards have been studied in various researches with different methods. In a study in Sweden, admitted patients in psychiatric wards reported to benefit from a high-quality care. Nevertheless, the results showed that the quality of provided cares has been far from what they expected.¹⁰ In a study in Thailand, admitted patients ranked the quality of cares as moderate. Interestingly, none of the scale items reached *very good* or *excellent* scores.¹¹ Using an observational checklist, in Moagari assessed the quality of provided nursing care to schizophrenic patients in physical and psychosocial aspects as moderate. However, connections with individuals effective on treatment were estimated as poor.¹² However, Akbari Kaji and Farmahini Farahani¹³ and Solati¹⁴ used a similar study method and estimated the quality of care as poor. In a qualitative study, nurses perceived quality of care as a positive concept. They believed it had an important role in improving patients' health. They mentioned some effective factors in quality of care such as respecting patients' dignity, patients' participation in the care, patients' recovery and the care environment.¹⁵ In a study, psychiatric inpatients pointed out nurses' shortcoming in explaining their actions, the negative impact of nurses' group behavior on ward atmosphere, their inadequate knowledge base and the negative consequences of inadequate staffing.¹⁶

Based on contradictory results about quality of provided cares in psychiatric wards, and considering the key role of nurses in promotion of cares,¹⁷ and limited studies about quality of

nursing care in psychiatric hospitals in Iran, the present study aimed to determine the perception of nurses toward quality of nursing care in psychiatric hospitals of north-western Iran.

Materials and methods

This was a descriptive cross-sectional study. The study population consisted of all nurses with an with an Associate Degree or higher level of education and all licensed practical nurses working in psychiatric wards of university hospitals in the Northwest of Iran. Nurses were only included if they had at least six months of work experience in psychiatric wards and were willing to participate in the study. Given the low number of nurses, no sampling was conducted. Finally, out of all nurses working in these hospitals ($n = 102$) 76 individuals enrolled in the study (19 questionnaires were incomplete and seven nurses did not satisfy the inclusion criteria).

A two-part questionnaire was used to collect data. The first part consisted of demographic characteristics with 13 questions measuring age, sex, marital status, educational degree, the university from which they were graduated, nursing experience, experience in psychiatric wards, employment status, working ward, type of work shift, whether or not they chose to work in the ward, satisfaction and willingness to continue nursing in psychiatric wards. The second part consisted of the three aspectual Quality Patient Care Scale (QUALPACS). Psychosocial (32 questions), physical (23 questions) and communicational (14 questions) aspects were assessed using four possible choices of Always (4 points), Often (3 points), Sometimes (2 points) and Never (1 point). Quality care scores in this questionnaire ranged from 68 to 272. Scores of 68-136 were interpreted as undesirable, 137- 204 as partly undesirable and 205-272 as desirable. The corresponding ranges were 32-64, 65-96 and 97-128 in psychological aspect, 32-46, 47-69 and 70-92 in physical aspect and 13-26, 27-40 and 41-53 in communicational aspect. This questionnaire has been used to evaluate care process and quality of nursing care since

1975 in the U.S., England, and Nigeria. Although the reliability and validity of the Persian version of questionnaire have been confirmed in 2005 in Tabriz,¹⁸ it was again given to ten faculty members of Tabriz University and Tabriz University of Medical Sciences to reassess its content and face validity and also to use their comments in modification of each sentence. In addition, in order to achieving reliability, the questionnaire was given to twenty nurses that a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.93 was calculated.

Descriptive statistics was used to indicate mean, frequency, and percentages of demographic characteristics and Quality of Care. A confidence interval (CI) of 95% and $\alpha = 0.05$ were considered. Data was analyzed by SPSS₁₃.

Permissions for data collection were obtained from Research Deputies of Tabriz, Urmia and Ardabil Universities of Medical Sciences. In addition, research project and its related tools were confirmed by the Regional Ethics Committee at Tabriz University of Medical Sciences. After approval of hospital chiefs, we referred to working shifts of psychiatric wards. Then, the questionnaires were

given to nurses to be completed and were collected again in the same or subsequent shifts. The required information about the study and its objectives, participants' rights (such as right to withdrawal and confidentiality of data) were explained to all participants and informed consents were obtained.

Results

The study subjects included 65 nurses and 11 licensed practical nurses whose mean (SD) age was 37.28 (5.76) years. The mean (SD) of nursing practice experience and work experience in psychiatric wards were 12.41 (4.64) and 7.74 (6.24) years, respectively. The majority of subjects were female (57.9%), married (85.5%), holding a BSc degree (78.9%) and working rotating shifts (57.9%). Most participants (57.9%) were willing to work in their current ward and 68.4% were satisfied with their ward. As a result, 67.1% wished to keep working in psychiatric wards. The mean score of quality of nursing care in psychosocial, physical and communicational aspects are given in Table 1.

Table 1. Mean (SD) scores of nursing care quality in psychiatric wards of university hospitals in Northwest of Iran during 2010

	Mean (SD)	CI 95%
Psychosocial care	95.57 (14.05)	92.3-98.7
Physical care	72.42 (12.19)	71.6-77.2
Communicational care	43.14 (6.39)	41.6-44.6
Total care quality	212.93 (29.48)	206.1-219.6

Table 2. Absolute and percentage frequency distribution of provided nursing care quality in psychiatric wards of university hospitals in Northwest of Iran during 2010

Quality of care aspects	Status	n (%)
Psychosocial aspect	Undesirable	1 (1.3%)
	Partly desirable	39 (51.3%)
	Desirable	36 (47.4%)
	Total	76 (100%)
Physical aspect	Undesirable	2 (2.6%)
	Partly desirable	24 (31.6%)
	Desirable	50 (65.8%)
	Total	76 (100%)
Communicational aspect	Undesirable	2 (2.6%)
	Partly desirable	33 (43.4%)
	Desirable	41 (53.9%)
	Total	76 (100%)
Total	Undesirable	2 (2.6%)
	Partly desirable	28 (36.8%)
	Desirable	46 (60.5%)
	Total	76 (100%)

Based on the results, 60.5% of nurses described the quality of nursing care as desira-

ble. To be more specific, physical and communicational aspects of nursing care were

assessed as desirable by 65.8% and 53.9% of the participants, respectively. However, 51.3% reported care in psychosocial aspect as partly desirable. The summary of the results is given in Table 2.

Discussion

The results of this study showed that nurses perceived quality of nursing care as desirable. This finding was in accordance with the perception of patients toward quality of nursing care in psychiatric wards in the study of Schroder *et al.* in which admitted patients in psychiatric wards reported a high quality care.¹⁰ Admitted patients in the study of Thapinta *et al.* ranked the quality of care as moderate.¹¹ In contrast to our results, Akbari Kaji and Farmahini Farahani¹³ and Solati¹⁴ reported the quality of cares in psychiatric wards as poor. The discrepancy could be caused by different types and tools of study, *i.e.* while in the mentioned studies, the researchers observed the performance of nurses using a checklist, we collected data by a questionnaire and considered the comments of nurses on which their honesty might have been effective. According to the data available on the Internet and library search, no study in Iran has evaluated the quality of nursing care from the viewpoint of nurses or patients admitted in psychiatric wards. However, similar studies have been done in medical and surgical wards, in which, like our study, nurses reported a desirable level of provided care.^{17,18}

In the present study, 65.8% of nurses reported the physical quality of care as desirable. However, psychosocial and communicational aspects were reported as desirable by 47.4% and 53.9% of the participants, respectively. This finding was in accordance with the study of Greenhalgh *et al.* in which nurses in psychiatric and general wards ranked the performance of physical cares higher than emotional cares.¹⁹ Another study assessed the viewpoints of patients toward quality of care in psychiatric wards and sug-

gested that patient satisfaction was highly affected by the relationship between the patient and the staff.²⁰ In the study of Hansson *et al.*, patients put less emphasis on the quality of physical care or daily routines in wards.²¹ It seems that low number of nurses in university hospitals due to high workload,^{9,22} prioritizing physical care, time constraints, poor environment, and lack of skills, knowledge and mental health services²³ cause staff to disregard emotional needs of patients. They also make nurses mostly attend to scientific and skill-related aspects of care rather than the art of nursing. While the nurses should be informed about their legal and moral responsibility toward the quality of provided care, specialty, psychosocial and skills aspects may also affect patients' perceptions toward quality of care.⁹

Although 60% of nurses in the present study reflected a desirable level of care quality, a significant number reported partly desirable to undesirable level of care. Therefore, reviewing the effective factors on quality of nursing cares in psychiatric wards seems necessary. In the study of Ahmadi *et al.*, retired nurses indicated proper training of personnel, appropriate planning and organizing nursing care, along with and the necessity of relationships with patients as effective factors on improvement of quality of nursing care.²⁴ Other studies have also suggested some interventions, including continuous training of nurses,²⁵ evaluating nurses' performance²⁶ to improve quality of nursing care. In a study by Reed and Fitzgerald, nurses in psychiatric wards announced education regarding psychiatric patient care at schools of nursing as inadequate while the focus is still on medical and surgical patient care.²³ Therefore, nursing educational programs at Schools of Nursing need to pay more attention to mental health issues. In addition, continuous education should be held for the staff. If we accept that presence of efficient staff is equivalent with better care and better understanding of care, we can claim improving the quality of care. A limitation of the present study was evaluat-

ing the quality of nursing care only from the viewpoint of nurses. Therefore, nurses may have given answers which are socially acceptable but not the facts happening in real clinical environments. Future studies focusing on patients' understanding from the quality of nursing care are suggested. In addition, instruments such as observational checklist for assessing the quality of nursing care could be used to increase the reliability of the study.

Another limitation of this study was including only three university hospitals in Northwest of Iran. Thus, the results cannot be generalized to the entire community of Iranian nurses.

Conclusion

The results of this study showed that quality of nursing care was at a desirable level based on the viewpoints of most nurses. In fact, although desirable levels of physical and communicational care were reported, psychosocial aspect of care was considered as partly desirable. Thus, designing and implementing educational programs such as continuous education and evaluation seem necessary to improve nursing care quality particularly in psychosocial aspects. Moreover, further studies are recommended due to limitations of domestic studies.

Ethical issues

None to be declared.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest in this study.

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