Comprehensive Analysis of The Role of Nursing in Promoting Healthcare Equity

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Abstract

Nursing's contribution to healthcare equity is a component of the continual transformation of healthcare systems worldwide. Nurses, being in the most direct touch with the patient and responsibilities involved in multiple activities related to patient care, are well poised to perceive and respond to inequalities in healthcare access, provision, and utilization. Hence, the following paper describes the extent of nursing involvement and contribution to advancing healthcare equity, especially amongst vulnerable groups. Each strategy focuses on exploring the theories that enhance nursing approaches to social determinants of Health, cultural competency, and approaches to advocacy for effective health equity. Further, it examines how nursing education, workforce diversity, policy reform, and nursing can improve equity within a healthcare system. These insights support further and sustained reform of the system and nursing advocacy movements working toward the development of equal care for all.

Keywords: *nursing; healthcare equity; health disparities; social determinants of health; culturally competent care; nursing education; healthcare advocacy.*

Introduction

Healthcare equity, therefore, involves achieving the best health for all people, regardless of their race, color, economic status, gender or preference, or even geographical location. To obtain healthcare equity, it is indispensable to eradicate social determinants of Health, diminish disparities in Health, and provide the population with requisite care that guarantees his/her Health. All nurses are responsible for advocating for increased equality in healthcare in that they work directly with patients and vulnerable groups, especially in that they offer culturally sensitive care and consider the general population and the determinants of Health.

The goal of this paper is consequently to offer a synthesis of the most relevant literature materials as the basis for the assessment of the effectiveness of the performance of nursing in the context of achieving healthcare equity (Mohammad et al., 2024a; Mohammad et al., 2023a; Mohammad et al, 2024b). Nursing practice will explore the approaches that nurses take to come up with measures on health disparity, the education of nurses, the diversity of the nurse workforce, and the courage that the nurses take in ensuring that there are policy changes that affect the disparities in the healthcare systems.

Literature Review

The literature on the role of nursing in promoting healthcare equity spans several domains, including the impact of nurses in addressing social determinants of health, their role in providing culturally competent

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care, and their involvement in policy advocacy for equitable healthcare. Below are key themes identified in the existing body of research:

Social Determinants of Health

Social determinants of health (SDOH) includes income, education, housing, and healthy foods, which play a crucial role in the general well-being of an individual. Nurses can easily see the SDOH that patients have, and that prevails among the population. Herrera and Mandigo (2020) and WHO (2020) report that WHO categorizes SDOH as crucial in improving equity and minimizing health disparities. Nurses are pivotal in identifying such factors and role-playing to link patients to community support, lobby for policies, and offer educative information about the effects of social determinants on Health.

Culturally Competent Care

Culture in care, or culturally competent care, is one of the foundations of an equitable healthcare system. Therefore, it can be argued that nurses require knowledge of their patients' culture, language, and economic status. Literature reviews also revealed that cultural competency enhances patient outcomes by enhancing trust and communications and decreasing health disparities (Betancourt et al., 2005; Mohammad et al., 2023b; Al-Hawary et al., 2020; Al-Husban et al., 2023). Through cultural competence, nurses can address individual cultural characteristics that facilitate health access and satisfaction for the patient.

Nursing Education and Workforce Diversity

Nursing education/RC is a foundation for achieving diverse healthcare objectives, especially equity-related ones. Evidence-based practice shows that diverse nursing employees result in the delivery of culturally appropriate, care-centered services and help to further amend disparities in the delivery of healthcare services (Buerhaus et al., 2017; Al-Nawafah et al., 2022; Alolayyan et al., 2018). Concerning the key approach linked with nursing education and practice to overcome disparities in the access to and use of health care, the role of diversity has been underlined. However, some obstacles, such as economic and institutional challenges, still hinder the development of the nursing profession.

Advocacy for Healthcare Equity

Nurses have traditionally played an active part in policy advocacy, which has been crucial to changing the face of inequality and working towards a better reform of all health systems. The advocacy activities include direct patient advocacy, lobbying through policy formulation, and membership in organizations that promote healthcare policy regulation. Research on leadership shows that nurse leaders, and more so those in advanced practice settings, exert significant influence in developing policies within the health system that seek to advance issues of diversity, justice, and fair distribution of healthcare services.

Methods

In this paper, the author used qualitative research methods to analyze the subject of nursing and healthcare equity. The methods include methodology for a systematic review: nursing effects on health disparity and equity, meaning the planned, systematic search and analysis of original publications that consist of empirical research and conceptual articles in peer-reviewed journals, government reports, and other forms of regional, national, and global research published in the year 2000 or later and ending in the year 2023. The review was structured around the following key themes:

1. Health inequalities and the community health nurse.

2. Culturally competent care for minorities as the approach to healthcare fairness.

3. The focus is hiring nurses and the nursing education workforce for equal and diverse treatment delivery.

4. The roles of nurses in policy advocacy and influencing health equity at the system level.

The search for data involved reviewing papers that quantified the aspects of nursing practice that increase healthcare access and quality in various communities and those that compared the effectiveness of nurse-led policy initiatives.

Results and Findings

Addressing Social Determinants of Health

The intervention by nurses in working to curb social determinants of Health has been established to have a close association with community-based care. A review of the literature points out that nurse-led interventions, which focus on housing, nutrition, and education needs of vulnerable groups, provide health benefits. For instance, nurses operating in community health facilities have collaborated with fellow social workers and other workers to ensure that their patients receive all-over care, which entails referring them to other useful services (Edelman & Mandle, 2019; Alzyoud et al., 2024; Mohammad et al., 2022; Rahamneh et al., 2023). These interventions have been linked to better health outcomes for populations with chronic disease and those with low-income status.
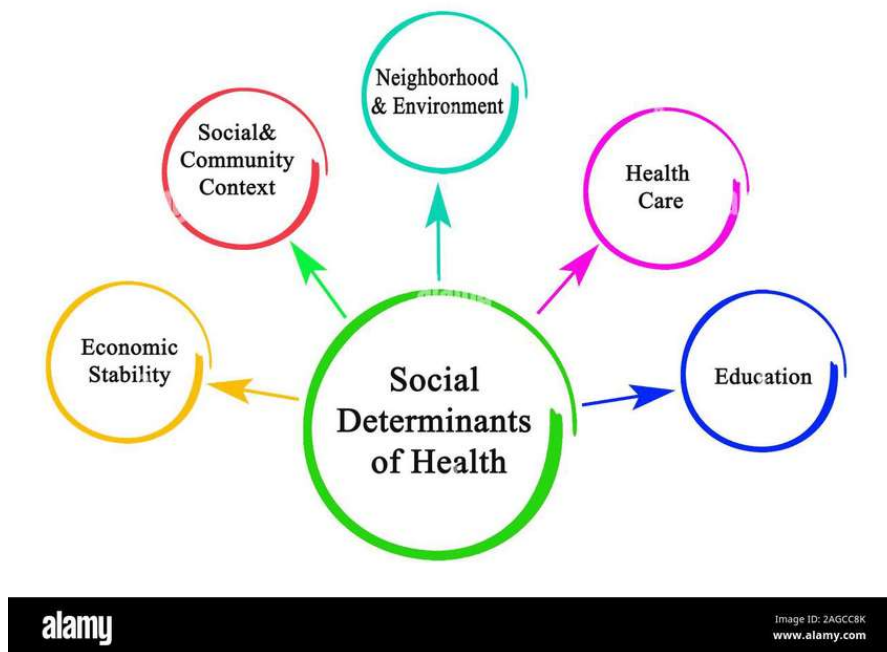

(Lopez & Gadsden, 2016)

Culturally Competent Care

Nurses should never disregard cultural competency when providing healthcare to individuals in society. It has been ascertained that nurses' appreciation of patients' culture enhances patients' needs' satisfactorily by the nurses enabling compliance with the recommended treatment plans. Other benefits of cultural competence training include an improved ability to handle communication-related to language interpreters and ethnic and racial disparities in Health. One of the threatened rights covered in the study is that culturally competent care enhances trust between nurses and patients and enhances care treatment results (Saha et al., 2008; Al-Azzam et al., 2023; Al-Shormana et al., 2022; Al-E'wesat et al., 2024).

Nursing Education and Workforce Diversity

There is a need for more diversity within the nursing workforce in order to eradicate healthcare disparities. The study demonstrates that diversified nursing courses have experienced enhanced care outcomes among diverse patients. Moreover, mixed staffing patterns have been evidenced to offer fair care outcomes since cultural and social factors relating to health problems are considered. Studies have also shown that students who attend various clinical practice settings provide culturally competent care and engage with a higher level of patient empathy (Baker et al., 2017).
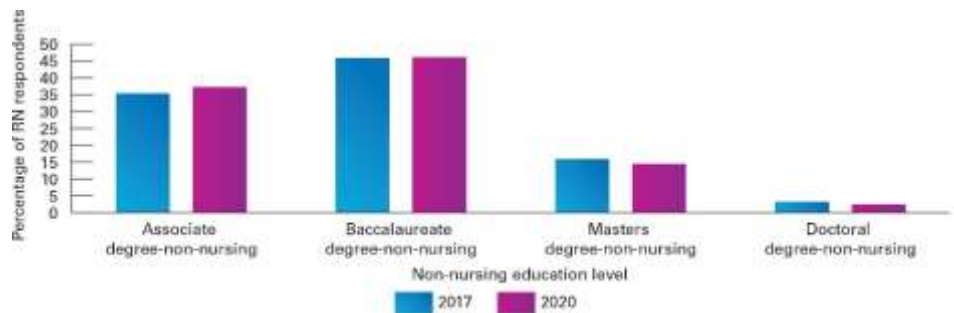
Note. In the 2013 and 2015 surveys a single question "What is your highest level of education?" was asked with the set of possible responses including both nursing and non-nursing degrees. The degree types were separated for the 2017 AND 2020 surveys.

(Greenwood et al., 2018)

Policy Advocacy for Healthcare Equity

Nurse leaders are even more engaged in policy to reduce inequities in healthcare than ever before. A literature review has documented how often nurse leaders such as those within organizations, including the American Nurses Association (ANA), have led healthcare reforms and equality in healthcare services policies. Nurse advocacy has played an important role in lobbying for minority peoples' health insurance, expanding public health programs, and removing disparities in maternal and child health, among other things (Gitterman, 2015).

Discussion

The study highlighted the importance of nursing in advocating for care equality for different patients, recognizing that nurses are the primary providers of patient care in achieving health outcomes. The following are some key areas where Nursing contributes to this mission: as caregivers, community members, health policy-makers, and leaders. This practice approach enables nurses to create effective change in inequalities of access to healthcare on both micro and macro levels.

Managing Social Risk Factors

Nurses are well-placed to address the social determinants of health (SDOH) or the places and circumstances where people live, learn, work, play, and age. Preconditions include SDOH elements encompassing economic status, education, housing, employment opportunity, and community support. These SDs are easily identifiable by nurses who have direct and passive contact with patients and can refer them to other care and resources. During patient evaluations, the nurse discovers various social, economic, and ecological factors that affect the patient and makes a referral to a community and support systems.

For example, the nurses in community health facilities work hand in hand with social workers and other carers who take care of the patients with consideration of medical and socio-economic aspects of the disease process. Nurses can address those factors throughout patients' early lives, improve their health status, decrease rehospitalization rates, and promote health promotion in vulnerable populations. Healthcare personnel also call for policy adjustments that affect such factors regarding adequate provision to those areas of high demand. This occurred from any shift in the provision of care because it is proved that when

nurses actively identify patients' social determinants of health, the positive self-perceived and actual health enhancement in vulnerable patients is enhanced (Edelman & Mandle, 2019).

Culturally Competent Care

Since health disparities continue to persist based on cultural background, culturally relevant care is a deliberate approach to lowering such disparities and enhancing the results of a patient. Culturally competent nurses can approach this care delivery concept by considering cultural, linguistic, and patient preferences. This competence is especially crucial in managing inequalities encountered by racial and ethnic minorities, immigrants, and, in general, the oppressed groups who could meet cultural and linguistic barriers while seeking medical treatment.

Promoting culturally competent nursing care has been said to strengthen the relationship between the nurse and the patient and facilitate interfacing with the patient to the extent of compliance with the recommended treatment plans (Saha et al., 2008). The above topics are very insightful in enhancing nursing care because when nurses accept the cultural background of their patients, it becomes easier to treat them. This includes understanding how cultural concepts impact a patient's perception of health and explaining illnesses for behavioral responses to treatment regimes. For example, a nurse with cultural knowledge about dietary restrictions will better understand decisions concerning nutrition education in light of a condition such as diabetes or hypertension among multicultural communities.

However, culturally competent care is more than the translation of languages. It involves being aware of unique health predilections and susceptibilities of given groups, like high blood pressure and diabetes affecting blacks and Hispanics, respectively. These issues, if addressed with an innate understanding of the cultures in question, can easily be solved, thus reducing health inequality and enhancing access to required health care among such population groups.

Nursing Education and Workforce Diversity

Education and diversification of the nursing workforce are probably the largest ways nursing can improve healthcare equity. A study proves that staff diversification is crucial to transforming nursing and eliminating the health gap among different population groups. Procuring and training employees from all parts of the geographical regions improves understanding of health care requirements within the various cultural, ethnic, and economic groups in the society. These reasons state that diverse nursing teams can understand and deliver culturally appropriate patient care and find ways of optimum communication and service delivery that will be suitable in the eyes of particular cultural groups.

Adapted from Smith, D.G. (2020) Diversity's Promise for Higher Education

(Andermann, 2016)

Nursing education diversity, therefore, is an essential component of the reform measures that will help redress the imbalances in health systems. However, several challenges deny a unit's accomplishment of a diverse nursing staff. These are economic factors, for example, the cost of nursing education; institutional barriers, including the lack of role models, particularly amongst people of color; and structural factors within the health care setting that would limit the likelihood of people of color to pursue nursing as a profession. The barriers that the nursing programs should minimize include providing more scholarships, more sufficient opportunities for mentorship, and a more diverse environment in the nursing programs. Moreover, efforts such as hiring diverse nursing faculty and integrating diversity into nursing students improve the cultures of nursing graduates.

There has been some improvement; nevertheless, issues persist. The source shows that attempts to increase diversity in the nursing workforce have been slow. According to the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN), concerted efforts have been made; however, minority nurses are underrepresented in the U.S. workforce, especially among senior leadership, on a daily basis. This underrepresentation reduces the ability to affect change at the institutional level within healthcare organizations and stifles the advancement of healthcare equity at an organizational systems level.

Advocacy and Policy Leadership

Due to this, nurses have an important duty to support policies in the health sector that will correct the imbalance observed in the current health care sector by enhancing equity and equal distribution of care services. The results of this study supported the following proposition: Nurse leaders play significant roles in developing healthcare policies that focus on the provisions of special groups(Freeman & Richards, 2019). Because of their capability to shape the policy regime, they are arguably the best change agents of the system.

As healthcare personnel, nurses are responsible for advocating for healthcare at the local and national levels. There are also opportunities for advancing change at the local level where the nurses can gain policy changes at a healthcare institution level, engage in policies that support patient-centeredness, support health promotion, and collaborate with organizations in addressing the social factors that cause health inequities during practice. At the national level, the nurses can conduct lobbying and be members of lobby groups, for instance, the ANA, to attain policies that seek to deliver equal treatment in the health facility, for example, by seeking approval of the expansion of Medicaid or enactment of governmental health insurance.

Leadership-qualified nurses also lobby for policy change bills that eliminate health disparities. For example, critical population groups are currently included as health coverage recipients through nurse advocacy, enhancing health programs, and decreasing health inequities in primary areas like maternal and under-aged child health. Nurses' advocacy activities influence policies affecting aboriginal people, rural and disadvantaged urban dwellers, and colored people.

Challenges and Future Directions

There is still a long way to go, as nurses have much to do to enhance healthcare equity. System-related barriers, including insufficient funding to nursing programs, especially in rural settings; insufficient political backing for nursing leaders to advocate for nursing policies; and persistent deficiency of a proficient nursing corollary, restrict the application of nursing intercessions. In addition, for sustainable changes in the contextual factors that underlie healthcare equity, one has to look for solutions outside of personal. The elimination of health disparity will, therefore, require major shifts in funding towards public Health, redesign of health organizations, and dismantling financial and organizational barriers.

However, to build on this foundation to extend nursing scope and promote healthcare equity, there is a need to invest in nursing education and workforce development, especially for minority nurses. There is a

need for nursing schools to come up with better ways of admitting minority students to the nursing profession. On the other hand, healthcare organizations should consider being supportive of the diversity of nurse employees. Further, nursing leaders must ensure they support the policies that drive the improvement of healthcare disparities, including poverty, healthcare access, and racism.

Nursing plays a crucial role in meeting healthcare equity due to the social determinants of Health, cultural competence, workforce diversity, and policy to promote health equity. However, more needs to be done to overcome the obstacles hindering diversity in nursing and to provide every person with the opportunity to get high-quality treatment. In so doing, I argue that with their education, leadership responsibilities, and community involvement, nurses will remain strategic in enhancing people's access to fair healthcare services.

Conclusions

The study proves that nursing contributes greatly to healthcare equity and shows that nurses work to overturn social factors that cause health inequality, cultural sensitivity, and policy influence. In order to build upon nursing's ability to address healthcare inequity, there is a need for systems change that addresses the dearth of programs that promote diversity in nursing education, promote nurses's participation in policy change, and increase funding for community health education programs.

Recommendations

1. Increase Diversity in Nursing Education: Purposefully grow scholarships, mentoring opportunities, and support from entering the nursing workforce to patients' representation.

2. Promote Culturally Competent Care:

3. Facilitate culturally competent care by including cultural competency training in the curriculum of basic nursing education and continuing education programs.

4. Support Nurse-Led Policy Advocacy: Equip nursing professionals' leadership postures to champion health policies that support equity, such as access to health facilities by vulnerable groups.

5. Address Social Determinants of Health: Foster collaborations between healthcare providers, community organizations, and social services to address the broader factors that affect health outcomes.

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