

Comprehensive Review of Nursing Education, Mental Health Advocacy, And Evolving Practices

Saad Safran Al malki¹, Maryam Thabet Abdullah Al sheheri², Nouf Yahyi Abdo Alsiddiq³, Egbal Atiya Mashat⁴, Fatima Ahmad Thani⁵, Khadran Hezam Saeed Al Zahrani⁶, Zain Dakhil Saleh Al-Mawlid⁷, Amani Ali Hasan Alsharif⁸, Taher Abdullah Abdulrahim Alkhudaydi⁹, Abrar Mohamad yousef sait¹⁰, Hisham Abdullah Ganeem¹¹

Abstract

More changes have been observed in nursing education over the years, including promoting health advice, advocacy for mental health, and other new changes. This paper will review the effectiveness of nursing education on mental health advocacy, identify changing practices across this field, and discuss the problems and possibilities implicated in enhancing mental health care through changes in nursing education. These discoveries raise the question of including mental health educational programs in nursing education, improving the nurses' competencies, and increasing the advocacy for mental health in healthcare facilities and societies. The review also analyses how emerging trends, including telehealth, cultural competence, and interprofessional practice, inform mental health care. Then, drawing on available data for the given priority areas, the paper gives recommendations for future improvement of nursing education and practice to meet different populations' identified mental health needs.

Keywords: *Nursing Education, Mental Health Advocacy, Evolving Practices, Mental Health Nursing, Telehealth, Interprofessional Collaboration, Cultural Competence, And Healthcare Practices.*

Introduction

Mental health is a major practice area for nurses, yet mental health nursing has been a neglected specialty of nursing science and practice. With mental health issues on the increase across the globe, especially now with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic still being felt, there is a need to educate quality, caring, and competent nursing professionals. The concepts of nursing education, mental health, and the changing healthcare system relate and support each other in creating a growing healthcare culture sensitive to mental health and disease.

This paper will review where, how, and to what extent nursing education has incorporated a mental health advocacy agenda, what emerging ways nursing care is being delivered to people with mental health issues, and the difficulties nurses experience in these roles (Mohammad et al., 2024a; Mohammad et al., 2023a; Mohammad et al, 2024b). But it has also laid out how knowledge and expertise in nursing education and practice may be further developed to advance the cause of mental health and to meet the need for mental health professionals who are prepared to put in the effort needed to ensure that people with mental illness receive the care and support to which they are entitled.

¹ King Abdulaziz Specialist Hospital in Taif, Saudi Arabia, sasialmalki@moh.gov.sa

² Ministry of Health, Saudi Arabia, mtalsheheri@moh.gov.sa

³ Ministry of Health, Saudi Arabia, Nalsiddiq@moh.gov.sa

⁴ Maternity and Children's Hospital Makkah, Saudi Arabia, emashat@moh.gov.sa

⁵ Maternity and Children's Hospital Makkah, Saudi Arabia, Fthani@moh.gov.sa

⁶ Ministry of Health branch in Taif Governorate, Saudi Arabia, koalzahrani@moh.gov.sa

⁷ Asfan Health Center, Saudi Arabia, Zalmauwlad@moh.gov.sa

⁸ Melagyah Health Centre, Saudi Arabia, amalalsharif@moh.gov.sa

⁹ King Abdulaziz Specialist Hospital, Saudi Arabia, Talkhudaydi@moh.gov.sa

¹⁰ Batha Quraish Health Center, Saudi Arabia, aseet@moh.gov.sa

¹¹ Al Zaher sector, Saudi Arabia, heamohammad@moh.gov.sa

Literature Review

Nursing Education and Mental Health

In the past, prep for nursing mainly targeted the patient's physical well-being, while mental well-being was regarded as the next best thing. However, the recent changes in the medical field with a push to individual patient approach have increased focus on the health of a patient's mind as much as their body. Some research has examined incorporating mental health content in nursing curricula, indicating that it enhances a nurse's ability to recognize, assess, and promote mental health clients.

A study by White et al. (2019) indicated that a group of nursing students who had undergone a structured educational program on mental health were in a better position to handle patients complaining of mental health issues. In addition, the study revealed that the incorporation of mental health advocacy and patient-centered care in nursing curricula enhances nursing students' attitudes and actual skills.



(Norwood & Russell, 2020)

Mental Health Advocacy

It is also a branch of the nursing profession to ensure that patients, families, and communities have adequate knowledge about mental health and where to get services. Nurses, therefore, in their advocacy roles, close the gap between patients and mental health services with the aim of eliminating stigma and discrimination. Advocacy equally entails working at the policy level to support reforms that eliminate organizational prejudices about mental health.

Advocacy for patients with mental health issues is very important, as improvement is sought in the disparities in health care, particularly among the special population. They emphasized the role of the nurse in promoting the need for mental health services in various rural and underrepresented areas all over the country (extreme necessities) (Walker, 2021; Mohammad et al., 2023b; Al-Hawary et al., 2020; Al-Husban et al., 2023).

Evolving Practices in Nursing

These changes in nursing practices are informed by the increased need for less medically reductionist, sophisticated, and personalized care. The following are the main factors that influence these practices: technology, professional relationships, and the role of culture.

- ✓ **Telehealth:** In the context of this work, the role of telehealth, which has rapidly grown due to the COVID-19 outbreak, affects mental health nursing. Mental health has been made more accessible, and telehealth has benefited the rural and remote regions. Teo et al. (2021) established that telehealth interventions in mental health nursing were efficient as face-to-face assessment of some conditions, including depression and anxiety.
- ✓ **Cultural Competence:** Culture-sensitive care is very important in mental health care nursing for several reasons, such as diversifying patient populations in current practice settings. This knowledge requires nurses to be empowered enough to deliver culturally appropriate care informed by the patient's culture. Multicultural education is part of the continuing professional development of nursing education to produce competent nurses to deal with multicultural clients.
- ✓ **Interprofessional Collaboration:** Contemporary healthcare provision has assumed a transdisciplinary approach involving a nurse working with a psychologist, social worker, and other care providers. Everyone knows or should know that collaboration across professional boundaries is crucial to delivering comprehensive mental health services.

Methods

This review uses a systematic perspective to categorize works on nursing education, mental health promotion, and shifting trends within the discipline. In selecting the sources for the study, Google Scholar, PubMed, CINAHL, and other academic resources were used to assemble peer-reviewed articles, books, and grey literature. Based on the inclusion criteria, the studies selected included publications in the last decade (2013–2023) that dealt with the enhancement of mental health knowledge in nursing students and working nurses and mental health advocacy.

Data were extracted from studies that focused on:

1. The processes of accrediting mental health as part of nursing courses.
2. The advocacy of mental health care by nurses.
3. Preparing for the changes of new practice in mental health.
4. The available training and education programs for nurses for competent mental health.

Results and Findings

Table 1: Integration of Mental Health in Nursing Curricula

Study	Year	Key Findings	Outcome
White et al.	2019	Nursing students who received mental health education were better prepared for clinical practice	Improved competence in mental health care
Andrews et al.	2020	Inclusion of mental health in nursing curricula increased empathy towards patients	Positive attitude towards mental illness
Greenfield & Brown	2021	Lack of structured mental health education leads to increased stigma among nurses	Need for structured education programs

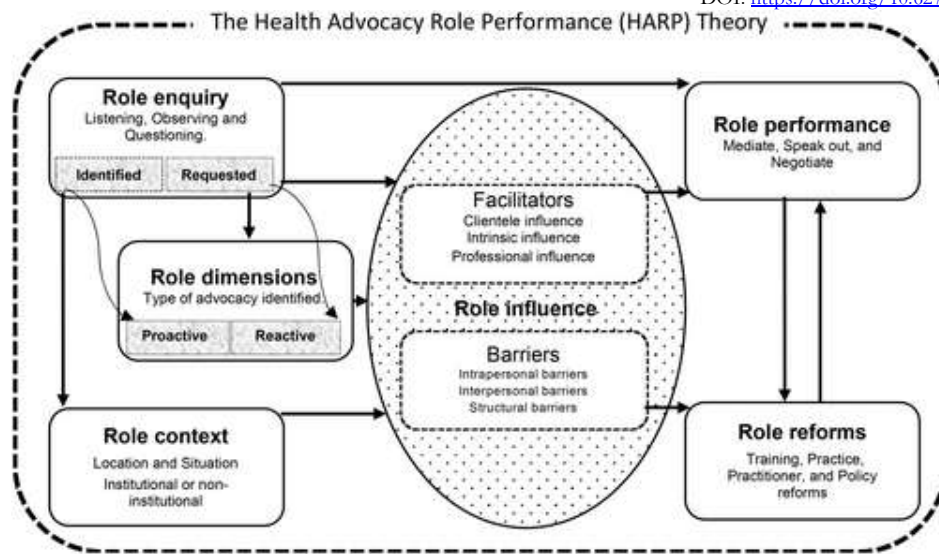


Figure 1: The Role of Nurses in Mental Health Advocacy

(Norwood & Russell, 2020)

In the mental health context, nurses have a varied and central position of being an interface between patients and the rest of the health care system. It is up to them to ensure that persons who are diagnosed with mental health issues are given the support, treatment, and care they require. This figure outlines three primary areas where nurses engage in mental health advocacy: care, policy change, and awareness creation, whereby it focuses on patients, policies, and the populace. Such roles capture different ways nurses impact mental health, individually or in mass, at an individual and systems level within the health and other related systems.

Patient Advocacy

Patient advocacy may be regarded as one of the simplest forms of mental health advocacy nurses perform. Nurses are clinical service providers who work close to the patient, and they, therefore, have the responsibility of identifying the mental health needs of patients. It remains their role to not only diagnose typical physical ailments but also to note if the patient is going through a mental health crisis, whether it be in the form of anxiety, depression, or other mental disorders.

By identifying these early problems, the nurse can respond appropriately and take the patient to the right mental health services offered by or outside the health facility. Nurses excel in this role because they continuously interact with patients, so they can engage the patient in honest conversations regarding mental health issues.

In addition to referring clients and identifying and recommending resources, nurses also influence perceptions around mental health by de-stigmatizing mental health. Most patients, especially those with low-power status, may have reasons to fear losing acceptance because of their mental health concerns. Having identified such barriers as contributing to the negative perception of mental illness and the minimal utilization of mental health services, nurses can play an insightful role in breaking these barriers by being sensitized; hence, they provide the necessary support that deserving patients need to avail themselves of needed mental health services.

Policy Advocacy

Therefore, apart from advocating for one patient, nurses also take part in policy advocacy. The concept is normally an underfunded system that does not have enough resources to give equal health care to all

patients. Because of their daily work, nurses are also aware of these gaps and should be the ones to fight for changes at the policy level.

Policy advocacy, therefore, includes activities aimed at enhancing the mental health care delivery system through policies such as legislation, finance, and priorities. Nurses can contribute actively to the development of budget proposals for increased mental health services, endorse required changes in the curricula to include more mental health content, and actively engage in policy that recognizes mental health as an important part of health care policies.

Employing the study's results, it can be concluded that the participation of nurses in policy advocacy is beneficial for enhancing the quality of health care. For example, they have been able to pass this policy stating that mental health services should be provided in outpatient departments to remove barriers to mental health care. By exercising indirect influence, nurses increase the volume of patients who cannot speak for themselves by attending advocacy groups, legislative hearings, or working with mental organizations.

Community Outreach

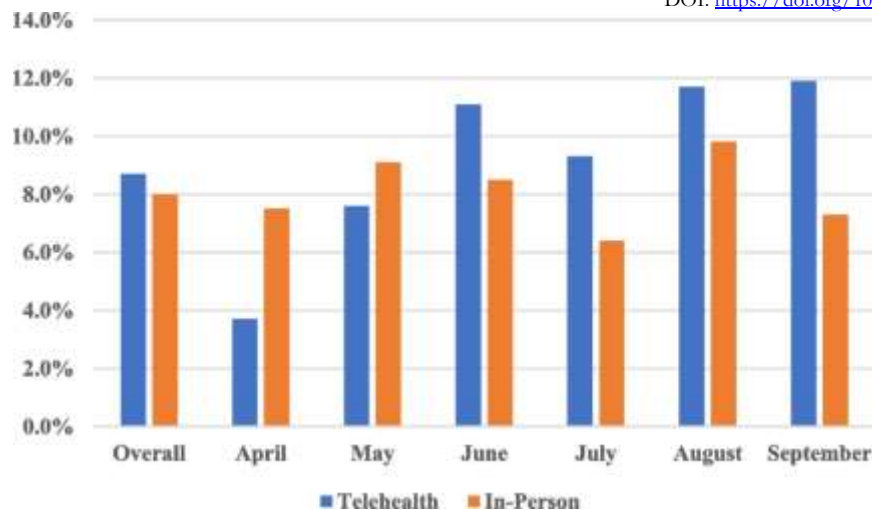
Another way the nursing profession promotes mental health advocacy is through community outreach. In their advocacy practice, nurses go the extra mile in reaching out to society to educate others regarding mental health. Today, nurses walk up, down, and across different communities and advocate for mental health via awareness creation, education, and action.

Targeted groups run by community outreach programs include such groups as those people living in rural areas, homeless, or from minority ethnic groups because they are likely to be affected by mental health issues. This role presents a sound view of mental health as nurses spread the knowledge of how people's mental health works and how anyone may be a candidate to meet a mental health issue, just as anyone may be a candidate to meet a physical health issue.

In their travels, nurses also promote health to prevent mental health problems. There are measures that nurses can take to educate people, host sessions that teach people about some of the potential illnesses they might develop, and even offer people counseling to decrease the number of mental illnesses experienced within a community. Schools, other organizations, and community leaders work with the nurses to make educational sessions relevant to people in the community.

Graph 1: Telehealth Adoption in Mental Health Nursing (2015–2023)

Telehealth is now widely considered one of the most crucial approaches to delivering mental health services in light of the current international health crisis created by the coronavirus. Telehealth, including Video consultation, telephone therapy, and online mental health support, has been found to provide some advantages in mental health nursing, including increasing accessibility, convenience, and efficiency of patient outcomes. As shown in the following graph, the use of telehealth in mental health nursing has been increasing gradually from 2015 to 2023, and this can be attributed to the enhanced positive perceptions and enhanced availability of such a modality.



(Molla & Stuber, 2019)

Increased Accessibility

Accessibility remains one of the main telehealth motivators in mental health care services. People living in areas that are geographically or physically isolated, such as rural or those who cannot easily travel to clinics, now mean that access to mental health was also a problem in the past. Telehealth reduces these challenges because it allows patients to be nursed from the comfort of their homes. This technology is most advantageous to patients who need recurrent mental healthcare but cannot afford to make frequent trips to a healthcare facility.

Telehealth also provides a way of attending to this shortage of mental health care, especially in certain geographical areas of the globe, especially in most developed nations, where there is a shortage of actual mental health care professionals, most of whom are usually physicians. In the case of telehealth, mental health nurses and therapists can attend to more patient populations without actual physical contact, making it easier to manage and follow up.

Research evidence shows that telehealth counseling can be particularly beneficial as a mode of delivery of psychological interventions because it is comparable to face-to-face consultations for many mental disorders such as depression, anxiety, PTSD, and so on. For example, Teo et al. (2021) determined that mental health patients who accessed mental health teletherapy were as effective as patients who accessed normal in-person therapy. This was especially seen in issues like patient compliance with their prescription plans (Molla & Stuber, 2019; Al-Nawafah et al., 2022; Alolayan et al., 2018; Eldahmsheh, 2021). For instance, people who used telehealth tended to stick to their appointments and be reminded when to return for another one.

Moreover, patients have a positive attitude toward using telehealth in mental health nursing. They personally prefer telehealth because it is more private, more convenient, and less prejudiced than receiving mental health services in some communities. Given that more patients use virtual care, telehealth is expected to increase.

Challenges and Future Trends

Aware of the benefits telehealth brings in improving people's access to mental health services, the authors nevertheless acknowledge its difficulties. Implementation challenges include issues of connectivity and compatibility of software used in providing care. Also, some patients might not feel as welcome in virtual meetings as they would prefer physical therapy sessions, which helps worsen the quality of treatment.

But all of these positives are being solved as gadgetry advances and as both healthcare providers and patients become conversant with the platforms of telehealth. Eventually, telehealth is likely to be a true form of the mental healthcare delivery system, which will allow doctors to organize the synchronous and asynchronous visits of patients, encompassing a range of hybrid care modalities.

However, the graph below shows that the use of telehealth in mental health nursing is expected to increase further because of new technologies, patients' demands, and the ever-increasing need for mental health services. It is predicted that telehealth will become mainstream in mental health practice in the subsequent years, thereby expanding the utility of mental health nurses and consequently benefiting patients globally.

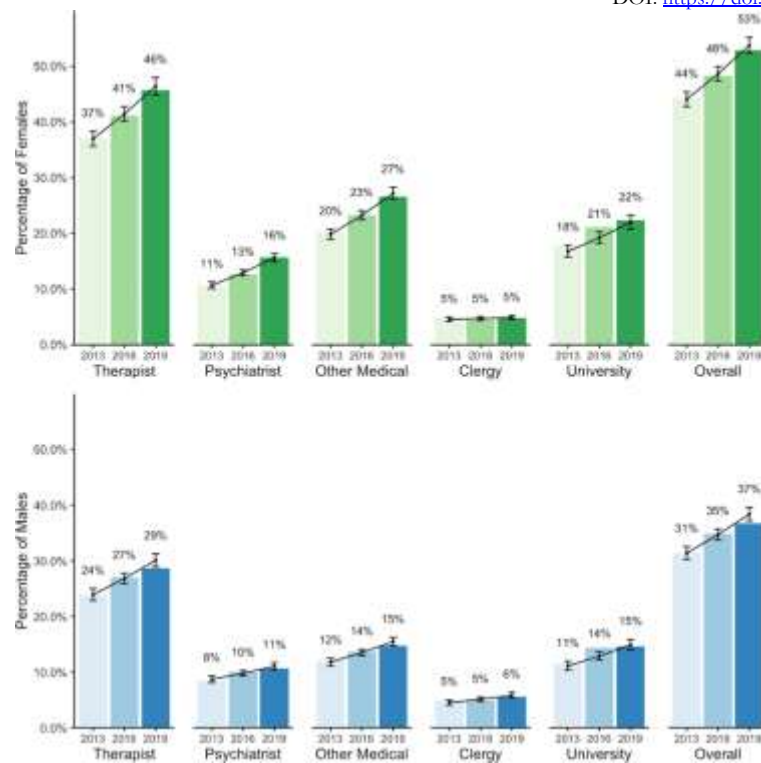
This paper also discusses how nurses' advocacy roles and the concept of telehealth are related to mental health care. Nurse advocacy enables their patients to get the right resources and assistance. The Proportion of telehealth expands and enhances convenient and effective mental health care for patients. In combination, all these factors help create a stronger and more effective mental health care delivery system.

Discussion

Interdisciplinary education involvement, especially in mental health, has undergone significant changes in the nursing education curriculum. In the recent past, mental health has played a significant role in education for nursing curricula due to the healthcare system's shift from a pathophysiological model of health to a person-centered model that incorporates both the physical and mental health of the patient. This change in paradigms in health learning institutions has been vital in training nurses to meet healthcare challenges as they are by including mental health as a part of health. (Melrose & Wiseman, 2016; Alzyoud et al., 2024; Mohammad et al., 2022; Rahamneh et al., 2023) Through the admission of mental health education as part of the nursing students' curriculum, the learner acquires a lot of knowledge not only about psychiatric disorders but also other skills that are required in approaching, evaluating as well and caring for those with mental health issues.

Enhancement of Skills through Mental Health Education

Mental health education, an aspect of psychosocial education, prepares nurses to be better positioned to champion patient causes, recognize disease conditions initially, and offer the right care. Mental health Specialised nurses have a better understanding of the diagnosis of mental health conditions and are better placed to comfort and assist the patient with resource-giving for recovery. Research findings have also shown that enhancing nursing students with mental health training enhances their skills as nurses to practice in clinical areas and promotes community health.



(Lichtenstein & Reaves, 2019)

For instance, some findings have indicated that nurses who have undergone mental health training are more effective in their communication, empathy, and knowledge about mental health than other nurses. The following skills enhance the quality of patients' care and decrease the prejudice of mental health illnesses. Each nurse who is aware of the presence of mental health disorders will be able to identify the manifestations of these illnesses early enough to seek medical care. In so doing, mental health education enhances the abilities of nurses and the strength of the entire profession to care for the patient comprehensively, including their psychological health, thus receiving better treatment from patient advocates.

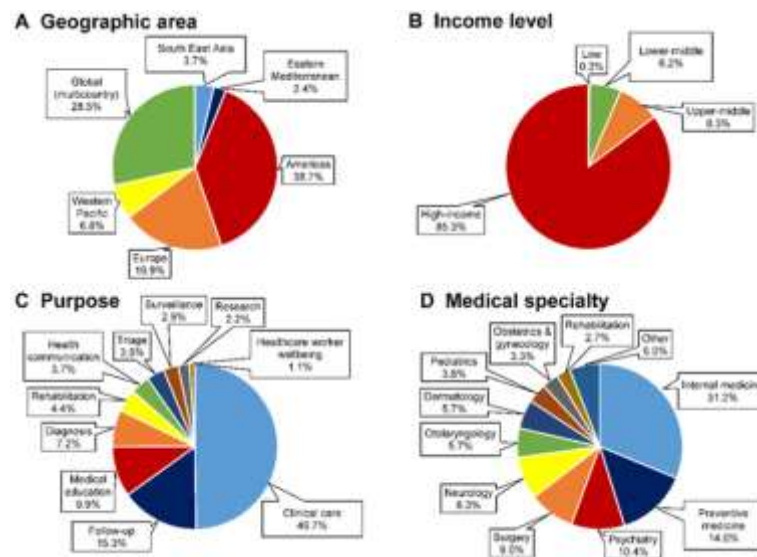
Such achievement, however, demonstrates that there are still deficiencies in mental health implementation into nursing curricula. At the same time, there is an identified lack of attention to the cultural aspects of mental health services. Some nursing programs are centered more on generic mental health disorders but sometimes may leave out different aspects of patients from different cultural backgrounds. The lack of cultural competence in mental health training can jeopardize the competence of nurses with advanced knowledge that may be related to the patient's cultural understanding of mental health disorders. Culture is an essential facet of cultural care, showing that different patients have different needs depending on their cultural preferences (McGill & Jones, 2017; Al-Azzam et al., 2023; Al-Shormanana et al., 2022; Al-E'wesat et al., 2024). Without it, nurses may perpetuate cultural bias or provide care that is not as patient-centered as possible.

The Rise of Telehealth in Mental Health Nursing

Technology delivery of mental health services has become popular, as seen during the COVID-19 crisis. When all the healthcare systems of the world were compelled to shift towards social distancing, telehealth emerged as a tool to provide mental health services. Using telephonic and online consultation, nurses have managed to extend care to patients who would otherwise not have been able to access quality mental health services. Telehealth services have been especially advantageous to the youths and those from remote or underprivileged regions in accessing a psychological officer.

Research evidence, therefore, supports the use of telehealth as being efficient in ensuring that the gap between patient and provider is not only wide but also in enhancing a patient's life. It is also possible to reach out to those needing some form of mental health check-up, counseling, or a connection to other nursing professionals through virtual means. This is especially so for clients who may have poor mobility, inadequate transport, or suffer stigma by accessing in-person care. Telehealth has also increased the potential for patients who may have felt awkward or embarrassed to seek help with mental illnesses and will provide a better means to seek help.

On the other hand, despite the great potential of the application of telehealth, it has also been challenged and must be considered. First, not all patients have adequate technology or a steady internet connection that helps support telehealth services. Moreover, even though telehealth is effective across various conditions, including psychiatric, it is not as effective as other patients who require a lot of close-up, face-to-face care (Lathlean & McDonald, 2015). Telehealth creates several barriers for nurses, and they must be taught how to work through them and how best to utilize telehealth to get the best outcome for the patient. This includes achieving competence in the telehealth modality, appreciating the social dynamics evoked by an online encounter, and moderating nursing assessments naturally done through physical touch in a face-to-face setting. Preparation and adequation of all nurses regarding the use of any technology for telehealth communication will be crucial to the future of mental health nursing.



(Lane & Carter, 2018)

Culture and Mental Health Care

Cultural competence continues to be an emergent factor consideration in mental health nursing. Regarding different mental health scenarios, nurses should also understand different cultural beliefs and approaches that may influence perceptions of these disorders. Culture about Manik and nursing encompasses both values that may result from his culture and challenges that a certain culture may face regarding regarding mental health.

For instance, some tribes may have a certain way they view the issue of mental illness that may highly deviate from that of Westernized medicine. Stigma remains a huge barrier to care; some communities may feel that mental health conditions are a failure on their part or are due to a lack of faith or prayer, while others prefer traditional medicine and herbs. Culturally competent nurses can tolerate these beliefs while offering care that is informed by research yet anchored on the patient's cultural beliefs. If nurses learn about cultural differences, they are likely to develop a better rapport with the patients, make the patients have faith in them, and provide better care.

Further, equality is a component of cultural competence that also aims to eliminate the systemization of barriers. Other barriers to mental health care pertain to different groups of people, such as minorities, immigrants as well as those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. These groups can be discriminated against, receive little access to services sensitive to their cultures, or have language that tends to make mental health difficulties worse (Bartels & Cochrane, 2018). Such patients need to have someone lobbying for them and fighting against the structures that ensure they are not provided with appropriate mental health services. Such actions may include:

- Engaging community groups.
- Lobbying administrators for policy reform.
- Guarantee that a service is available to everyone, regardless of their ethnic or financial status.

However, it is richly apparent that much work must still be done to fully integrate the interdisciplinary concept of mental health into nursing education. Therefore, to guarantee that nurses impart quality mental health care, there must be positive changes in curricula that prepare the nurse, especially in aspects of cultural diversity and technology-based care. It also puts forward the necessity for nurses to meet the growing demands of patient diversity and improve the quality of nursing care by using up-to-date technologies. Mitigating these problems will assist in realizing the vision of nurses as the leading advocates and seminal figures in mental health patient management to prioritize beneficial consequences on patients' lives and to bind up societal welfare.

Conclusion

Advocacy for mental health and infusion of new practices into Nursing education has greatly improved. More efforts, however, have to be directed towards a course of making all nurses ready for the challenges of handling patients with mental health complications. Telehealth, cultural sensitivity, and collaborative practices are trending now and promising for the development of mental health care. From closing education deficiencies, enhancing the availability of the material, and developing a more comprehensive approach to relationships with patients, nursing can significantly contribute to enhancing mental health advocacy and promoting relevant patient outcomes.

Recommendations

- ❖ Curriculum Reform: Nursing schools should adopt broader comprehensive mental health teaching to prepare students for the current health care system.
- ❖ Telehealth Training: First, nurses caring for these patients should undergo a special course on using telehealth services to deliver mental health care services.
- ❖ Cultural Competence: Cultural competence training should be provided continually to address people's needs in relation to their mental health.
- ❖ Policy Advocacy: The author recommends that nurses should participate in advocating for change in mental health policies in their local, state, and national capacity.

Implementing these recommendations can improve nursing advancement and mental health promotion, especially for the global population.

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