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Undergraduate Nursing Students' Experience and Perspectives towards Patients Death: A Qualitative Descriptive Study

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Introduction

- **Cradle of Cancer Discipline of China**
- **National Center for Cancer Clinical Research (2013)**
- **2400 beds , 2867 workers;**
- **46 clinical departments and 12 basic research institute;**
- **More than 1 million outpatient visits, 90 thousand inpatients and 28 thousand operations in 2017**



Introduction

- **The Ministry of Health of China Key Project of Clinical Nursing Subject**
- **China Cancer Association Nursing Committee**
- **One winner of 43th Nightingale prize**
- **1300 nurses, 83% with Bachelor's Degree**

Patients' needs are supreme

Providing Patients with cultural, professional and individualized services based on evidence



**Winner of
Nightingale Prize**

Background

Death education has gradually received global attention of nursing educators and researchers for decades, and it has largely promoted reforms of death-related education, training and programs

It helps nursing students to establish positive overviews towards life, and it also benefits them to understand and to cope with patient death, transforming the fear of death into humanistic care for patients

Garvey AM, Hickey A, Conroy R. The anatomy room: A positive learning experience for nursing students. Nurse Education Today, 2014, 35(1):245-250.

Huang L, Ni N, Zhang Li ,et al. Preliminary exploration of development of death education in medical colleges and universities. Nursing Research of China, 2017, 31(10):3178-3179.



Background

To understand the experience and perspective of nursing students regarding patient death is of importance, which may assist with exploring current status of nursing education on patient death

Numerous quantitative studies have been conducted with regard to nursing students' view with patient death

Little is known however about Chinese nursing students' experience and perspective towards patient death



Methods

Design and Setting

- ◆ A qualitative descriptive design
- ◆ In a 2400-bed cancer hospital

Sample

- ◆ Purposive sampling

Inclusion criteria

- ◆ Having experienced patient death
- ◆ Have been working as a clinical nurse student for at least 0.5 year
- ◆ Older than 18 years old
- ◆ Willing to participate



Methods

At last 16 undergraduate nursing students participated

- Age range: 19 to 23 years Average: (21.2 ± 2.9) years
- 2 male, 14 female
- 11 with bachelor degree, 5 with diploma certificate
- 1 to three times they experienced patient death
- Time duration of clinical practice: (8.1 ± 2.4) months



Methods

Data collection and analysis

- ◆ Semi-structured interview guide
- ◆ Be neutral, sensitive, nonjudgmental, et al
- ◆ Data analysis was done in conjunction with data collection
- ◆ Thematic analysis method to analyze data

Semi-structured Interview Guide

1. Describe what you experienced when patients were dying.
2. Describe your attitude and perspectives towards patient death.
3. Describe the impacts of the experience with patient death on you.
4. How did you cope with patient death?
5. What do you need to deal with patient death?

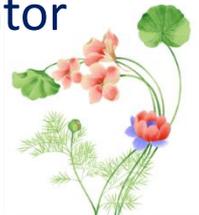
Findings

Ethical considerations

- ◆ Approval from Human Research Ethics Board
- ◆ Informed consent, entirely voluntary
- ◆ Subject code used instead of real name to protect their privacy

Rigor

- ◆ Investigator triangulation and member checks
- ◆ Standard forward-backward translation process was adopted to translate the original Chinese data into English by a translator outside the research team



Findings

| Themes | Subthemes |
|------------------------------------|---|
| Emotional responses | Fear and resistance facing patient death |
| | Helplessness and powerlessness |
| | Sadness and guilt over patient death |
| | Compassion and sympathy for families |
| Lacking of expertise and knowledge | Inexperienced in taking care of dying patients |
| | Little support for bereaved family members |
| | Willingness to improve end-of-life care abilities |
| Coping strategies | Sharing experiences with peers |
| | Seeking support from parents |
| | Leisure activities and writing diary |
| Benefit finding and impacts | Cherishing life |
| | Promoting professional development |
| | Impacts on nursing students |

Findings

Theme 1 Emotional responses

◆ Fear and uncertainty facing patient death

Nursing students stated that they were full of fear and uncertainty when a patient died.

"I never thought of death before that. Death makes me panic, I did not know what happened. It was just so quick. I was shocked...had no any idea what to do next." (I)

◆ Helplessness and powerlessness

Some nursing students felt guilty because they could not save dying patients' lives but only saw them passing away.

"My ability is too limited. I am not competent with this job.....If I was God, how wonderful it would be if I could prolong his life. " (P)



Findings

◆ Sadness and guilt over patient death

The students stated that experiencing patient death was disturbing and makes them feeling sad, unpleasant. Some felt guilty for not being able to save patients' lives.

"My mind went blank and tears fell down my face when I saw the body was packed in a bag. You know I made a acquaintance with this person for more than two yearsIt was too fast for a human being to die..." (B)

◆ Compassion and sympathy for family members

Some students expressed deep sympathy for family members as they thought family members would be struggling to accept the fact and to experience psychological distress.

"I did understand what they were experiencing. I was quite sorry for their loss." (C)

"How would the baby go to live on without his young mother? And what about her old parents?" (M)



Findings

Theme 2 Lacking of expertise and knowledge

◆ Inexperienced in taking care of dying patients

Students could not foresee imminent death though they worked alongside of dying patients. They were incompetent in rescuing dying patients.

“The patient did not respond to me. I thought he was uncomfortable and was reluctant to speak with me..... However, very soon my mentor told me he was in coma, but I did not realize that actually.” (A)

“I did not know what I could help with at that time, but just stood there. My mentor and other nurses were busy with rescuing that person.” (G)

◆ Little support for bereaved family members

They were inexperienced in communication, as well as in providing psychological support to family members.

“I did not know what to say and what to do for his family members. What I am supposed to speak with them? Nobody taught me this.” (F)



Findings

◆ Willingness to improve end-of-life care abilities

Students reported there was a large gap between what they learned during their study period and with what they experienced in clinical practice.

“We had a lesson which was about hospice care. But what I saw in clinical practice was totally different with what I have experienced. To better adapt with future work, I need to experience more and learn more.” (J)

They hoped to have more opportunities to take care of dying patients and assisting with body care. They also showed strong interests to learn more about end-of-life care.

“I wanted to take care for dying patients and help to deal with the body because I would face this challenging job sooner or later.” (D)



Findings

Theme 3 Coping strategies with patient death

◆ Sharing experiences with peers

The nurse students shared experiences with peers, but the depth of discussion about death and dying was lacking.

“I talked with my roommate about my experience with patient death. It really helped me to deal with this stressful encounter.” (E)

◆ Seeking support from parents

Some talked with their parents, but not all of the parents were able to provide effective support.

“I talked with my mom. But she felt that experience was terrible and unlucky, and she was unwilling to listen to me.....” (N)

◆ Leisure activities and writing diary

Some got relaxed by engaging themselves in leisure activities and wrote diary to cope with patient death.

“Sometimes I went out, sometimes I wrote diaries, just like ‘Life is like a piece of chocolate , you never know what's that smell ’.....” (L)



Findings

Theme 4 Benefit finding and impacts

◆ Cherishing life

Students benefited a lot through the experience. They changed views towards life and began to cherish and be grateful to what they have.

“I would love my body and change my lifestyle instead of eating snacks and staying up all night.”(I)

◆ Promoting professional development

They stated that the experience promoted their self-growth in nursing job.

“I have learned how to take care of a dying patient, and what to say and how to comfort their family.”(F)

◆ Impacts on nursing students

However, this experience influenced a few students. They had nightmares, and fall-asleep dysfunction.

“I would think of that patient’ face when I closed my eyes. I dare not to get sleep.”(E)



Discussion

Nursing students suffered emotional distress when caring for dying patients although they had strong willingness to offer quality end-of-life care to dying patients and families.

Nurses students interpreted caring of dying patients as a meaningful opportunity for both professional development and personal growth, though they had rarely been educated systematically on how to deal with dying and death.

Qualified death education combining theory and clinic experience should be provided to nursing students to help understand the meaning of death and life, as well as to improve the ability of caring for dying patients.



Discussion

Standardized curriculum should be developed by clinical teachers to provide nursing students with tools and training to effectively provide end-of-life care to the dying and death. However, Chinese culture and religion should be taken into account.

Mentors are strongly advised to provide nursing students with more opportunities to care for dying patients, and to pay attention to their psychological status , and to encourage them to express negative feelings.

Nursing educators are suggested to work together with clinical practitioners, to empower themselves with up-to-date knowledge, which may assist with meeting nursing students' needs.



Limitations

The subjects only came from one cancer hospital in China, which may result that the research findings could not be generalized in other settings or cultural context.

The number of interview questions was small and the question protocol can be further developed, although the results appear to have given a good picture of how these nursing students viewed and experienced caring for dying patients.



Conclusion and Implication

Chinese undergraduate nursing students are challenged by taking care of dying patients.

Death education should be provided to equip them and to help with coping with this challenging event.

More practice opportunities to deal with dying patients should be provided to nursing students.

Clinical mentors and instructors are advised to pay high attention and to provide specific training to nursing students on issues relevant to coping skills of patient death and end-of-life care.



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A nighttime photograph of the Tianjin skyline. The Eye of Tianjin Ferris wheel is the central focus, illuminated with a warm orange glow. To its left, several modern skyscrapers are lit up with white and yellow lights. The foreground shows a wide river with long-exposure light trails from boats, creating streaks of red, orange, and yellow light. The sky is a deep blue with a hint of purple from the setting or rising sun.

THANK YOU !

WELCOME TO TIANJIN!