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Narrative Engineering in Nursing Care: A Meta-Synthesis of Experiences and Implementation Challenges

Toktam Soleimani[1], Asma asadian*[2]

1.9Dey Educational Hospital, Torbat Heydariyeh University of Medical Sciences, Torbat Heydariyeh, Iran

2.9Dey Educational Hospital, Torbat Heydariyeh University of Medical Sciences, Torbat Heydariyeh, Iran

Backgrounds

Narrative engineering is an emerging approach in nursing that enhances empathy, communication, and holistic care by structuring patients' stories. This meta-synthesis aimed to explore the experiences and challenges of applying this approach in qualitative nursing studies.

Methods

This meta-synthesis was conducted through a systematic search of PubMed, CINAHL, Scopus, and Web of Science for studies published from 2015 to 2025. The search strategy combined MeSH terms including "Nursing," "Narrative," "Care," "Qualitative Study," and "Meta-synthesis" using Boolean operators (AND, OR). Inclusion criteria were: (1) qualitative studies focusing on narrative application in nursing care; (2) participants including nurses or patients; (3) publication in English or Persian; (4) availability of full text. Exclusion criteria were: quantitative studies, previous systematic reviews, conference abstracts, and articles lacking sufficient qualitative data. After removing duplicates and screening titles and abstracts, 12 qualitative studies with 287 participants were included in the final analysis. Data were synthesized using the Noblit and Hare meta-ethnography approach.

Findings

Four main themes were identified: (1) narrative engineering as a tool for empowering nurses' professional identity — nurses reported that recording and revisiting patient narratives deepened their understanding of their professional role and enhanced their sense of value; (2) enhancement of empathy and patient–nurse communication — narrative-centeredness enabled nurses to see patients beyond clinical symptoms and establish more effective therapeutic relationships; (3) structural challenges — including time constraints, organizational resistance to change, and lack of formal narrative training in nursing curricula; and (4) emotional tensions — repeated exposure to narratives of suffering imposed a heavy emotional burden on nurses, requiring psychological support and coping strategies.

Conclusion

Findings indicated that narrative engineering holds substantial potential for improving the quality of care; however, its success requires reforming educational policies, managerial support, and integration into nursing curricula. This review emphasizes the need for longitudinal and interventional studies to overcome implementation challenges and offers strategies for effective integration of this approach into clinical practice.

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