



THE ROLE OF NURSES IN PROMOTING MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

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Abstract:

Background: The prevalence of mental health problems has been on the rise globally, highlighting the importance of Mental Health First Aid provided by individuals in the social network of those affected. Nurses play a crucial role in promoting mental health and well-being through various interventions and strategies.

Objective: This review aims to explore how nurses can promote mental health and well-being among their patients, examine specific interventions and strategies used by nurses, assess the impact of nurse-led mental health promotion initiatives on patient outcomes, identify barriers and challenges faced by nurses in promoting mental health, investigate the training and education needs of nurses in mental health promotion, and examine the attitudes and beliefs of nurses towards mental health and well-being promotion. **Conclusion:** Nurse-led mental health promotion initiatives have shown significant improvements in patient outcomes by emphasizing patient education, personalized care, evidence-based practices, and community outreach. Despite facing barriers such as stigma, resource limitations, time constraints, lack of training, and heavy workloads, nurses' attitudes and beliefs towards mental health promotion significantly impact the quality of care provided. By addressing these challenges and fostering positive attitudes and beliefs, nurses can continue to play a crucial role in improving mental health outcomes for individuals and communities.

Keywords: Mental Health, Nursing, Schools, Mental health promotion strategies

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Introduction:

The occurrence of mental health issues has shown a consistent rise over the years. In 1990, an estimated 655 million individuals globally were dealing with mental disorders, a number that surged to around 970 million by 2019 [1]. Consequently, the general populace is increasingly coming into contact with individuals facing mental health challenges, presenting an opportunity for providing initial assistance. This primary aid is typically offered by someone within the social circle of the individual experiencing mental health issues, such as friends and family, rather than by mental health professionals. The assistance provided to someone with a mental health condition, until professional help is available or the situation is resolved, is commonly referred to as Mental Health First Aid [2]. Examples of mental health first aid actions include supporting the use of relaxation techniques and aiding in connecting with a mental health specialist. Encouragement from members of the social network, as highlighted by Wong et al., tends to make individuals with mental health problems more inclined to seek professional assistance [3].

It is essential for citizens to actively engage in the well-being of others when offering initial aid. The World Health Organization emphasizes that enhancing health literacy can enhance citizens' participation in personal and community health initiatives [4]. Health literacy encompasses the cognitive and social abilities required to access, comprehend, and utilize information for the promotion and maintenance of good health [5]. Mental health literacy involves understanding strategies for promoting positive mental health and preventing mental disorders, recognizing mental health issues and the associated stigma, being effective in seeking help resources, and knowing how to provide initial aid and support to others [6]. Therefore, promoting skills in mental health first aid is a means of intervening to enhance mental health literacy [7]. As per Tay et al., low levels of mental health literacy have been noted globally [8]. Hence, Mental Health First Aid Training Programs hold significant relevance, aiming to equip individuals with fundamental abilities to provide initial aid to those with mental health concerns. These training programs view their participants as an informal support network.

Numerous studies have outlined different interventions involving the concept of "Mental Health First Aid Training Programs." Costa et al. have identified these interventions along with their characteristics, participants, and implementation

contexts. These researchers have indicated that Mental Health First Aid Training Programs can be tailored for upper secondary students [9]. For instance, Hart et al. have documented positive outcomes from the integration of these educational interventions in classrooms for adolescents aged 15 to 18 years [10].

Schools serve as a conducive environment for promoting health literacy due to their diverse student population. School-based interventions have been linked to enhanced cost-effectiveness and positive health outcomes for communities [11]. In the context of Portugal, upper secondary education (level 3 of the International Standard Classification of Education) is universal, mandatory, and free. During this educational phase, students are expected to acquire comprehensive knowledge and skills to respond to situations, adapt effectively, and take on responsibilities [12]. Consequently, the objectives of schools align with those of Mental Health First Aid Training Programs.

Objectives:

The main objectives of this review are:

1. To explore the various ways in which nurses can promote mental health and well-being among their patients.
2. To examine the specific interventions and strategies that nurses can use to support mental health and well-being.
3. To assess the impact of nurse-led mental health promotion initiatives on patient outcomes.
4. To identify the barriers and challenges that nurses face in promoting mental health and well-being.
5. To investigate the training and education needs of nurses in relation to mental health promotion.
6. To examine the attitudes and beliefs of nurses towards mental health and well-being promotion.

Interventions and strategies used by nurses to support mental health and well-being:

Nurses play a pivotal role in promoting mental health and well-being by implementing a diverse range of interventions and strategies. An essential aspect of their work involves conducting a comprehensive assessment of patients' mental health status, encompassing an evaluation of psychological symptoms, behaviors, and risk factors. This evaluation enables nurses to identify individuals who may be vulnerable to mental health issues, facilitating early intervention [13].

Moreover, nurses offer crucial emotional support and counseling to patients, aiding them in managing stress, anxiety, depression, and other mental health challenges. They also educate patients on mental health conditions, treatment options, and self-care practices to empower them to actively manage their mental well-being [13].

In terms of strategies, nurses frequently utilize therapeutic communication techniques to establish a trusting and supportive rapport with patients. Effective communication in mental health care involves elements such as active listening, empathy, and a nonjudgmental approach. Additionally, nurses collaborate with various healthcare professionals, including psychiatrists, psychologists, and social workers, to devise comprehensive treatment plans for individuals with mental health disorders, ensuring holistic care that addresses physical, emotional, and social needs [14].

Furthermore, nurses engage in health promotion activities and prevention strategies to enhance mental health and well-being. They educate both individuals and communities on the significance of mental health, work to destigmatize mental illness, and raise awareness about available resources and support services. Nurses also advocate for policies and programs that bolster mental health, such as increased funding for mental health services, improved access to care, and enhanced integration of mental health into primary healthcare settings [15].

In acute care settings, nurses play a critical role in crisis intervention and suicide prevention. They assess patients at risk of self-harm, provide immediate support and supervision, and collaborate with mental health professionals to ensure prompt and appropriate treatment. Equipped with the ability to identify warning signs of mental health emergencies, nurses respond swiftly and effectively to avert harm [16].

Overall, nurses employ a diverse array of interventions and strategies to uphold mental health and well-being within individuals and communities. Through assessment, counseling, education, communication, collaboration, advocacy, and crisis intervention, nurses significantly contribute to the promotion of mental health and the prevention of mental illness. Their holistic care approach considers the intricate interplay of biological, psychological, social, and environmental factors influencing mental well-being. By acknowledging the importance of mental

health and integrating evidence-based practices into their care, nurses play a pivotal role in enhancing the overall well-being of individuals and society as a whole [17].

Impact of nurse-led mental health promotion initiatives on patient outcomes:

Nurse-led mental health promotion initiatives are increasingly recognized as essential components of healthcare systems worldwide, with a focus on improving patient outcomes and overall well-being by addressing the complex interplay of biological, psychological, and social factors that contribute to mental health issues [18]. These initiatives leverage the expertise and compassionate care of nurses to provide a holistic approach to mental health that extends beyond traditional medical interventions. Research has demonstrated that nurse-led initiatives can result in significant improvements in patient outcomes, such as decreased symptoms of anxiety and depression, enhanced quality of life, improved treatment adherence, and reduced hospital readmission rates.

A key aspect of nurse-led mental health promotion initiatives is the emphasis on patient education and empowerment, with nurses playing a crucial role in educating patients about their mental health conditions, treatment options, and self-care strategies [19]. By equipping patients with the knowledge and skills to effectively manage their mental health, nurses empower them to take an active role in their recovery journey. This patient-centered approach not only fosters autonomy and self-efficacy but also strengthens the therapeutic alliance between patients and healthcare providers, leading to improved treatment outcomes.

Furthermore, nurse-led initiatives often incorporate evidence-based practices such as cognitive-behavioral therapy, mindfulness-based interventions, and psychoeducation sessions to address the diverse needs of patients with mental health issues [20]. These interventions are tailored to individual preferences and circumstances, promoting personalized care that is responsive to the complexities of mental health conditions. By integrating these interventions into their practice, nurses can help patients develop coping skills, improve emotional regulation, and enhance overall resilience in the face of mental health challenges.

In addition to direct patient care, nurse-led mental health promotion initiatives also focus on community outreach and advocacy efforts to raise awareness about mental health issues and reduce stigma [20]. Nurses collaborate with other

healthcare professionals, community organizations, and policymakers to develop comprehensive strategies for promoting mental health and preventing mental illness. Through public education campaigns, support groups, and policy discussions, nurses play a vital role in creating a more supportive and inclusive environment for individuals with mental health conditions.

Overall, the impact of nurse-led mental health promotion initiatives on patient outcomes is profound and multifaceted, with nurses providing compassionate care, evidence-based interventions, and empowering education that significantly contribute to the well-being and recovery of individuals with mental health issues [21]. As healthcare systems increasingly prioritize mental health promotion and prevention, nurse-led initiatives will continue to play a crucial role in improving mental health outcomes and enhancing the overall quality of care for patients.

Barriers and challenges faced by nurses in promoting mental health and well-being:

Nurses play a pivotal role in advancing mental health and well-being, yet they confront a multitude of obstacles and difficulties in fulfilling this vital aspect of their profession. One of the primary hurdles faced by nurses pertains to the stigma surrounding mental health issues. Despite concerted efforts to raise awareness and diminish discrimination, mental health challenges are still often perceived negatively, resulting in hesitancy to seek help and accept treatment. This stigma can also influence how nurses approach mental health care, as they may encounter resistance from patients who feel ashamed or embarrassed about their condition [22].

Furthermore, the inadequate allocation of resources and funding to mental health services presents a significant challenge for nurses. Mental health is frequently not accorded the same level of importance as physical health in many healthcare settings, leading to restricted access to mental health professionals, therapies, and medications. This scarcity of resources can impede nurses' capacity to deliver comprehensive care to patients with mental health concerns, compelling them to operate with limited support and options. Additionally, the intricate and varied nature of mental health issues poses another obstacle for nurses [23].

Mental health conditions exhibit a wide spectrum of symptoms, causes, and treatments, making it

arduous for nurses to devise a standardized approach to care. Nurses must possess an in-depth understanding of various mental health disorders and their implications to offer effective support to patients. Moreover, the high prevalence of comorbidities among individuals with mental health issues introduces an additional layer of complexity to nursing care. Patients with mental health conditions frequently experience physical health problems as well, necessitating nurses to address multiple issues concurrently and coordinate care across different specialties [24].

Time constraints and heavy workloads also present significant challenges for nurses in championing mental health and well-being. In numerous healthcare settings, nurses are tasked with attending to a large number of patients with diverse needs, leaving them with limited time to focus on mental health assessments and interventions. The fast-paced nature of healthcare environments can make it challenging for nurses to engage in meaningful discussions with patients regarding their mental health concerns or offer continuous support and counseling. Additionally, the emotional strain of caring for individuals with mental health issues can result in burnout and compassion fatigue among nurses, further impeding their ability to provide quality care [25].

Another impediment faced by nurses is the deficiency in training and education in mental health care. While nursing programs typically cover fundamental concepts of mental health, many nurses feel ill-prepared to address the complex requirements of patients with mental health conditions. Opportunities for continuing education in mental health are frequently limited, leaving nurses without the requisite skills and knowledge to deliver evidence-based care. This gap in training can contribute to feelings of inadequacy and uncertainty among nurses when managing mental health issues, impacting the quality of care they provide. In conclusion, nurses grapple with a myriad of barriers and challenges in advancing mental health and well-being among their patients [26].

From stigma and resource constraints to the intricacy of mental health conditions and time limitations, nurses must navigate various hurdles in their endeavors to offer comprehensive care. Overcoming these challenges necessitates a multifaceted approach that involves destigmatizing mental health, augmenting resources for mental health services, enhancing nurses' education and training in mental health care, and prioritizing

mental health on par with physical health in healthcare settings. By addressing these barriers, nurses can better cater to the mental health needs of their patients and contribute to enhanced overall well-being in the communities they serve [27].

Attitudes and beliefs of nurses towards mental health and well-being promotion:

Nurses' attitudes and beliefs play a crucial role in shaping the effectiveness of their interventions and the outcomes of patient care within the realm of healthcare [28]. Various factors such as their educational background, training, personal experiences, and the prevailing organizational culture can significantly influence nurses' perspectives on mental health and well-being promotion. Studies indicate that nurses who have undergone specialized training in mental health care tend to exhibit more favorable attitudes towards promoting mental well-being and are more inclined to partake in activities that enhance the welfare of their patients. Furthermore, nurses with personal or familial encounters with mental health challenges often demonstrate heightened understanding and empathy towards individuals grappling with such issues [29].

The beliefs that nurses harbor regarding mental health and well-being promotion also hold sway over their professional conduct. Some nurses may harbor stigmatizing beliefs about mental illness, perceiving it as a sign of personal weakness or a character flaw rather than a legitimate health concern. Such beliefs can impact the quality of care provided by nurses to individuals facing mental health issues and may contribute to the perpetuation of stigma within healthcare environments. Conversely, nurses who espouse more positive and empathetic beliefs about mental health are more likely to interact with their patients with compassion and understanding, ultimately leading to enhanced outcomes and increased levels of patient satisfaction [30].

Moreover, the attitudes and beliefs of nurses towards mental health and well-being promotion can be influenced by the organizational setting in which they operate. Healthcare institutions that prioritize mental health care and offer resources for staff training and support are more likely to have nurses who are actively involved and motivated to champion mental well-being among their patients. Conversely, organizations that do not prioritize mental health care may have nurses who feel inadequately prepared or unsupported in their endeavors to promote mental well-being,

potentially resulting in suboptimal outcomes for patients [31].

Conclusion:

In conclusion, the research article highlights the increasing prevalence of mental health problems globally and emphasizes the crucial role of Mental Health First Aid provided by individuals in the social network of those affected. Nurses play a vital role in promoting mental health and well-being through various interventions and strategies, including assessment, counseling, education, communication, collaboration, advocacy, and crisis intervention. Nurse-led mental health promotion initiatives have shown significant improvements in patient outcomes, emphasizing patient education, personalized care, evidence-based practices, and community outreach. Despite the barriers and challenges faced by nurses, such as stigma, resource limitations, time constraints, lack of training, and heavy workloads, their attitudes and beliefs towards mental health promotion significantly impact the quality of care provided. By addressing these challenges and fostering positive attitudes and beliefs, nurses can continue to play a crucial role in improving mental health outcomes for individuals and communities.

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