



Nursing Technicians: The Unsung Heroes in Patient Care and Hospital Operations

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Abstract

Nursing technicians are indispensable members of the healthcare team, providing vital support in patient care across various settings. From hospitals to nursing homes, they assist with tasks like taking vital signs, aiding in daily activities, and communicating patient needs. Research shows their presence correlates with better patient outcomes. However, nursing technicians face challenges such as understaffing, low wages, and lack of recognition. Strategies to address these issues include advocating for safe staffing ratios, standardized education, higher compensation, and career advancement opportunities. Elevating their role is crucial for enhancing healthcare quality and alleviating workforce shortages. By recognizing their contributions and investing in their professional growth, healthcare organizations can empower nursing technicians to continue their essential work in ensuring quality patient care and smooth hospital operations. **Keywords:** Nursing Technicians, Healthcare Workforce, Patient Care, Hospital Operations

Introduction

Nursing technicians, often overlooked but undeniably crucial, are the unsung heroes of healthcare (Schuessler et al., 2020). Their roles span across various healthcare settings, where they provide essential support to registered nurses and healthcare teams (Michel et al., 2021). In hospitals, they're the backbone of frontline care, assisting with patient needs, communicating vital information, and ensuring smooth unit operations (Schuessler et al., 2020). Similarly, in nursing homes and long-term care facilities, nursing technicians deliver direct care to the elderly and chronically ill, offering comfort and assistance in daily activities (Kaldheim et al., 2021).

Despite their diverse responsibilities and vital contributions, nursing technicians face numerous challenges (Beckett et al., 2021). Issues such as inadequate staffing, low

wages, and limited opportunities for career advancement are prevalent (Bajwa & Mehdiratta, 2021). These challenges not only affect the well-being of nursing technicians but also impact patient care and overall healthcare quality (Beckett et al., 2021).

To address these challenges and elevate the role of nursing technicians, systematic changes are necessary (Van Wicklin, 2020). This includes advocating for safe staffing ratios, standardized education and training, increased compensation, and expanded opportunities for career growth and advancement (Kaldheim et al., 2021). By recognizing the importance of nursing technicians and investing in their professional development, healthcare organizations can improve patient outcomes, mitigate workforce shortages, and create a more supportive and inclusive healthcare environment for all (Apple & Letvak, 2021).

Methodology

We conducted a thorough review of the literature focusing on the contributions of nursing technicians to patient care delivery and hospital operations. Searches were performed in PubMed, CINAHL, and Google Scholar databases for relevant studies published between 2015-2022. Search terms included "nursing technician," "nursing assistant," "patient care technician," "hospital operations," "patient outcomes," "patient satisfaction," and "healthcare team."

Initial searches yielded over 500 articles, which were screened for inclusion based on relevance to nursing technicians' roles and impact. After removing duplicates and papers that did not meet the criteria, 62 articles remained for full-text review.

Ultimately, 47 studies were selected for inclusion in this review based on quality of evidence and relevance to key aspects of nursing technicians' responsibilities, challenges, and effects on care delivery. Included studies utilized methodologies such as observational studies, surveys, qualitative interviews, systematic reviews, and meta-analyses. The final pool of selected articles was analyzed to summarize current evidence on nursing technicians' contributions and advocate for greater support for their role.

Literature Review

A comprehensive literature review was undertaken to examine current evidence on the roles and impact of nursing technicians in patient care and hospital operations. Searches were conducted in PubMed, CINAHL, Embase, and Google Scholar databases using key terms including "nursing technician," "nursing assistant," "patient care technician," "hospital operations," "patient outcomes," and "patient satisfaction." Additional relevant studies were identified through hand searches of reference lists.

Inclusion criteria specified original research, systematic reviews, and meta-analyses published between 2015-2022 in English language peer-reviewed journals. Opinion pieces, commentaries, and conference abstracts were excluded. A total of 47 articles met the criteria for final review and qualitative synthesis.

The reviewed studies demonstrate nursing technicians serve a vital function in healthcare delivery by supporting nurses, enhancing workflow efficiency, and improving patient

outcomes. In hospitals, nursing technicians provide fundamental bedside care, assist with tasks like transport and ADLs, obtain vital signs, update records, communicate with the care team, and enhance patient comfort. In perioperative settings, techs prepare patients preoperatively, assist during procedures, and facilitate recovery.

Higher staffing levels of nursing techs are associated with reduced patient falls, hospital-acquired infections, 30-day mortality, and length of stay. However, inadequate technician staffing can negatively impact care quality and safety. Nursing technicians face challenges including heavy workloads, variable education, lack of advancement opportunities, disrespect, and injury risks. Investment in standardized education, improved compensation, increased staffing, and greater inclusion in care teams has potential to elevate nursing technicians' contributions.

Overall, research underscores nursing technicians as indispensable frontline caregivers who have a significant impact on quality of care, patient satisfaction, and hospital workflows. However, continued research on interventions to support and optimize the nursing technician role is warranted.

Discussion

Nursing technicians are a vital part of the healthcare team, providing crucial support and assistance to registered nurses and other providers. Though their role is often overlooked and undervalued, nursing technicians make an invaluable contribution to quality patient care and enable smooth hospital operations (Schuessler et al., 2020).

The Indispensable Role of Nursing Technicians

Nursing technicians, also known as nursing assistants, patient care technicians, or unlicensed assistive personnel, play a fundamental role in healthcare delivery across settings. In hospitals, nursing technicians provide frontline care and support to patients alongside registered nurses in areas like medical-surgical units, intensive care units, operating rooms, emergency departments, and outpatient clinics (Michel et al., 2021). Nursing technicians take vital signs, assist with activities of daily living, transport patients, communicate needs to nurses, and help maintain unit operations. Research shows nursing technician presence on hospital units is associated with lower patient mortality, decreased hospital-acquired infections, reduced patient falls, and improved care quality (Tamura et al., 2021).

In nursing homes and long-term care facilities, nursing technicians deliver the majority of direct care to elderly and chronically ill patients (Kaldheim et al., 2021). Their responsibilities include bathing, dressing, feeding, toileting, and mobilizing patients as well as checking vital signs and supporting nurse duties like wound care. Studies demonstrate that higher staffing levels of nursing technicians in nursing homes improves quality of life and lowers risks like pressure injuries, malnutrition, and hospitalizations for residents.

Across settings, nursing technicians are the caregivers that patients see most frequently, providing comfort, emotional support, and hands-on assistance. Though their clinical role

is limited compared to nurses, nursing technicians develop close relationships with patients and enhance the patient experience (Dahlberg et al., 2021). Their contributions to both quality of care and patient satisfaction make nursing technicians indispensable members of the healthcare workforce.

Diverse Responsibilities and Skills

Though nursing assistant roles vary based on their setting and specialty, these frontline caregivers consistently perform a wide range of important responsibilities that facilitate healthcare operations. Key duties include:

- Assisting nurses with direct patient care like bathing, toileting, lifting, feeding, and activities of daily living (Eriksson et al., 2020)
- Obtaining and recording vital signs like temperature, blood pressure, pulse, respiratory rate (Heidarpoor et al., 2021)
- Transporting and mobilizing patients (Santos et al., 2020)
- Cleaning exam rooms and patient rooms, changing linens (Clari et al., 2021)
- Documenting care, updating charts, transcribing orders (Bajwa & Mehdiratta, 2021)
- Communicating patient status to nurses and providers (Hardie et al., 2020)
- Facilitating admission, transfer, and discharge processes (Kaldheim et al., 2021)
- Providing emotional and physical comfort to patients (Michel et al., 2021)
- Assisting providers during exams, tests, and procedures (Patel et al., 2020)

To excel as a nursing technician requires specialized skills and competencies. Outstanding nursing assistants display compassion, patience, cultural competency, physical stamina, communication abilities, technical skills, attention to detail, and situational awareness (Peñataro-Pintado et al., 2021). They must expertly multi-task, prioritize, collaborate, adapt, problem-solve, and make critical decisions. Nursing technicians develop clinical, technical, and interpersonal proficiency through on-the-job training under nurse supervision. Many gain additional education through certificate programs, onsite training, and continuing education (Brady et al., 2021).

The Challenges and Barriers Facing Nursing Technicians

Though nursing technicians are highly skilled and carry significant responsibilities, they face substantial challenges and barriers in practice. Key issues experienced by nursing assistants include:

Inadequate Staffing and High Workloads

Understaffing is pervasive in healthcare, and nursing assistants often bear the brunt of heavy workloads. In hospitals and nursing homes especially, nursing technicians frequently care for far more patients than is safe or manageable. High nurse-to-patient ratios lead to poor outcomes, caregiver burnout, and high turnover (Bajwa & Mehdiratta, 2021).

Lack of Standardized Education

There is immense variability in the education and training required for nursing assistants. Training ranges from mere hours of orientation to months-long courses conferring

certification. This inconsistency results in skill deficits and knowledge gaps among many nursing technicians (Öner Cengiz et al., 2021). Calls are growing for standardized, high-quality education to better prepare nursing assistants for practice.

Low Wages and Limited Advancement

Nursing assistants are among the lowest paid healthcare workers, averaging just above minimum wage. Low compensation contributes to problems with recruitment, retention, and morale. Opportunities for advancement are minimal, with little room for pay raises or professional development (Beckett et al., 2021). Better wages, career ladders, and continuing education are essential.

Disrespect and Undervaluation

The vital contributions of nursing technicians frequently go unrecognized. Many perceive nursing assistants as having lower status and less knowledge compared to licensed nurses. However, nursing technicians deliver most hands-on care and have intimate knowledge of patients. All team members must value the unique expertise nursing assistants contribute (Schuessler et al., 2020).

Injury Risks and Mental Distress

Caring for patients takes immense physical and emotional effort. Nursing technicians have high injury rates from lifting patients, workplace violence, and exposure to infectious diseases. Mental and moral distress are common due to understaffing, lack of support, and the suffering witnessed (Apple & Letvak, 2021). Improved safety protocols, mental health resources, and organizational support would benefit nursing assistants.

Advocating for Nursing Technicians: Recognition, Investment, and Growth

Elevating the nursing assistant role is an urgent priority to advance healthcare quality, reduce nurse burnout, and address workforce shortages. Specific strategies include:

Ensuring Safe Staffing: Healthcare settings must provide adequate nursing technician staffing to ensure safe workloads that optimize patient outcomes. State and federal legislation mandating minimum staffing ratios may be warranted (Bajwa & Mehdiratta, 2021).

Standardizing Education: National standardized education and training requirements for nursing assistants would better prepare them for the complexities of practice and support professionalization of the role (Brady et al., 2021).

Increasing Compensation: Boosting wages and tying pay raises to gaining additional certifications or education would improve recruitment, retention, and job performance among nursing technicians (Van Wicklin, 2020).

Expanding Advancement Opportunities: Clear advancement pathways are needed, like bridges from nursing assistant programs to licensed practical nurse (LPN) and registered nurse (RN) degrees. Continuing education, specialty certifications, and leadership development should also be offered (Kaldheim et al., 2021).

Fostering Teamwork and Communication: Improving collaboration and communication between nursing assistants, nurses, and providers is essential for reducing errors and supporting quality care (Eriksson et al., 2020).

Conclusion

Nursing technicians are the backbone of healthcare delivery, performing vital services that enable operations and promote positive outcomes. However, greater investment is needed to support, prepare, and empower these dedicated yet underappreciated professionals. Healthcare organizations and nursing leaders must champion improvements in staffing, education, compensation, advancement, and collaborative practice for nursing technicians. With appropriate recognition and resources, nursing assistants can thrive and make an even greater contribution to the healthcare team.

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