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Artificial Intelligence–Enhanced Wound Care to Improve Access, Efficacy, and Equity in Wound Care for Older Adults in Rural and Remote Regions of Canada

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Abstract

Wound care is an increasing global challenge, with older adults among those most affected. As populations age, the demand for effective and efficient wound care increases. Over the years, various wound assessment and care techniques have been developed, including digital wound care technology (DWCT), which uses innovative artificial intelligence (AI). Many older adults, especially those living in rural and remote areas, face significant barriers in obtaining timely and effective wound care, leading to poorer health outcomes and increased health care costs related to wound care. These challenges underscore the urgent need to implement wound care models that equitably improve access to care and enhance clinical outcomes, particularly for older adults, to promote healthy aging and age-in-place. Based on evidence from the literature and the initial implementation of a DWCT in 2 community health systems in Ontario, this viewpoint paper encourages clinicians and health care leaders to embrace and expand the implementation of an AI-driven DWCT to address inequities in access to high-quality, timely care. The experiences from these implementations indicate that the use of AI can support clinical decision-making and extend access to care for individuals in rural and remote communities in Canada. By leveraging DWCT powered by AI, health care providers can enhance the accuracy and consistency of wound assessments, improve communication, streamline care processes, and more effectively allocate resources, ultimately aiming to reduce disparities in wound care outcomes.

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KEYWORDS

wound care; AI; equity; artificial intelligence

Introduction

Wound care represents a growing challenge worldwide, particularly impacting older adults [1]. As populations age, the demand for effective and efficient wound care increases, driven by the growing number of older adults with multiple chronic conditions that predispose them to complex wounds and longer healing times. Many older adults, especially those living in rural and remote areas, face significant barriers in obtaining timely and effective wound care, leading to poorer health outcomes and increased health care costs [2]. These challenges underscore

the urgent need to implement wound care models, which equitably improve access to care and enhance clinical outcomes. Traditionally, wound assessment is conducted visually to evaluate anatomical, physiological, and mechanical domains [3] or with subjective methods such as the Pressure Ulcer scale for Healing (PUSH) and Pressure Sore Status Tool (PAST) scales; these methods are widely used, can lack accuracy and consistency, leading to variable wound evaluation reports when administered by different clinicians [4].

With advances in science and technology, a range of instruments has been developed to address the growing demand for wound care. Among these, noninvasive imaging techniques have received particular attention for their potential to support wound assessment and monitoring. A systematic review of 20 studies done in 2015 summarized available approaches, including 2D stereophotogrammetry and 3D imaging methods. The authors concluded that 2D imaging is a practical wound measurement technique, offering ease of use and reliable assessments of wound size and healing progress; however, they noted that its inability to capture wound depth limits its value for care planning [5]. Building on this, a 2022 scoping review of 156 global studies examined the development, evaluation, and implementation of digital health technologies (eg, imaging and measurement) for wound care [6]. This review highlighted growing adoption of digital tools, citing evidence of their acceptability, feasibility, effectiveness, and clinical impact. At the same time, it identified important challenges, including limited evidence in hard-to-reach populations (eg, those in remote regions), low uptake linked to noninclusive design processes, and uncertainty around cost-effectiveness. It is essential to note that this review was not specifically tailored to older adults, a population at elevated risk of wound development and delayed healing due to comorbid conditions, and who also experience disproportionate barriers to care arising from age-related, geographic, and socioeconomic factors.

This study is a forward-looking perspective that highlights the current context of wound care in Canada and explores the potential for artificial intelligence (AI) driven digital wound care technology (DWCT) to improve access, efficiency, and equity. The authorship of this study reflects the multiple perspectives shaping this work, including 2 community health systems implementing a DWCT, the evaluation team supporting that implementation, academic and government partners advancing digital health innovation, and representatives from the company developing the technology. By bringing together these complementary experiences, we aim to provide a salient commentary on the merits of AI-augmented DWCT and its potential to advance equity, access, and efficiency in wound care in Canada.

The initial implementation of a DWCT in 2 rural and/or remote community health care systems, presented here as case studies, illustrates the contextual challenges faced by health care providers and patients while also offering practical insights into the technology's application and benefits. Discussion of anticipated challenges in implementing AI technologies in wound care provides a roadmap for future research directions, including identification of potential facilitators and barriers to adoption and uptake of the DWCT in the 2 networked community health systems. The potential for AI in transforming health care delivery is vast, particularly in the field of wound care, and can play an important role in ensuring that all patients receive high-quality, equitable care across diverse geographies.

Wound Care in Canada

The Canadian population is experiencing a significant demographic shift, with older adults (65 years and older) rapidly

becoming the fastest-growing demographic, and by 2051, they could represent 25% of the population [7]. Aging is associated with the accumulation of cellular and molecular damage within the body, which can manifest as frailty and/or chronic health conditions [8], which increases vulnerability to complex wounds, meaning the number of older adults needing wound care is anticipated to increase substantially in the future [9]. Although the exact prevalence of wounds requiring care in Canada is unclear, estimates suggest that up to CAD \$11.1 billion (US \$8.18 billion) are spent annually on wound care [9]. Approximately 1 in 500 Canadians develops nonhealing wounds [10], which significantly impacts the health care system [11]. In Ontario alone, 30% - 50% of health care delivery involves patients with wounds, predominantly affecting older adults who often heal at home [11].

In 2019, older adults constituted 17% of Canada's population but accounted for 47% of total health care costs [10]. Rural and remote areas of Canada are aging more rapidly than their urban counterparts [12]; yet, they often have fewer health resources, especially health human resources (HHR) [2]. This lack of access to timely treatment for complex wounds leads to improper treatment of up to 25% of Canadian patients [13]. Chronic wounds impose significant physical and emotional burdens, decreasing patients' quality of life and increasing health care costs [14,15]. Without regular, high-quality care, these wounds can lead to serious complications such as infections, hospitalization, amputation, and even death [1].

The complexity of wound care is exacerbated by limited opportunities for comprehensive wound care education for health care providers, who typically receive fewer than 10 hours of formal instruction [16]. During training, health care providers are taught to provide quality care and maintain optimal functioning, including the treatment of health conditions such as wounds, through supportive, preventive, therapeutic, palliative, and rehabilitative care. However, these professionals need additional training to fulfill the specific needs of care and their respective professional scope of practice. For example, the College of Ontario of Nurses specified the scope of practice for registered nurses (RNs), registered practical nurses (RPNs), and nurse practitioners (NPs), which includes 5 regulated acts, including performing a prescribed procedure below the dermis or a mucous membrane [17]. While this authorized act consists of wound assessment and wound care, which are at the entry level, nurses with advanced education, such as NPs, have an extended scope of practice and are authorized to diagnose, prescribe medications, and other treatments for clients [17]. Similarly, British Columbia has specified the pacified authorities at entry level and advanced level, which is presented in the Wound Care Canada by Freeman et al [18]. In addition, the British Columbia Provincial Nursing Skin & Wound Committee, in collaboration with the wound care clinicians from across all health authorities, has devised the wound assessment and treatment flow sheet: documentation guide (version 2, 2018) that specifies nurses' roles with regard to wound assessment and documentation for varying types of wounds [19].

Traditional methods for tracking wound healing progress, such as using a paper ruler and cotton swab for wound assessment, result in high clinical variability and a 44% error rate in infection

identification [20]. Furthermore, health care education and wound care tools have traditionally been developed with lighter skin tones in mind, leading to inaccurate assessment for patients with darker skin [21]. Additionally, rural communities in Canada are diverse, not only in terms of geographic characteristics such as population size, density, or distance from urban centers, but also in social aspects, including social representation and resource availability [18,22,23]. There is growing concern regarding the shortage of health care providers in remote and rural regions, further intensifying the issue of care access for older adults. The Canadian Institute for Health Information reports on the declining trends of health professionals in rural or remote areas, including for nurses, NPs, and pharmacists over a decade, and stagnant growth for rural family physicians [2]. Reducing health disparities, particularly in rural and remote areas with finite resources, requires innovative solutions, including consultation models and enhanced access to best practice care [24]. These dual drivers, population aging and uneven resource distribution, underscore the urgent need for effective health care solutions that:

1. Enable individuals to age in place while living with aging-related health conditions, including chronic and complex wounds.
2. Support the provision of best-practice clinical care in areas where specialized health care human resources are limited.
3. Reduce the challenges associated with human error and biases.

To meet these needs, innovative technologies such as AI offer promising solutions that can enhance efficiency, access, and quality in health care delivery.

AI-Enhanced Wound Care as a Solution

AI has the potential to transform medical practices and service delivery in health care, including enhancing productivity, improving patients' flow, experience, care, and quality of life [25] and enhancing providers' experiences and safety [25,26]. The positive impacts of AI in clinical care include enhanced accuracy in diagnostics, improved patient engagement, and increased treatment support [25]. AI has been leveraged in wound care, providing more efficient and effective solutions for acute and chronic wounds [27]. AI-driven algorithms have proven effective in measuring wound dimensions and identifying prognostic features, such as tissue composition, granulation, slough, eschar, and exudate. These elements are crucial for assessing wound burden and predicting the healing trajectory [28].

Our Implementation Experience: Project and Team

To illustrate how AI-augmented wound care can enhance equity, access, and efficiency, we draw on our collective experiences implementing a DWCT in 2 networked Canadian community health systems. The following section describes the technology itself, the project sites, and the multidisciplinary team involved in its adoption, highlighting both practical considerations and lessons learned in real-world settings.

The Digital Wound Care Technology

The DWCT under implementation, Swift Skin and Wound (Swift), is developed by Swift Medical Inc. and is deployed in more than 5200 health care facilities internationally, spanning the continuum of care. Swift Skin and Wound is a software-based, noninvasive digital wound assessment application installed on smart devices. The software captures clear imaging enhanced by HealX (Swift Medical Inc), a Health Canada and US Food and Drug Administration-registered fiducial marker for real-time calibration of wound images on smart devices, using AI-driven algorithms that auto-trace wound edges, precisely measure wound surface area, and facilitate comprehensive documentation [29]. These features offer advanced analytical and tracking insights to clinicians, empowering them with data-driven assessments to support wound care management [28,29]. This DWCT also enhances communication among the interdisciplinary care team through the centralized dashboard portal, which provides a comprehensive, real-time view to support coordinated care management. The dashboard enables the care team to review patient information, track progress, and provide recommendations, facilitating coordination of care.

Recently, Swift Skin and Wound added additional features: AutoDepth, SmartTissue, and HealingIndex. AutoDepth automatically calculates the visible depth of wounds, measures the wound, and accurately identifies and records its deepest point on a smart device. SmartTissue detects and quantifies tissue types including epithelial, granulation, slough, and eschar within the wound bed, irrespective of skin tone, using deep learning and vision architectures designed to run locally on a wide range of smart devices [30]. HealingIndex uses deep learning and machine learning algorithms to analyze a range of wound characteristics, including wound size, tissue composition, wound type, location, and wound exudates' type and amount to predict healing trajectories of wounds [28]. By using these sophisticated AI-driven algorithms, providers can achieve rapid and precise assessments of wounds and their characteristics and use predictive modeling to project healing trajectories and inform clinical decision-making for care plans (Figure 1).

Figure 1. A sample wound on the ankle area, showing a clinical presentation where objective and consistent wound assessment, supported by an artificial intelligence–driven tool for measurement and tissue classification, can enhance effective monitoring, especially in settings with limited access to specialized expertise.



Evidence from implementations, mostly in US health systems, indicates that integrating Swift's DWCT into wound care programs can improve clinical outcomes [31,32], enhance operational efficiency [29,32], reduce costs [31-33], and increase clinician satisfaction [34].

While other digital wound care technologies exist, this viewpoint focuses on Swift's DWCT because the authorship team is uniquely positioned as active implementation partners in Canadian health systems. We draw on the published literature to provide context and evidence, but we triangulate these insights with our direct, real-world experience to highlight equity, access, and efficiency considerations that emerge in practice, providing insights that would be difficult to capture from literature alone.

Project Description

This project uses an implementation research approach to evaluate the adoption of the DWCT in 2 networked Canadian health systems, aiming to identify facilitators, barriers, and lessons for broader AI-driven wound care implementation.

Implementation Site 1: Giishkaandago'Ikwe Health Services

Giishkaandago'Ikwe Health Services (formerly Fort Frances Tribal Area Health Services) is an Indigenous-led health organization in Northwestern Ontario. The accredited organization provides holistic health services to the 10 Anishinaabe Communities of Southern Treaty 3. The Home and Community Care Program offers essential services in the home and community setting, including advanced wound care through a nurse-led DWCT tool.

Giishkaandago'Ikwe initiated implementation of the DWCT in February 2022 as a quality improvement initiative. This site has particular expertise in leveraging technology to provide care across remote geographic regions. Given the high amputation rates in the region, the home and community care team implemented the DWCT to strengthen decision-making for wound management through efficient documentation and communication, with the goal of enhancing healing rates and reducing amputations.

The interdisciplinary wound care team includes RNs, RPNs, including 2 Skin Wellness associate nurse (SWAN)–trained RPNs, personal support workers (PSWs), and a physiotherapist with advanced wound care training (Masters of Clinical Science in wound healing). In total, the team includes 14 wound care clinicians, supported by a wound care champion and a home and community care coordinator. Foot care nurses conduct wound assessments and communicate findings to the home care team, while other community health nurses contribute through public health programming and wound care support.

Team members complete an 8-hour online wound care training upon hire if they do not already have advanced wound care education. In addition, the team participates in an annual, full-day, hands-on internal wound care workshop to reinforce clinical skills. Weekly SWIFT rounds provide structured opportunities for case review, collaborative problem-solving, and ongoing knowledge exchange.

Implementation of the DWCT was completed over 1 month, supported by training and mentorship from both SWIFT and the site's internal champion (the home and community care coordinator). Initial training consisted of a 1-hour virtual session, followed by ongoing support throughout the implementation period. Due to the team's small size, strong collaboration, and

existing wound care expertise, adoption of the technology was rapid and well integrated into practice. The AutoDepth feature has been actively used in patient care, and team members completed SmartTissue training in January 2025.

Implementation Site 2: Brightshores Health System (Brightshores)

Brightshores Health System is a comprehensive health care network serving the rural Gray and Bruce counties in Ontario, Canada. It operates 6 hospitals (Owen Sound, Meaford, Markdale, Southampton, Wiarton, and Lion's Head), each with 24/7 emergency departments. Brightshores services encompass medical and surgical services, including complex surgeries, total joint replacements, cancer treatments, advanced diagnostic imaging such as magnetic resonance imaging and computed tomography scans, and wound care. Across the system, over 400,000 visits per year are reported, and approximately 2200 staff members with over 250 dedicated physicians deliver patient care across the region, including wound care.

Implementation of the DWCT began in 2024, initially within the regional diabetic foot ulcer clinic. Within months, 35 clinical staff were trained as technology champions, and by October 2024, the DWCT was rolled out to multiple departments across all 6 hospitals. Initial training was performed in-person (2.5 h) with an asynchronous online portion (1.5 h) facilitated by the research team and a nurse specialized in wound, ostomy, and continence (NSWOC), with a focus on use of the AI technology, clinical data entry education, and workflow processes. Users included RNs, RPNs, clinical coordinators, NPs, nurse clinicians, and PSWs. Within 6 months, it was noted that the turnover of staff necessitated continuous training opportunities. An online training module has been developed specifically for the Brightshores sites, which will be more accessible and enable quicker onboarding for staff across multiple sites. Deployment of SmartTissue began in December 2024 and continues across sites.

Discussion

AI-Powered Digital Wound Care Could Improve Access, Enhance Efficiency, and Address Inequities

Overview

Wound care is a critical component of comprehensive home health services. The prevalence of older adults as recipients of

home care is notable, with a substantial proportion necessitating wound care due to conditions such as pressure injuries, postsurgical recovery, and complications arising from venous ulcers. Older adults prefer to receive wound care in community settings [35], citing pain, transportation barriers, and risk of exposure to infection in the clinic as primary drivers of preference [36]. Patients and family caregivers frequently report feeling inadequately prepared to participate effectively and confidently in wound care [37]. The presence of nonhealing wounds and associated complications can profoundly affect quality of life, increasing risk of infections and hospitalization [38].

Access

In the Canadian context, the potential for an AI-enhanced DWCT to increase access to best practice care is particularly significant. The "Caring for Canadians" study highlights a significant gap between the supply and demand for HHR in Canada, a gap that is already evident and expected to widen over the next decade, with rural and remote communities feeling the impacts most acutely [39]. Specialist HHR, such as NSWOCs or additional training in wound care, is in high demand. However, recruiting and retaining specialized health care workers is challenging, which has led to the adoption of innovative, technology-enhanced care models to optimize resource use [2,24].

In Canada, geographic location is a primary factor determining access to care, with isolated and remote communities experiencing the highest levels of deprivation [40]. These communities are frequently located in northern regions of the provinces and territories and are often home to Indigenous groups [40]. First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people, along with those of African, Caribbean, Southeast Asian, and Latin descent, have higher prevalence and incidence of diabetes and higher rates of lower extremity amputation because of diabetic foot ulcers and peripheral arterial disease [41]. This is particularly evident in Indigenous populations, where the rate of major amputations due to diabetic wounds is up to 49 times higher than in non-Indigenous populations [42]. This may be attributable to poor access to health care, barriers to clear communication, cultural differences, and discrimination [43]. Within this context, the AI-augmented DWCT offers an opportunity to increase access to best practice care by leveraging available resources and supporting available staff to work at the frontiers of their scope of practice (Textbox 1).

Textbox 1. Case study: Giishkaandago'Ikwe Health Services.

The team at Giishkaandago'Ikwe Health Services uses digital wound care technology (DWCT) for all aspects of wound assessments. Leveraging this technology has strengthened communication internally and externally with care partners. Enhanced communication is central to improved outcomes, illustrated here through a client story.

A client was referred by the Emergency Department after seeking care for painful, reddened foot wounds that had worsened following several weeks of self-treatment. The team initiated a comprehensive wound assessment completed by a personal support worker (PSW) using the SWIFT app. PSWs are unregulated care providers who assist individuals with activities of daily living (ADLs) and instrumental activities of daily living (IADLs).

A holistic treatment plan was then created by the interdisciplinary team during SWIFT rounds. Giishkaandago'Ikwe Health Services mobilized available staff to provide care, ensuring they were supported to work to their full scope of practice. The client observed weekly progress through the app, which increased their engagement and adherence to the care plan. The team also used dashboard-generated reports to share wound progress with external health care providers.

Through this collaboration, the client's care was escalated appropriately, enabling timely access to vascular surgery and chiropody for specialized offloading. The client received these services in a tertiary center and was able to return home promptly, with the Giishkaandago'Ikwe team providing ongoing follow-up.

Despite a late start to wound care and the need for surgical intervention, the client's wounds fully healed within 5 months—an excellent outcome for a case at high risk of amputation. Importantly, the majority of the client's care occurred within their home community, minimizing disruption to their family and caregiving responsibilities. The ability to coordinate and communicate effectively across providers using DWCT was key to avoiding prolonged hospitalization and ensuring continuity of care close to home.

In the Giishkaandago'Ikwe Health Services case study, the DWCT enabled a PSW who had direct contact with the patient to complete a wound care assessment even though this typically would be conducted by nursing staff. The DWCT tool enabled the team member who was geographically co-located to effectively capture the data needed for the wound care team to create a full care plan, without requiring the patient or the specialist providers to travel. In such scenarios, AI-augmented DWCT can support an available staff member to work at the frontiers of the scope of practice while maintaining direct connections for clinical escalation and consultation when needed.

This is particularly relevant in the Canadian rural and remote context, where geography and inclement weather can act as a barrier to access. A 2020 review of barriers to equitable access identified the lack of year-round roads, extreme winter weather events, and the absence of rural and remote hospital staffing as key contributors to poor access to care in Indigenous communities [44]. That same review identified telehealth and telehealth-enabled consultation models as a mitigator of inequitable access. Furthermore, the review noted that telehealth enables community health workers and nurses to provide additional services in their local community and reduces the burden on patients to travel long distances to access care. This has important implications for equitable access, as community care providers typically have higher levels of trust and greater ability to provide culturally safe care [45].

The DWCT augments traditional “telehealth” in wound care by adding empirical data in the form of high-quality, time-lapsed photos in a “dashboard” that can be accessed by patients, caregivers, and the entire wound care team. This enables tracking of wound trajectory and gives contextual clinical data to geographically remote specialist providers such as NSWOCS, endocrinologists, and vascular surgeons. Additionally, the dashboard supports team communication as it offers a shared point of reference to facilitate collaborative care planning. In the context of an optimized scope of practice, this feature provides an additional layer of protection—ensuring specialized

clinical oversight of geographically remote patients being cared for by practitioners working at the frontier of scope of practice. Furthermore, this supports staff who may not have clinical training in wound care by providing avenues for consultation and escalation to complement their clinical judgment. Ultimately, this benefits patients who receive care from a trusted provider in their community, while retaining the benefit of review and consultation from clinical experts.

The AI-augmented features of the DWCT expand access to best practice care by (1) enabling patients in remote communities to access services without necessitating travel, (2) empowering clinicians practicing in rural and remote communities to work with an optimized scope of practice, and (3) supporting communication and ensuring all members of the care team have access to relevant clinical information.

Efficiency

Optimization of clinical resources is required to ensure efficiency and maximize the number of patients who receive best practice care. The AI-enhanced DWCT tool can increase clinical efficiency by conducting rapid assessment of wounds and streamlining consultations and escalations [28]. A key component of effective wound care is assessment of wound size. Traditionally, this is done with paper rulers, and the wound size is calculated using a formula that multiplies length by width. However, this traditional method is ill-suited to irregularly shaped wounds, leading to overestimation of size in 36% - 74% of nonrectangular wounds [46-48]. Patients with darker skin tones, wounds characterized by diffuse edges, irregular shapes, necrotic tissue, or unhealthy surrounding tissue are more prone to having their wounds overestimated in size [46]. A more accurate calculation of wound size can be captured using a tracing method, where transparency film is placed over the wound and outlined, but this is reported to be time-consuming [49]. Accurate and objective measurement of wounds is essential as a change in wound size is a key predictor of wound healing trajectory [5]. Digital wound measurements powered by AI are emerging as a more efficient and accurate means to measure wounds [46,50-52] (Textbox 2).

Textbox 2. Case Study: Brightshores Health System.

Brightshores Health System is spread throughout 8600 square kilometers in Southwestern Ontario. Residents are among the oldest average age in the province, with the fastest-growing segment of the population aged between 65 and 84 years. The region has a significant population of patients with chronic disease and wounds, but Brightshores is limited to 1.4 Nurses Specialized in Wound, Ostomy, and Continence (NSWOC's) for the 6 hospital sites.

This means that daily, multiple wounds can present at any one of Brightshores hospitals, and the reality of limited resources means limited and delayed response time. Furthermore, without access to specialists and with limited tools, frontline nursing staff struggle to accurately assess wounds. The DWCT has presented an opportunity for frontline staff to take photos of wounds, allowing for accurate and detailed assessments that can be digitally accessed by the NSWOC and all providers within the circle of care. Providing frontline staff at all 6 hospital sites with a tool to accurately assess wounds allowed for a reduction in reliance upon the NSWOC.

Within the first year, over 1000 km of NSWOC travel time has been saved, allowing them to devote more time to direct patient care. Since the implementation of this DWCT, initial trends show a promising decline in amputation rates and fewer visits of outpatient wound care patients attending the emergency departments due to wound complications, compared to the previous year. Patients are reporting that their assessments performed with the DWCT are more comfortable than traditional methods and are reporting that the use of DWCT has improved their wound care experience.

In one patient's story, the patient felt discouraged about the lack of visual improvement they were able to detect with their eyes. With the use of the DWCT and historical measurements, the patient was able to monitor progressive wound closure, aligning with compliance to treatment recommendations, and was happy to experience a full wound closure within a month of using Swift.

Brightshores' continued hope is that the use of this technology will empower nurses to gain confidence and become more involved in wound assessments, enabling prioritization of wound care, and that this technology will enable patients to see progression in healing over time.

This case study highlights the benefits of tools that enable the clinical care team to optimize their time and streamline processes for escalating concerns to specialized care resources. Use of the DWCT is faster and clinically equivalent in accuracy compared to manual methods of wound measurement and capture [29,53]. Enhanced DWCT reduces the overall time required for wound measurement and documentation and has been shown to result in an average time saving of 1.01 - 2.39 minutes per wound assessment when compared to the traditional manual methods [29]. Given the known constraints on clinicians' time, burden of documentation, and anticipated workforce shortages, these time savings represent an opportunity to increase both efficiency and access.

AI tools can also help identify and escalate wounds that require review. HealingIndex is a new feature of the DWCT that uses machine learning algorithms to assess the photographs of the wounds that are submitted by clinicians. This tool analyzes the photo to identify wound characteristics associated with healing including wound size, tissue composition, and exudates, to predict the healing trajectories of the wound. The HealingIndex AI Model uses deep learning techniques to examine patient wound records, images, and characteristics, producing a score from the AI model that indicates the level of risk for delayed healing and potential deterioration [28].

While traditional care pathways rely on clinicians identifying and escalating wounds that are deteriorating or at risk of deteriorating, the HealingIndex automates these processes using a predictive algorithm. This allows the wound care team to rapidly identify and prioritize wounds that require specialist input. This identification reduces the risk of deterioration and complications that necessitate hospitalization or amputation, reducing overall health care costs associated with wound complications [1,31,38]. Furthermore, the use of this AI tool can identify wounds at risk for slow healing, which may require an adapted wound management protocol. By reducing complications and adapting the treatment of slow-healing wounds, the AI tool can reduce the overall costs associated with wound care [31]. Early identification of wound deterioration is

crucial as it allows timely intervention, preventing progression and potentially leading to significant savings for the health care system through avoidance of unnecessary costs [34].

The use of the predictive algorithm may also augment clinical decision-making by identifying wounds that are healing effectively and therefore may not need daily or thrice-weekly dressing changes. Reducing the frequency of dressing changes reduces supply costs and frees patient and provider time. Reducing the frequency of dressing changes to once a week, where clinically appropriate, can free up thousands of hours of nursing time over the course of a year [54]. Overall, the AI-powered DWCT can enhance clinical efficiency by automating escalation and review processes.

Additionally, the DWCT platform provides opportunities for asynchronous collaboration. Specialists are able to review patient records, including high-resolution time-lapse photos, and provide recommendations without requiring geographic co-location or congruent timing. This enables the specialist wound care nursing team to optimize their time by reducing travel between sites, reducing administrative burden, and creating care plans that can be executed by staff located near the patient. This offers the benefits of not only efficiency but also equity, as access to best practice care and consultation is no longer limited to the fortunate few who can be reviewed by the specialist nurses in person. In rural and remote parts of Canada, which, as noted above, are struggling to recruit and retain skilled providers, these tools enable more patients to access specialist consultation and review without necessitating travel.

AI-powered DWCT can support increased efficiency by (1) reducing time spent on manual assessment and measurement of wounds; (2) automating escalation by flagging deteriorating wounds for review, which enables prioritization of at-risk patients for intervention; and (3) enabling collaboration between frontline staff and specialist wound care resources without requiring geographic colocation or time alignment.

Equity

Universality and accessibility are embedded within Canada's Health Act, and equity must be centered as a priority. Inequities in the Canadian health system exist, especially related to disparities in health outcomes for rural and remote populations, and disproportionately affect First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities who face burdens associated with travel and costs [44]. Rural health care policies are often guided by urban care models, which can exacerbate these inequities for rural communities [24].

Many rural, remote, and Indigenous communities experience inequitable access and poor outcomes, which may be attributable in part to resource shortages. Additionally, human biases, racism, colonial legacies, and historically unbalanced relationships between service users and providers also play a key role. Nyugen et al [44] explicitly state "Colonization and historical intergenerational traumas... have plagued the survivors and later generations with physical and mental trauma," and "...many Health Care providers do not acknowledge the impact of colonization on the Indigenous community and disregard the social determinants of health as explanations for illness." This, in turn, manifests as culturally inappropriate health services, which deter people from seeking health care.

In this context, the AI-enhanced DWCT can support more equitable care by enabling community care providers with existing, trusting relationships to provide culturally safe care. This approach is aligned with mitigation strategies proposed by Indigenous health experts who highlight the importance of community partnerships and provision of culturally safe care [44,45].

Furthermore, patients with darker skin tones disproportionately experience poor wound outcomes, which may be attributable to both inequities in social determinants of health and limitations in provider ability to accurately identify clinically relevant changes in tissue in pigmented skin [55]. Johnson et al [55] note that erythema is an excellent example, as its presentation varies based on skin tone, and historically, medical education has failed to account for diverse skin tones in training and published literature [21]. Darker skin tone is associated with overestimation of wound size when using standard "width X length" measurements [46]. In comparison, the DWCT with AI-augmented AutoTrace, AutoDepth, and SmartTissue is able to provide accurate measurements and can enable color calibration to adjust for light conditions and skin pigmentation [46]. Thus, the use of the AI-enhanced DWCT can support more accurate measurements and potentially overcome some of the implicit biases that health care providers manifest.

Next Steps

While AI-enhanced tools offer immense promise to support better care efficiency and outcomes, there are several key

considerations that must be addressed to ensure equitable and trustworthy implementation. One of the pressing concerns is the representation of diverse patient populations in AI systems. When datasets fail to capture diversity across factors such as skin tone, age, and other demographic variables, resulting models can produce biased or inaccurate outputs. These biases are particularly problematic in clinical contexts like wound care, where diagnostic accuracy is critical. Diverse groups, such as individuals with darker skin tones or older adults, are often underrepresented in training datasets, leading to biases in AI outcomes. This underrepresentation can result in inaccurate diagnoses or recommendations, which are harmful and counter to the goals of quality wound care. Human biases embedded in AI systems can become enshrined or even amplified if not intentionally designed with equity in mind [25]. Such biases arise when AI models are trained on datasets that do not adequately represent the diversity of the population, including those most likely to experience wounds, such as older adults [56]. Chu et al [56] emphasize the known challenges of ageism in AI, noting that models often overlook older adults due to insufficient data representation. To counteract these biases, it is essential to increase the diversity of AI training datasets and maintain robust evaluation protocols that ensure accuracy and interrater reliability across patient populations. These safeguards are crucial in mitigating the risks of bias and ensuring that AI systems are fair and inclusive.

In addition to addressing bias, overcoming skepticism and implementation barriers is crucial for the successful adoption of AI-enhanced technologies, particularly among older adults. While the stereotype of older adults as technophobic is increasingly being disproven [57], structural barriers such as the cost of technology and access to reliable internet remain significant hurdles for many older adults in rural and remote communities [58]. Despite these challenges, patients are generally open to the use of AI in health care if appropriate regulatory and safety oversights are in place [59]. Pilot studies, such as those by Wang et al [52] and Raismam et al [60], show promising results regarding patient acceptance of AI for wound care [52,60] while Mohammed et al [34] highlight positive provider acceptance [34]. These studies indicate a growing receptiveness toward an AI-augmented DWCT, but continued exploration into unique barriers, especially those pertinent to the Canadian context, is necessary.

The evaluation being conducted by this team will enhance understanding of implementing AI-enhanced DWCT in rural and remote communities in Canada. This evaluation will identify specific barriers and facilitators of adoption, ultimately leading to the creation of a framework that supports wider adoption and integration of technologies to support healthy aging. By addressing these issues, the path toward equitable, efficient, and widespread use of AI technologies in health care becomes clearer, fostering a more inclusive technological future.

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Conflicts of Interest

Authors HTM and RDJF are current employees of Swift Medical Inc. Other authors have no conflicts to declare.

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Abbreviations

- AI:** artificial intelligence
- DWCT:** digital wound care technology
- HHR:** health human resource
- NP:** nurse practitioner
- NSWOC:** Nurses Specialized in Wound, Ostomy, and Continence
- PAST:** Pressure Sore Status Tool
- PSW:** personal support worker
- PUSH:** Pressure Ulcer Scale for Healing
- RN:** registered nurse
- RPN:** registered practical nurse
- SWAN:** Skin Wellness associate nurse

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Acceptance of Digital Technology Among Nursing Staff in Geriatric Long-Term Care: Systematic Review

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Abstract

Background: Digital technologies are increasingly being introduced into the health care system and in settings such as hospitals and geriatric long-term care (LTC) facilities, offering potential benefits such as improved care quality, reduced workload, or enhanced documentation processes. However, the success of these technologies also depends on the acceptance by the primary users, that is, the nursing staff.

Objective: This review synthesizes empirical studies that have explored the acceptance of digital technologies by nursing staff in geriatric LTC settings, building upon the foundational work by Yu et al (2009). The goal is to identify influencing factors, assess the extent of existing evidence, and highlight research gaps in this care setting.

Methods: A systematic literature review was conducted following PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) 2020 guidelines. The SPIDER (sample, phenomenon of interest, design, evaluation, research type) framework was used for eligibility criteria. Databases searched included PubMed, ACM Digital Library, Web of Science, and the Health Administration Database ProQuest. Studies were included if they empirically examined the acceptance of digital technologies by nursing staff in geriatric LTC settings. Two reviewers independently screened the studies, extracted data, and assessed methodological quality using the CASP (Critical Appraisal Skills Programme) checklist.

Results: A total of 3 studies met the criteria, highlighting a gap in research on this topic. The studies applied cross-sectional quantitative designs and highlighted critical determinants of technology acceptance, including perceived usefulness, ease of use, digital competence, and organizational support. The studies involved a total of 1019 participants from Germany, Australia, and the Netherlands. Barriers included lack of user involvement, lack of training, poor system design, and demographic differences in digital affinity.

Conclusions: This review shows that the acceptance of digital technologies by nursing staff in geriatric LTC settings is shaped by a constellation of individual factors, such as digital competence and perceived relevance of technology, as well as organizational factors such as access to training and involvement of staff in the implementation process. Despite these insights, the limited number of empirical studies highlights a research gap in this care setting. To ensure sustainable digital transformation in geriatric LTC, future research should prioritize rigorous and participatory approaches, using longitudinal, intervention-based, or multilevel study designs.

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KEYWORDS

digitalization; elderly care; health information technology; geriatric nurse; long-term care; LTC; nursing; organizational innovation; systematic review; technology acceptance

Introduction

Overview

“A promising approach to understanding social dynamics lies in conceiving our society as a globalized knowledge society undergoing a comprehensive and multifaceted digital transformation” [1]. The adoption of digital technologies in

health care and nursing care reflects the complex digital transformation taking place across society [2]. Digital technologies are already having an immense impact on how nursing care is delivered [3-10]. In elderly care settings, particularly in geriatric long-term care (LTC) facilities, digital technologies such as electronic health records, assistive robotic systems, telehealth apps, assistive sensory systems, information

and communication technologies, or artificial intelligence monitoring platforms [4,9,11] offer important opportunities to address current and future challenges [12-15]. These include workforce shortages, improving working conditions, or increasing the attractiveness of the nursing profession. The demographic shift associated with an aging population [16] is also one of the major challenges in this context. In Germany, the number of individuals in need of LTC rose to over 5.7 million people by December 2023 [17], with projections indicating a further increase in this number. In Germany, several programs were initiated for supporting the digital pathway [18,19]. The Bavarian State Chancellery decided in a cabinet meeting on March 19, 2024, to promote digitalization in health care and nursing. The goal is to further improve medical and nursing care for the population [20]. On the other hand, not only is the demand for LTC places increasing, but also the need for nursing staff in general is growing [21].

The real-world implementation of digital innovations in the health care system, especially elderly care, remains inconsistent and is frequently challenging [7,22-25]. One of the most significant challenges is the level of acceptance among nursing staff [26-29]. As the primary users of these technologies and new systems, nursing staff play a crucial role in determining whether such tools will be adopted and integrated into everyday work [15-19]. While research in acute and primary care has increasingly examined digital transformation through staff training, workflow redesign, and implementation frameworks, geriatric LTC remains comparatively underexplored. In acute care settings, digital competence programs and structured IT implementation strategies are often supported by institutional infrastructure [30,31]. Theoretical models such as the technology acceptance model (TAM) [32] or TAM2 [33] highlight that perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use are key predictors of user acceptance [34]. However, practical experience shows that digital transformation, especially in the field of care, often falters at the stage of user engagement, particularly when it fails to consider organizational, cultural, ethical, and educational conditions [2,5,10,35-38]. In geriatric LTC, where staff is more involved in basic care of older adults, these challenges become even more important [14,39-41]. A simple example of how digital technology in geriatric LTC could avoid high risks and time waste of the nursing staff is the occurrence of discrepancies between medication plans sent via fax by general practitioners and the actual administration records in nursing homes. Paper-based updates made during medical visits are sometimes not transferred into the official documentation, creating dangerous information gaps and avoidable risks for residents. This example illustrates how outdated communication practices and the lack of integrated digital infrastructures can compromise care quality and safety. It further highlights the importance of user-accepted digital solutions in daily nursing work and a scientifically grounded framework for implementation in LTC. Geriatric LTC facilities often face limited access to training resources and less technical and managerial support for digital adoption. Consequently, empirical evidence on how nursing staff in LTC acquire digital skills, engage in technology implementation, and perceive organizational support remains scarce. This gap underscores the need for research specifically focusing on acceptance factors,

training needs, and contextual barriers unique to geriatric LTC, rather than extrapolating findings from hospital-based studies. Despite the critical role of nursing staff in implementing digital innovations, scientific evidence addressing their perspectives, needs, and acceptance in LTC contexts remains very low [25,42].

Objective

Despite considerable political interest and investments in digital transformation, the success of such efforts in the care setting hinges on a crucial factor that remains underexplored, at least in the geriatric LTC, which is the acceptance of digital technologies by nursing staff. Their perspective is not only relevant but essential to the sustainable implementation of digital solutions in care. The primary objective of this systematic review is to synthesize existing empirical research that investigates the acceptance of digital technologies among nursing staff in geriatric LTC settings, building upon the work of Yu et al [39], which was one of the first studies with focus on acceptance factors among nursing staff in LTC, published in 2009. By identifying the most relevant influencing factors, the review contributes to a better understanding of the conditions under which circumstances digital innovations can be effectively and successfully implemented in geriatric LTC environments, with particular attention to the acceptance factors of the nursing staff in this setting.

Methods

Study Design

This systematic review was conducted in accordance with the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) 2020 guidelines (Checklist 1) [43]. For the development of the eligibility criteria, the SPIDER (sample, phenomenon of interest, design, evaluation, research type) framework [44] was applied to ensure a structured and targeted selection of studies.

Eligibility Criteria

The eligibility criteria and methodological steps were defined a priori; however, no protocol was registered for this review. The inclusion and exclusion criteria were defined in alignment with the SPIDER components (Table 1), focusing for instance on studies involving nursing personnel in LTC (sample); their acceptance of digital technologies (phenomenon of interest); and empirical research designs with quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods approaches (design and research type). This focus reflects the review's aim to identify scientific evidence on how acceptance shapes digital adoption among LTC nursing staff. The studies had to be peer-reviewed and published in English or German. Exclusion criteria comprised studies conducted only in hospital, outpatient, or home care environments, as well as research focusing on other professional groups without separately analyzing the nursing staff perspective. Although qualitative and mixed methods studies were eligible according to the SPIDER framework, no such studies met all inclusion criteria (ie, focus on nursing staff in geriatric LTC and explicit assessment of technology acceptance). As a result, all included studies employed cross-sectional

quantitative designs. This limitation is discussed in the *Results* and *Discussion* sections, but the inclusion parameters were retained to ensure methodological consistency and comparability across studies.

Table . Inclusion and exclusion criteria—SPIDER (sample, phenomenon of interest, design, evaluation, research type) components.

SPIDER components	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
S=Sample	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nursing staff employed in long-term care facilities (nursing homes, elderly care) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Studies focusing in general on non-nursing staff (eg, administrators, managers) Studies involving participants who are not working in long-term care facilities Studies with samples not clearly defined as nursing staff in geriatric long-term care
PI =Phenomenon of interest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acceptance, adoption, barriers, experiences related to digital innovations in care settings, including technologies like electronic health records, telehealth services, assistive robotics, digital documentation, sensory, ICT^a, IoT^b, AI^c-driven decision support systems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Studies focusing only on nondigitalized operations in long-term care Studies exclusively addressing competencies and education without looking at technology acceptance Studies not involving digital technologies
D=Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Intervention studies, observational or cross-sectional surveys, studies employing qualitative, mixed methods designs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nonresearch
E=Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outcomes related to staff attitudes, perceptions, barriers, willingness to use, fears, and facilitators to adoption, satisfaction, perceived usefulness of digital technologies in long-term care 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Studies not reporting on outcomes related to staff digital technology acceptance Studies focusing solely on managerial or administrative evaluations without staff input. Studies focusing only on nursing staff from hospitals or private home care settings
R=Research type	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods research focusing on the care employees regarding digital innovation adoption Peer-reviewed journal articles published between January 1, 2010, and December 31, 2024 in English or German 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conference papers, reviews, editorials, letters to the editor, and studies not published in peer-reviewed journals Publications not in English or German Studies published outside the specified date range before January 1, 2010 (except for Yu et al [39])

^aICT: information and communication technology.

^bIoT: internet of things.

^cAI: artificial intelligence.

Search Strategy

The search strategy employed an inclusive keyword combination, which was discussed and refined beforehand. Boolean operators were used to capture the intersection of acceptance, digitalization, technology, nursing, and geriatric LTC. The primary search string used was as follows: (“acceptance” AND (“digital technology” OR “digital” OR “technological” OR “artificial” OR “robotic” OR “digitalization” OR “artificial intelligence” OR “IoT” OR “robot” OR “virtual reality” OR “socially assistive robots” OR “digital tools” OR “telehealth” OR “Internet of Things” OR “EHR”)) AND (“nursing homes” OR “elderly” OR “geriatric” OR “inpatient home” OR “care facility” OR “nursing facilities” OR “nursing home” OR “aged care” OR “care home” OR “long-term care” OR “senior living center” OR “LTC”). Exact search strings for each database are documented in [Multimedia Appendix 1](#).

The literature search was conducted across PubMed, Web of Science, ProQuest, and the ACM Digital Library. These databases were selected to ensure broad interdisciplinary coverage of nursing, health care, and technology-related research. Gray literature was not searched systematically. However, 1 relevant report identified through manual search [45] was used to provide contextual information for the discussion and was not part of the primary evidence base.

Although specialized databases, such as CINAHL, were not included due to missing license at University of Applied Sciences Neu-Ulm, the chosen databases offer considerable overlap. This limitation and the potential risk of missed studies are acknowledged in the *Discussion* section. To enhance comprehensiveness, the database search was supplemented by citation tracking and manual searches. Searches were limited to the period from January 1, 2010, to December 31, 2024. As noted previously, 1 of the included studies [39] falls outside the formal inclusion window set; however, it was retained based

on discussions among all internal reviewers involved and due to the fact that this study represents the first known empirical study with the focus on the acceptance of digital technology among nursing staff in LTC settings. The identification process is illustrated in the PRISMA 2020 flow diagram, in the *Results* section.

The systematic search was conducted on April 14, 2025, following an initial exploratory search for an overview of the existing literature on October 25, 2024 ([Multimedia Appendix 2](#)). The primary researcher (JI) led the systematic review process, including database search, screening, and data extraction. The second reviewer (RH) independently screened the publications and also evaluated them for eligibility. Any discrepancies or critical assessments concerning study relevance, methodological quality, or thematic clarity were discussed in regular virtual meetings with senior reviewers (WS) and (DH). To manage the studies, the open-source software Zotero, version 7.0.11 (64-bit) was used as the reference software.

Study Selection

Study selection was conducted in 2 phases. The first phase was the selection via title and reading the abstract. In the second phase, the full texts of potentially eligible studies were reviewed in detail. Studies that met the inclusion criteria and passed quality checks were included in the synthesis. Excluded studies and reasons for exclusion are presented in [Multimedia Appendix 3](#).

Due to the limited number of eligible studies, a formal sensitivity analysis was not possible. However, the impact of study quality on synthesis outcomes was qualitatively assessed during reviewer discussions.

Data items from included studies were extracted with the following variables using an Excel form:

- Study identification: authors, title, year of publication, country
- Study design: methodological approach
- Participants: number, role (nursing staff, management)

- Aim of study: nature of the digital technology studied
- Key findings: outcome measures, determinants, and facilitators affecting acceptance

Quality Assessment

Methodological quality was assessed using the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) [46], applying item-level judgments (“Yes,” “Can’t tell,” “No”). The overall confidence rating was categorized as “low,” “moderate,” or “high,” with no studies falling into the “high” category. Each study was independently assessed by 2 reviewers across all checklist domains, including study aims, design, recruitment strategy, data collection, analysis, and potential bias. Discrepancies between the reviewers were resolved through consensus. To further strengthen methodological rigor and confirm the reliability of the CASP-based evaluations, the AXIS (Appraisal tool for Cross-Sectional Studies) [47] checklist for cross-sectional studies was additionally applied as a supplementary framework ([Multimedia Appendix 4](#)).

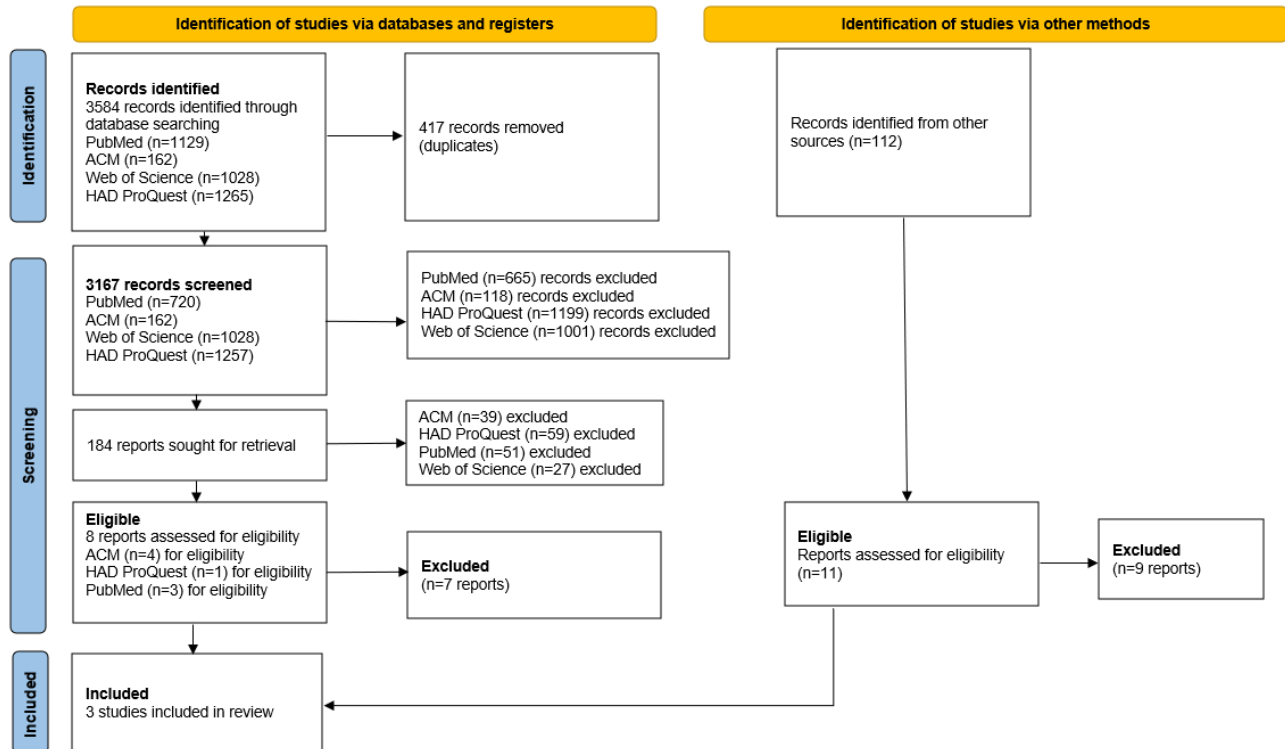
Synthesis Approach

With regard to the synthesis approach, due to the heterogeneity of the included studies (technologies, outcome measures, countries), a narrative synthesis approach was applied keeping in mind the principles of thematic content analysis [48]. Data were coded inductively to identify recurring themes related to determinants and facilitators of digital technology acceptance. These themes were subsequently compared and mapped to ensure conceptual coherence across studies [49]. As this review analyzed previously published studies, no ethical approval was required.

Results

Study Selection

The outcome of the literature search initially yielded 3584 records from the databases and an additional 112 studies from citation tracking and manual searching as demonstrated in [Figure 1](#).

Figure 1. PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) 2020 flow diagram—identification of studies.

After the removal of duplicates, the screening of the studies, and the application of eligibility criteria, 3 studies were included in the final analysis [12,26,39]. The included studies reported quantitative findings using the following measures:

- Likert-scale derived scores: these were used in all studies to assess acceptance variables (eg, attitudes, fears, perceived usefulness).
- Regression coefficients: these were reported in Barisch-Fritz et al [12] and Yu et al [39] to identify predictors of acceptance (eg, age, gender, professional group).
- Descriptive statistics: frequencies, means, and standard deviations were commonly used to present the results.

For this study, qualitative studies were eligible; however, none were identified for the final selection. Although limited in

number, these studies offer initial insights into key acceptance factors and provide a basis for further investigation. These studies were conducted in Germany, the Netherlands, and Australia. Together, they involved 1019 participants, most of whom were direct care workers in nursing homes or LTC facilities. Across all studies, 867 were nursing staff, 99 were nursing home managers, and 53 were other staff members in LTC facilities (eg, clerks). The technologies under investigation ranged from electronic documentation systems to assistive robotic devices and digital communication platforms.

Risk of Bias

The risk of bias was assessed using the CASP checklist for cross-sectional studies (Table 2). Individual checklist items were evaluated qualitatively to appraise methodological rigor, and each cell in Table 2 represents the reviewer's consensus.

Table . Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) evaluation.

CASP	Barisch-Fritz et al (2023) [12]	de Veer et al (2011) [26]	Yu et al (2009) [39]
1. Did the study address a clearly focused issue?	Yes	Yes	Yes
2. Did the authors use an appropriate method to answer their question?	Yes	Yes	Yes
3. Were the subjects recruited in an acceptable way?	Yes	Yes	Cannot tell
4. Were the measures accurately measured to reduce bias?	Cannot tell	No	Yes
5. Were the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue?	Yes	Yes	Yes
6. Did the study have enough participants to minimize the play of chance?	Cannot tell	Yes	Cannot tell
7. How are the results presented and what is the main result?	Yes	Yes	Yes
8. Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?	Yes	Yes	Yes
9. Is there a clear statement of findings?	Yes	Yes	Yes
10. Can the results be applied to the local population?	Cannot tell	Yes	Cannot tell
11. Is the research valuable?	Cannot tell	Yes	Yes

While the CASP checklist provided a structured approach to appraising methodological quality, we also considered the AXIS critical appraisal tool, and it confirmed the initial CASP-based judgments.

Two studies [12,39] were rated as having moderate risk of bias. The study by Barisch-Fritz et al [12] addressed a clearly focused issue using validated instruments. Although the sample was good, it was not randomly selected, introducing potential self-selection bias. The study by Yu et al [39] also had a moderate risk of bias. It demonstrated strong internal validity through the use of validated TAM2-based instruments and a clearly defined research aim. However, some limitations remain; for instance, the convenience sampling reduced the strength of the recruitment process. Also, the relatively small sample size limits generalizability. These facts increase the potential for selection and sampling bias. The study by de Veer et al [26] demonstrated low risk of bias, supported by transparent reporting and robust measurement design. Nevertheless, the study lacked detailed information on how bias was addressed through measurement design.

Study Characteristics

The key findings and characteristics of the included studies are summarized in Table 3. Across the 3 studies, several patterns emerged regarding the implementation and acceptance of technology in nursing and LTC settings. In the study by de Veer et al [26], approximately half of the nursing staff had encountered new technologies within the past 3 years and generally perceived these introductions positively. However, actual use was hindered by technology-related factors, such as ease of use, patient relevance, and potential risks. Respondents emphasized the need for structured innovation strategies and organizational support. Similarly, Yu et al [39] in Australia confirmed the validity of a modified TAM2 model for LTC facilities, identifying perceived usefulness, ease of use, professional image, and computer skills as primary determinants of the intention to adopt health IT applications. The German nationwide survey by Barisch-Fritz et al [12] extended these findings, showing that acceptance and technology affinity depend on education, professional role, and sociodemographic characteristics. Lower acceptance was observed among older employees.

Table . Included studies: key findings.

Authors	Title	Year of publication	Research method	Country	Aim of study	Which technology?	Participants included	Key findings
de Veer et al [26]	Successful implementation of new technologies in nursing care: a questionnaire survey of nurse-users	2011	Questionnaire survey	The Netherlands	To gain a better understanding of determinants influencing the success of the introduction of new technologies as perceived by nursing staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New technologies introduced in the past three years • Electronic information systems • Distant care technology • Medical devices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 685 nursing staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Half of the respondents were confronted with the introduction of new technology in the past 3 years • Half of them rated the introduction of the technology as positive • Factors impeding actual use were related to the technology itself: ie, malfunctioning, ease of use, relevance for patients, risk to patients • Nursing staff stressed the importance of an adequate innovation strategy

Authors	Title	Year of publication	Research method	Country	Aim of study	Which technology?	Participants included	Key findings
Yu et al [39]	Health IT acceptance factors in LTC ^a facilities: a cross-sectional survey	2009	Self-administered questionnaire	Australia	To examine the factors determining the acceptance of health IT applications by caregivers in LTC facilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Health IT applications (software, documentation) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 134 questionnaires <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nurses (n=10) LTC depts (n=11) Nursing managers (n=18) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Approved the validity of a modified TAM2^b in LTC facilities Factors influencing caregivers' intention to use IT technology were perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, image, and computer skills
Barisch-Fritz et al [12]	Are nursing home employees ready for the technical evolution? German-wide survey on the status quo of affinity for technology and technology interaction	2023	Online survey	Germany	Examine affinity for technology and technology interaction and related sociodemographic confounders, as well as detect possible requirements and boundary conditions relevant for the development and implementation of assistive technologies among nursing home employees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Technology, assistive technologies (eg, networked systems, assistive humanoid or social robots, mobile applications) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 200 nursing home employees <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nursing and therapy operation (n=77) Nursing home manager (n=8) Others in LTC (n=2) 	

Authors	Title	Year of publication	Research method	Country	Aim of study	Which technology?	Participants included	Key findings
								<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive consequences depended on education and professional group and the affinity for technology varied across age and gender <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lower acceptance with increasing age • Lower acceptance for females • Lower acceptance among nursing home managers

^aLTC: long-term care.

^bTAM2: technology acceptance model.

Despite differences in geographic context and methodological design, the studies share some overlapping findings regarding common factors that influence the acceptance. Perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use [26,39] consistently emerged as important determinants of acceptance. In addition, digital competence, defined as the ability to interact confidently with digital tools, was positively associated with willingness to use technology, particularly among younger staff members [12].

Organizational support, including leadership endorsement, training opportunities, and the involvement of staff in decision-making processes, also acted as a strong facilitator [26].

These cross-cutting themes are summarized in Table 4, which illustrates the main factors affecting the acceptance across studies.

Table . Factors affecting acceptance.

Authors	Title	Year of publication	Strengths	Weaknesses	Practical relevance	Factors affecting acceptance
de Veer et al [26]	Successful implementation of new technologies in nursing care: a questionnaire survey of nurse-users	2011	Strategic depth, very practical, multi-sectoral representativeness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Little quantitative analysis • Mainly qualitative; not 100% LTC-specific^a 	Very high: helpful for implementation planning, LTC sector, and hospital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involvement of nursing staff during development and implementation affects acceptance. • Organizational support, such as leadership endorsement, communication, and available training does increase adoption. • Perceived relevance of the technology for patient care enhances likelihood of use.
Yu et al [39]	Health IT acceptance factors in LTC facilities: a cross-sectional survey	2009	Theoretically grounded, structural modeling, clear implications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited representativeness, convenience sample, preimplementation data 	Moderate to high: theoretical insights; limited practical transferability relevant for IT strategies in the LTC context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perceived usefulness is the strongest predictor of care staff intention to use digital technologies. • Digital competence correlates positively with willingness to use technology, particularly among younger staff. • Negative perceptions through IT use (image factor) reduce acceptance. Ease of use significantly influences both perceived usefulness and intention to adopt technology. • Perceived relevance of the technology for patient care enhances likelihood of use.

Authors	Title	Year of publication	Strengths	Weaknesses	Practical relevance	Factors affecting acceptance
Barisch-Fritz et al [12]	Are nursing home employees ready for the technical evolution? German-wide survey on the status quo of affinity for technology and technology interaction	2023	Good sample, valid measurement instruments, differentiated results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confounder control • Nonrandom sampling, response bias likely 	High: directly applicable to nursing homes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital competence correlates positively with willingness to use technology, particularly among younger staff. • Technology affinity varies strongly across age, gender, and professional role. • Organizational support, such as leadership endorsement, communication, and available training does increase adoption. • Ethical concerns can limit technology acceptance.

^aLTC: long-term care.

All 3 studies contributed important evidence regarding factors influencing acceptance, organizational support, training availability, perceived usefulness, and digital competence. To account for heterogeneity across technologies and study designs, the extracted data were grouped thematically into 3 analytical levels: individual, organizational, and technological (Table 5).

This comparative thematic structure enabled a coherent synthesis across diverse contexts. Perceived usefulness, digital competence, organizational readiness, and usability emerged consistently across studies, supporting central constructs of the TAM.

Table . Thematic synthesis of factors affecting acceptance.

Level	Technology type	Emerging themes	Example evidence	Studies contributing
Individual	Electronic information and documentation systems; telecare software	Digital literacy, perceived usefulness, professional image, computer self-efficacy	Staff with higher digital competence and positive attitudes toward electronic documentation and telecare reported higher acceptance. Perceived usefulness and ease of use predicted intention to adopt these systems.	Barisch-Fritz et al (2023) [12]; Yu et al (2009) [39]
Organizational	EHR ^a systems; digital readiness tools	Training, managerial support, workload, innovation climate	Organizational readiness, management involvement, and access to training facilitated technology use, while workload and lack of structured implementation strategies reduced uptake.	de Veer et al (2011) [26]; Barisch-Fritz et al (2023) [12]
Technological	Assistive technologies; robots; health IT software	Usability, reliability, system relevance, perceived ethical and professional implications	Usability and reliability were decisive for acceptance across all technologies, whereas assistive and robotic technologies introduced concerns regarding trust, ethics, and role identity.	de Veer et al (2011) [26]; Yu et al (2009) [39]; Barisch-Fritz et al (2023) [12]

^aEHR: electronic health record.

Discussion

Interpretation of Findings

The synthesis of the 3 studies revealed that the acceptance of digital technologies in geriatric LTC depended on a combination of individual and organizational factors. Consistent with TAM and its extensions, usefulness and ease of use were the most robust predictors across the studies.

Beyond individual and organizational determinants, contextual factors, such as organizational culture, leadership style, and national policy frameworks, also influence digital readiness in LTC. Environments with a long-standing emphasis on innovation and participatory care culture may facilitate staff involvement in digital implementation, whereas strict data-protection orientation and reliance on paper-based processes may hinder the change. National eHealth infrastructures, such as Germany's Telematics Infrastructure and reimbursement policies, can affect incentives for adoption. Recognizing these dimensions is essential, as technological acceptance should not be understood in isolation from broader policy and organizational environments [50].

Previous reviews have also highlighted the importance of user attitudes and digital competencies for successful implementation [51-53]. Staff who feel confident in their ability to use digital tools are more willing to adopt them. This is particularly relevant given the generational differences observed in digital affinity. Younger staff members tend to have higher levels of acceptance, while older staff may require more training and support.

Organizational conditions further contribute to acceptance. Early staff involvement in the selection, testing, and implementation of new technologies, combined with training and transparent communication, fosters adoption.

A valuable complement to the peer-reviewed evidence is the BGW report "Pflege 4.0" [45], which constitutes gray literature but offers important contextual insights. Drawing on a mixed methods dataset of 576 professional caregivers in Germany—140 of whom were from geriatric LTC facilities—the report explored both actual technology use and perceived barriers to adoption. Using various 5-point Likert scales (ranging from "does not apply" to "fully applies"; from "not familiar at all" to "very familiar"), the survey identified key concerns, such as fear of job loss, data protection concerns, lack of technical skills, and low participation in implementation processes. While the professional composition of respondents was not fully specified, the findings add practical relevance by highlighting workplace-level perceptions that mirror those reported in the peer-reviewed studies.

Limitations of Evidence

The limited number (n=3) of eligible studies and their predominantly cross-sectional nature restrict the ability to draw clear conclusions, even though they identify relevant influencing factors. Additionally, the studies differ in the types of technologies investigated, outcome measures used, representation of demographic groups, and regional contexts. This heterogeneity complicates direct comparisons, and it further limits the generalizability of the findings. For instance, Yu et al [39] conducted a preimplementation survey based on TAM2 in an Australian LTC context, focusing on intention to use the technology. On the other hand, de Veer et al [26] investigated actual technology implementation across multiple health care sectors in the Netherlands, including nursing homes, but not exclusively. Barisch-Fritz et al [12] explored technology affinity in German nursing homes, but their heterogeneous sample included managers and other staff in LTC facilities with a

relatively small response rate. This fact raises concerns regarding representativeness. These limitations hinder generalizability.

Although comprehensive efforts were made to include all relevant research, the review was limited to publications in English or German, and no protocol was registered in advance. In addition, the CINAHL database was not searched due to a missing institutional license. As CINAHL is a relevant source, other studies may not have been captured.

Implications

Given the limited number of studies and their methodological heterogeneity, the implications hereby should be interpreted with caution. Nevertheless, the evidence indicates that the successful implementation of digital technologies in geriatric LTC relies on strategies that are aligned to the needs, competencies, and experiences of nursing staff. Policies should prioritize ongoing digital training programs based on the different groups of users. Furthermore, implementation efforts should involve staff from the earliest planning stages, ensuring that their expertise informs both system design and rollout. Organizational support and transparent communication regarding the objectives, benefits, and limitations of new systems are essential to build trust and reduce uncertainty among nursing staff. Ethical concerns must be addressed proactively, particularly in relation to surveillance technologies and the preservation of interpersonal care dynamics. In terms of research, there is definitely a need for more robust, rigorous, and longitudinal studies to enhance external validity and provide a more comprehensive understanding of technology acceptance among nursing staff in geriatric LTC.

Conclusion

This systematic review demonstrates that the acceptance of digital technologies by nursing staff in geriatric LTC settings is shaped by a constellation of individual and organizational factors. Three key determinants emerged consistently across all studies.

First, digital competence significantly influences willingness to adopt new technologies. Nursing staff with higher digital affinity, especially younger staff members, show greater readiness to engage with digital tools in the workplace. This highlights the need for training programs that target all age and experience groups.

Second, perceived relevance of technologies to daily care practice affects acceptance. Nursing staff are more likely to accept innovations that support main aspects of nursing home care, such as documentation efficiency, communication, or safety.

Third, organizational support, including communication, managerial encouragement, access to training, and staff participation in the implementation processes of digital technologies, plays a crucial role.

In light of the structural and demographic relevance of geriatric LTC, future research should be directed toward building a strong evidence base on technology acceptance. This review offers several testable hypotheses derived from the synthesized evidence. Future studies should empirically examine how early involvement of nursing staff in the development and implementation of digital technologies affects subsequent acceptance and sustained use. It can be hypothesized that organizational support mechanisms, including leadership endorsement, effective communication, and targeted digital training, strengthen the relationship between perceived usefulness and intention to use. Likewise, digital competence may mediate the relationship between training and technology adoption, while factors such as technology affinity, age, and professional role may moderate these effects. Furthermore, perceived relevance for patient care likely increases acceptance by reinforcing the perceived usefulness of digital tools, whereas ethical concerns or a negative professional image of IT use may inhibit adoption. Testing these mechanisms through longitudinal, intervention-based, or multilevel study designs could provide stronger causal evidence for the transformation strategies in geriatric LTC.

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Authors' Contributions

JI, WS, and DH participated in the design of the study. JI conducted the search. JI and RH were responsible for the screening of the results. JI, WS, and DH reviewed, evaluated critically, and edited the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

None declared.

Multimedia Appendix 1

Search strings for the databases searched.

[[PNG File, 213 KB - nursing_v9i1e82223_app1.png](#)]

Multimedia Appendix 2

Overview search in PubMed conducted on October 25, 2025, to explore the topic prior to the systematic search.

[[PNG File, 196 KB - nursing_v9i1e82223_app2.png](#)]

Multimedia Appendix 3

Excluded publications after eligibility assessment according to the exclusion criteria.

[[XLSX File, 15 KB - nursing_v9i1e82223_app3.xlsx](#)]

Multimedia Appendix 4

AXIS (Appraisal tool for Cross-Sectional Studies) quality assessment of included studies.

[[XLSX File, 12 KB - nursing_v9i1e82223_app4.xlsx](#)]

Checklist 1

PRISMA 2020 checklist.

[[PDF File, 190 KB - nursing_v9i1e82223_app5.pdf](#)]

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Abbreviations

AXIS: Appraisal tool for Cross-Sectional Studies

CASP: Critical Appraisal Skills Programme

LTC : long-term care

PRISMA: Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses

SPIDER: sample, phenomenon of interest, design, evaluation, research type

TAM: technology acceptance model

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Developing a Best Practice Guideline for Clinical Practice in a Digital Health Environment: Systematic Reviews Based on the Grading of Recommendations, Assessment, Development, and Evaluation Approach

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Abstract

Background: Digital health refers to the field of knowledge and practice associated with the development and use of digital technologies to improve clinical practice and health outcomes. Knowledge of digital health technology is becoming essential for all nurses and health providers.

Objective: This study aims to present the results of the systematic reviews that were used to inform the recommendations in a best practice guideline (BPG) following the GRADE (Grading of Recommendations, Assessment, Development, and Evaluation) approach. Reviews focused on digital health education for nurses and health providers, peer champion models, and the use of predictive analytics in digital health environments.

Methods: The BPG team, in collaboration with a panel of 17 experts, conducted 5 systematic reviews to address 5 recommendation questions. Systematic searches looked for relevant studies published in English from January 2017 to July 2022 from 10 databases. The GRADE approach was used to synthesize and evaluate the quality of evidence, ensuring the guideline aligned with international reporting standards.

Results: A total of 18 articles across 4 systematic reviews met the inclusion criteria. From these reviews, 4 corresponding recommendations were drafted for nurses and health providers. The strength of the recommendations was determined through discussion and consensus by the expert panel using the GRADE approach. Among all, 1 systematic review resulted in no recommendation due to insufficient evidence.

Conclusions: The BPG on digital health provides 4 evidence-based recommendations for nurses and health providers on how to incorporate digital health technologies into clinical practice. This BPG is intended to be used across all health care settings.

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KEYWORDS

digital health; nursing; electronic health; health informatics; clinical guidelines

Introduction

Over the last decade, there has been an increased uptake of digital health technologies across global health care systems [1]. Digital health is a broad term that refers to the field of knowledge and practice associated with the development and use of digital technologies to improve health [2]. Digital health

technologies refer to tools, systems, or devices that can generate, create, store, or process data, enabled through microprocesses that are programmed to perform specific functions [3]. Specifically in health care settings (or digital health environments), digital health technologies may encompass eHealth, mHealth, health informatics, artificial intelligence (AI), machine learning, big data, robotics, and advanced computing

sciences [2]. A digital health environment refers to any setting where health providers, informatics professionals, administrators, managers, and persons or families receiving care work in supportive teams to leverage digital tools, technologies, and services to optimize care delivery and empower and activate people to manage their health and wellness [4]. Nurses and health providers use a variety of digital health technologies in practice, including electronic health records, clinical decision support systems (CDSSs) that use predictive analytics, robotics, mobile apps, virtual care platforms, wearable devices, remote monitoring systems, smart home technologies, and others [4]. As nursing practice continues to evolve across all settings and sectors to incorporate these technologies, ongoing education is essential for nurses and health providers to deliver comprehensive clinical care [4,5].

Digital health technologies are advancing at a rapid pace; however, challenges remain in supporting nurses and health providers in using these technologies safely and effectively [6]. Educators and health systems leaders must work to evolve the understanding of novel nurse-patient interactions involving digital health technologies, alongside other core nursing topics [5]. Through further education and training, nurses will have a greater understanding of how both new and existing digital health technologies may impact clinical processes and communication patterns between patients, caregivers, and the interprofessional team [7]. Furthermore, nurses in clinical practice will require initial and ongoing professional development opportunities to aid in the use of digital health technologies [8,9]. Effective training will enable nurses to use these technologies both safely and effectively. Many of the good practice statements, recommendations, and resources within this best practice guideline (BPG) provide guidance on education for nurses and health providers to address this growing need.

The Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario (RNAO) published a new BPG entitled *Clinical Practice in a Digital Health Environment* in March 2024 [4]. The BPG was developed with an expert panel, which included 17 digital health experts representing diverse backgrounds including nursing, education, research, allied health, and people with lived experience. The purpose of the BPG is to provide evidence-based recommendations that foster nurses' ability to maintain, advance, and strengthen professional practice in the context of a digital health environment [4]. The guideline is intended for all nurses (registered nurses, nurse practitioners, and registered practical nurses), nursing students, as well as members of the interprofessional health care team, educators, administrators, executives, policymakers, researchers, and people with lived experience. Within the context of this BPG, people with lived experience refer to patients and family within health systems wherein digital health is used.

The aim of this paper is to describe the BPG development process and the results from 4 systematic reviews that were used to inform the recommendations in the BPG, following the GRADE (Grading of Recommendations, Assessment, Development, and Evaluation) approach [10]. Additionally, this paper will reflect on the health equity considerations, research gaps, and limitations noted during guideline development,

related to the integration of digital health technologies in clinical practice.

Methods

Development Approach

RNAO's BPG development team used the GRADE approach to develop this guideline, which is in line with international reporting standards [10]. GRADE is a transparent and structured process to evaluate the certainty of a body of evidence from systematic reviews in order to develop sound, evidence-based recommendations in guidelines [10]. The systematic reviews were conducted in accordance with the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines [11] (Checklist 1). The following section will describe how the purpose and scope of the guideline were determined, the 5 systematic reviews that were conducted, and the resulting 4 recommendations that were drafted following completion of the systematic reviews.

Scoping the Best Practice Guideline

To determine the purpose and scope of this BPG, the guideline development team conducted an environmental scan on existing clinical guidelines on this topic and appraised those guidelines. Two guideline development methodologists (GDMs) determined inclusion or exclusion criteria and searched an established list of websites for guidelines and other relevant content (eg, quality standards) published between January 2016 and March 2021 (Multimedia Appendix 1). Expert panel members were also asked to suggest additional guidelines for review. Guidelines were reviewed for content, applicability to health provider scope of practice, accessibility, and quality. Each GDM individually evaluated guideline quality using the Appraisal of Guidelines for Research and Evaluation II instrument [12]. Through this process, it was determined that no guidelines had been developed addressing evidence-based recommendations in this unique and growing area, especially as it relates to nurses and clinical practice.

The team also completed a preliminary literature review to examine available evidence on digital health for nurses, including how digital health technologies are being integrated into the nursing process; how digital health technologies are facilitators and/or barriers for nurses when maintaining and advancing professional practice; and what outcomes are used to measure the impact of using digital health technologies in nursing practice. Two databases were searched for literature (CINAHL and MEDLINE) between January 2016 and May 2021. Screening for eligibility was conducted independently by 2 GDMs with conflicts resolved through consensus. Data extraction was completed for the included studies on a customized Microsoft Excel sheet developed by the GDMs. Elements of data extraction (such as study setting, intervention, and outcomes) were determined by the GDMs. An analysis of themes across the studies was synthesized, and the themes, interventions, and outcomes were later presented to the expert panel.

GDMs also conducted 22 key informant interviews and 2 discussion groups with diverse experts in the field. Key

informants included people with lived experience, direct care health and social service providers, and researchers selected based on their knowledge and expertise related to the BPG topic. Snowball sampling was also used to recruit key informants. See [Textbox 1](#) for a description of the questions asked during the interviews. For the discussion groups, 3 sessions were convened

with a total of 18 nursing students, clinical informatics nurses, and frontline nurses to understand the needs of nurses within digital health environments. GDMs used inductive qualitative content analysis to analyze data collected from key informant interviews and discussion groups, and this information was also presented to the expert panel.

Textbox 1. Key informant interview questions.

- How can digital health technologies impact the quality of care a person receives?
- How can digital health technologies promote or hinder the therapeutic nurse-client relationship?
- In what ways can a digital health environment enhance or hinder patient care delivery for underserved populations?
- What skills or competencies do nurses require in order to maintain professional practice in a digital health environment?
- What skills and competencies do nurse leaders require in order to support the interface between nursing clinical practice and digital health technology?
- What challenges do nurses face when working in a digital health environment?
- What challenges or struggles do you face in your current practice related to the use or implementation of digital health technologies?
- What challenges do nurses face when trying to engage in the design, development, and evaluation of digital health environments?
- What policies or practices can help nurses maintain professional practice in a digital health environment?
- What outcomes should we explore in the literature to measure the impact of using digital health technologies in clinical nursing practice?
- What should the scope of this guideline be?
- What should this best practice guideline (BPG) address in order to be most useful in practice for nurses and people receiving care?
- Are there any last thoughts on what is important for us to consider when starting the development of this BPG?

Identifying Priority Recommendation Questions and Outcomes

The BPG development team assembled a panel of 17 experts, including 2 cochairs, from nursing practice, research, education, and policy, as well as other members of the interprofessional team, and people with lived experience representing a range of sectors and practice areas. The BPG was supported by 2 cochairs with relevant clinical and research experience, one of whom was a doctorate-prepared registered nurse, and the other cochair led the pan-Canadian Electronic Health Record Clinical Engagement Strategy for 6 years at Canada Health Infoway. The expert panel also included representatives from different geographical areas, including rural, suburban, and urban. From July to December 2021, 4 panel meetings were held to determine the BPG's purpose, scope, and research questions that informed the systematic reviews. During the first orientation meeting, the expert panel was introduced to RNAO's BPG program, the

systematic review process, and the GRADE approach. Additional electronic materials were also sent to the panel to familiarize them with the BPG development process and the GRADE approach. Declarations of conflicts of interest that might be construed as constituting a perceived and/or actual conflict were made by all members of the expert panel prior to their participation in guideline development work, and on an ongoing basis.

During the initial phase of the guideline development process, the expert panel prioritized 4 research questions and corresponding outcomes deemed most important to this topic. An amendment to the PROSPERO registration was made following these initial meetings, once the panel determined through email correspondence that a fifth research question should be added. [Textbox 2](#) displays the final recommendation questions and outcomes that informed focused research questions for the systematic reviews.

Textbox 2. Recommendation questions and outcomes in the clinical practice in a digital health environment best practice guideline.

Recommendation question 1: Should practical (eg, hands-on) professional development education focused on the use of digital health technologies within an organization be recommended or not for all nurses?

Outcomes: nurse competence (with using technology), nurse acceptance of technology, nurse-sensitive outcomes (eg, falls, pressure injuries, and pain), nurse involvement in the technology life cycle, nurse confidence (with using technology), and nurse-person therapeutic relationship.

Recommendation question 2: Should education about relational care and interpersonal communication skills be recommended or not for nurses practicing in virtual care settings and in-person digital health environments?

Outcomes: person or caregiver or family experience or satisfaction, nurse competence (with using technology), nurse confidence (with using technology), nurse-person therapeutic relationship, and person or caregiver or family involvement and engagement in care.

Recommendation question 3: Should the implementation of interdisciplinary peer champion models in health service organizations be recommended or not to facilitate education for health providers on the use of digital health technologies?

Outcomes: health provider competence (with using technology), health provider adoption of technology, health provider confidence (with using technology), health provider sensitive outcomes (eg, pressure injuries and pain), and sustainability of education (ie, knowledge and skills retention).

Recommendation question 4: Should the use of predictive analytics software or systems (eg, command centers and risk assessment software tools) for nurses providing care in all practice settings be recommended or not to inform clinical decision-making and improve clinical outcomes?

Outcomes: proactive or anticipatory care, critical incidents, failure to rescue, consistent application of evidence-based practice, and nurse-sensitive outcomes (eg, falls, pressure injuries, and pain).

Recommendation question 5: Should a distributive model (vs no distributive model or any other type of change management model) be recommended to integrate digital health competencies into the professional practice roles and responsibilities of nurses at all levels within an organization?

Outcomes: nurse competence (with using technology), nurse engagement (with using, developing, acquiring, and participating in education about the technology), nurse confidence (with using technology), person or caregiver or family experience or satisfaction, and nurses being able to define what their role is.

Systematic Retrieval of the Evidence

The systematic reviews for the guideline were registered with PROSPERO in 2022 (CRD42022321580). Upon consultation with the expert panel, 4 amendments were made to the original PROSPERO registered protocol. These included: (1) adding an additional database to search (IEEE Xplore) in April 2022, (2) adding an additional systematic review question (December 2022), (3) conducting indirect evidence searches (January 2023), and (4) publishing the final version of the guideline online (May 2024). All other systematic review methods followed the protocol outlined in the original PROSPERO registration.

Five separate systematic review search strategies were developed and run by an external health sciences librarian from the University Health Network after consulting with 2 GDMs (CB and LH). The systematic searches included peer-reviewed studies of any study design (eg, quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods, and systematic reviews) published in English from January 2017 to July 2022. The following databases were searched: MEDLINE, MEDLINE Epub Ahead of Print and In-Process, Embase, Emcare Nursing, Cochrane Central Register of Controlled Trials, Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews, APA PsychInfo, CINAHL, and IEEE Xplore. Expert panel members were also asked to review their personal libraries for key studies not found through the above search strategies. For more details and the full search strategy used for each systematic review, please refer to [Multimedia Appendix 2](#).

After conducting the initial searches, it was decided to look for further indirect evidence to support each question. Direct evidence comes from research that directly compares the interventions of interest when applied to the populations of interest and measures outcomes important to patients [13]. Evidence can be indirect if the population differs, the

intervention differs, or outcomes differ from those of original interest [13]. The health science librarian conducted additional indirect evidence searches from January 2023 to March 2023 for systematic reviews published in English. The BPG team recognizes that direct evidence allows for more confidence in the results; however, in the absence of direct evidence, GRADE notes that indirect evidence can be used and downgraded accordingly [10,13]. The broader populations and interventions searched were considered sufficiently direct by the expert panel and in line with the original methodology. To ensure the most up-to-date evidence was included in the BPG, an update search was also conducted in English between January 2023 to January 2024 for recommendation questions 1 to 4. However, an update search for question 5 was not completed since a recommendation was not drafted for this area. For the full search strategies, see [Multimedia Appendix 2](#).

Eligibility Criteria

All search results from the librarian were uploaded into DistillerSR software (DistillerSR Inc). All steps of the systematic review process were completed by 2 GDMs (CB and LH for the initial search and CB and LB for the update search). Two GDMs independently completed title and abstract screening using standardized screening guides developed by the GDMs. Screening guides were reviewed by senior members of the RNAO team prior to use. Studies included at this stage had the full text reviewed independently by both GDMs. Final inclusion was deemed appropriate if studies answered the research question, included prioritized outcomes, were published in English, and were accessible for retrieval. See [Textbox 3](#) for inclusion and exclusion criteria, and [Multimedia Appendix 2](#) for further details. Disagreements were settled by consensus. For the initial systematic search, any study design was eligible to be included. For the updated indirect systematic searches,

study designs were limited to systematic reviews and meta-analyses.

Textbox 3. Inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Inclusion criteria:

- A primary focus on the interventions of interest and the prioritized outcomes per research question
- A focus on digital health technologies
- Applicable to nurses or health providers providing care in all practice settings (including registered nurses, registered practical nurses, nursing students, and nurse practitioners)
- Applicable to all health or social service organizations, or academic institutions
- Published after January 2017
- Published in English
- Accessible for retrieval
- Conducted in any geographic region
- Peer-reviewed literature
- Any study design (eg, quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods, and systematic reviews), but when conducting the indirect searches, only systematic reviews and meta-analyses were included.

Exclusion criteria:

- Topic NOT related to the interventions or prioritized outcomes per research question
- Dissertations, commentaries, narratives, discussion papers, case studies, expert reports, consensus documents, and studies with no specific methodology
- Studies not published in English
- Unpublished literature (eg, gray literature)
- Studies published prior to 2017

Data Extraction and Quality Appraisal

Data extraction was completed on the included studies for each research question. The included studies were divided between GDMs and each reviewer independently extracted details from their assigned studies using standardized Excel sheets that were developed by the RNAO team ([Multimedia Appendix 3](#)). Each Excel sheet had a designated outcome for which study details were recorded. Details such as the setting, intervention and control description, the outcome and how it was measured, and study results were recorded by 1 GDM. Any harms (such as adverse effects), information on values, preferences, and health equity were also recorded. The second GDM independently reviewed the extracted data for accuracy. Quality appraisal of each article was completed independently by each GDM. The Cochrane Risk of Bias 2.0 tool [14] was used to appraise randomized controlled trials (RCTs), the risk of bias in nonrandomized studies—of interventions (ROBINS-I) tool [15] was used to appraise nonrandomized studies, and the risk of bias in systematic reviews (ROBIS) tool [16] was used to appraise systematic reviews. If a systematic review received a low risk of bias score using the ROBIS tool, and the review's authors completed a risk of bias assessment within the paper, those assessments were also considered when conducting the GRADE consensus. After quality appraisal was completed by both GDMs, GRADE consensus was completed to assess the certainty of evidence for each outcome for each research question. GRADE uses five categories to rate the certainty of evidence as high, moderate, low, and very low by examining

(1) risk of bias, (2) inconsistency, (3) imprecision, (4) indirectness, and (5) publication bias [10]. After the 5 categories had been graded, a certainty of evidence was determined for each of the 4 drafted recommendations corresponding to the research questions.

Drafting Recommendations in the BPG

As per the GRADE methodology, the GDMs created an evidence profile (EP) and evidence to decision (EtD) framework for each recommendation [4,10]. The EP outlined details regarding the certainty of evidence across outcomes and the GRADE domains ([Multimedia Appendices 4-7](#)). The EtD frameworks provided a narrative summary of the evidence for draft recommendations, described the certainty of evidence, and provided details around values and preferences regarding the intervention, as well as health equity considerations found in the systematic reviews. Expert panel members were provided with the EPs and EtD frameworks to review prior to 3 (virtual) half-day meetings to determine the direction (ie, a recommendation for or against an intervention) and the strength (ie, strong or conditional) of the BPG's recommendations. A conditional recommendation is one for which the desirable effects probably outweigh the undesirable effects, and there is a need to consider more carefully than usual the individual's circumstances, values, and preferences [10]. If there was insufficient direct or indirect evidence to develop a recommendation, the expert panel also had the option not to proceed with a recommendation. The expert panel determined that current evidence was insufficient to assess the certainty of

effects of a distributive model (recommendation question 5) compared to other types of change management models to integrate digital health competencies into the professional practice roles and responsibilities of nurses within an organization; thus, no recommendation was made.

The recommendations and draft BPG also underwent several rounds of internal and external review prior to publication [17]. External reviewers for RNAO BPGs are identified through a public call issued on the RNAO website [17]. For this BPG, the written external review process was completed between September 14, 2023, and October 23, 2023. External reviewers with diverse perspectives, such as nurses and health providers, administrators, researchers, educators, nursing students, and people with lived experience, provided direct feedback.

Results

Summary of Results

For PRISMA flow diagrams, see [Figures 1-5](#). Two reviewers screened over 22,500 articles for the 5 original research questions. After screening, the 2 GDMs reviewed 253 full-text articles for relevance to the research questions and outcomes, and 18 articles met the requirements to inform the recommendations. It was determined through consultation with the expert panel that question 5 did not have enough evidence to support the recommendation, so a recommendation was not developed. Thus, 4 recommendations were drafted (one per each of the corresponding systematic reviews), and the strength of the recommendations was determined through discussion and consensus by the expert panel, based on the available evidence ([Table 1](#)).

Figure 1. PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) flow diagram for recommendation question 1: “Should practical (eg, hands-on) professional development education be focused on the use of digital health technologies within an organization be recommended or not for all nurses?” Adapted from Page MJ et al [11].



n=original search
n=indirect search
n=update search

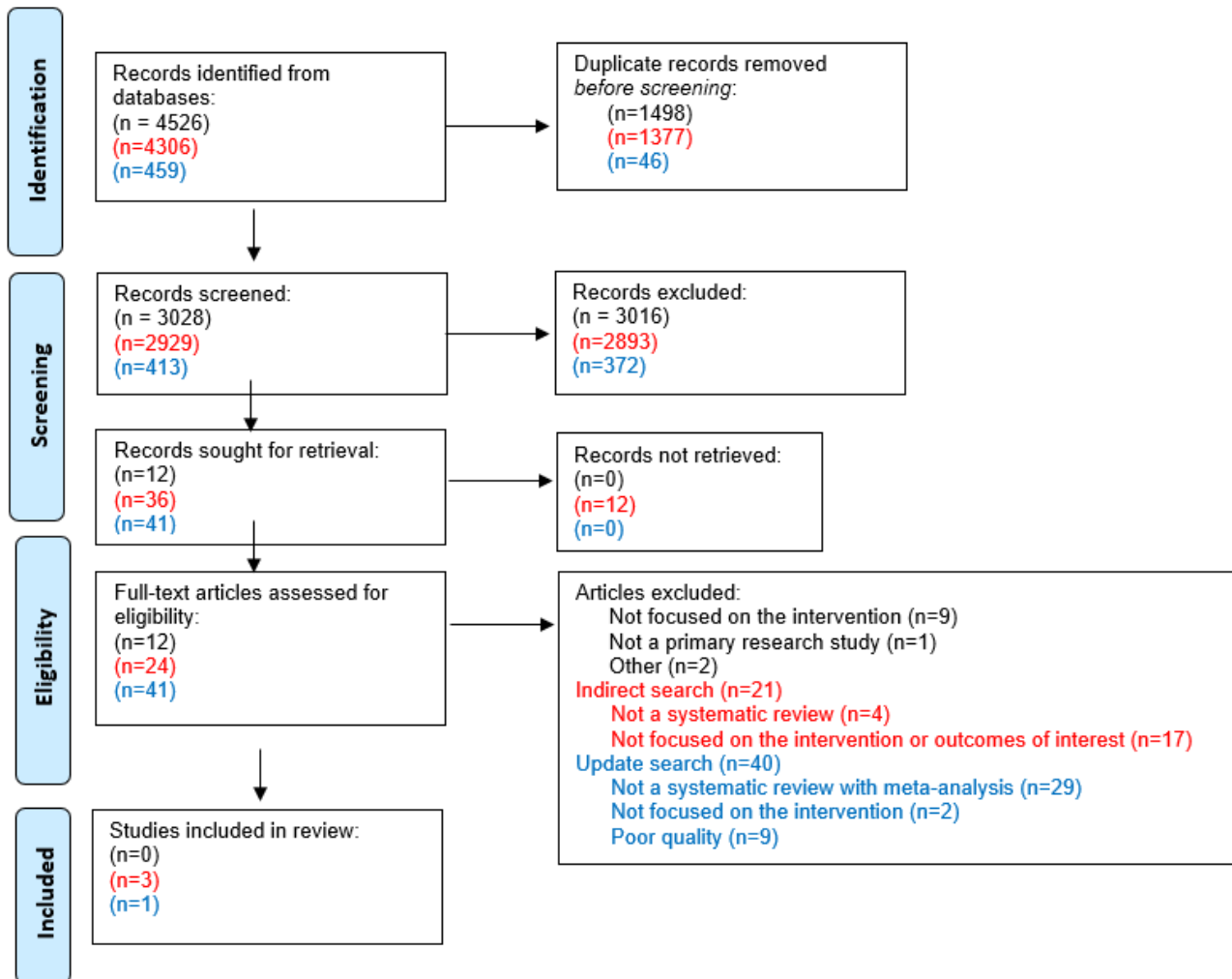


Figure 2. PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) flow diagram for recommendation question 2: “Should education about relational care and interpersonal communication skills be recommended or not for nurses practicing in virtual care settings and in-person digital health environments?” Adapted from Page MJ et al [11].



n=original search
n=indirect search
n=update search

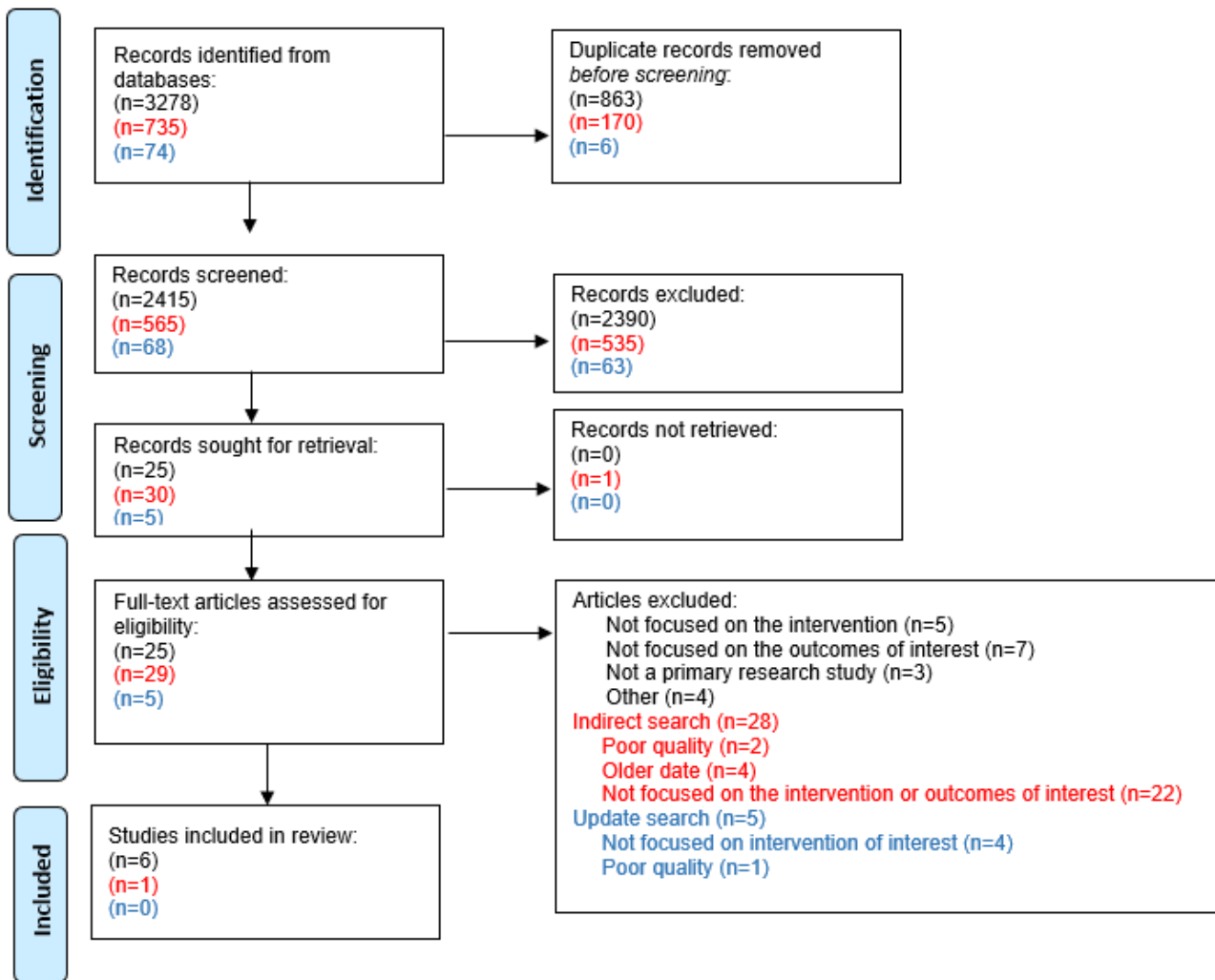


Figure 3. PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) flow diagram for recommendation question 3: “Should the implementation of interdisciplinary peer champion models in health service organizations be recommended or not to facilitate education for health providers on the use of digital health technologies?” Adapted from Page MJ et al [11].



n=original search
n=indirect search
n=update search

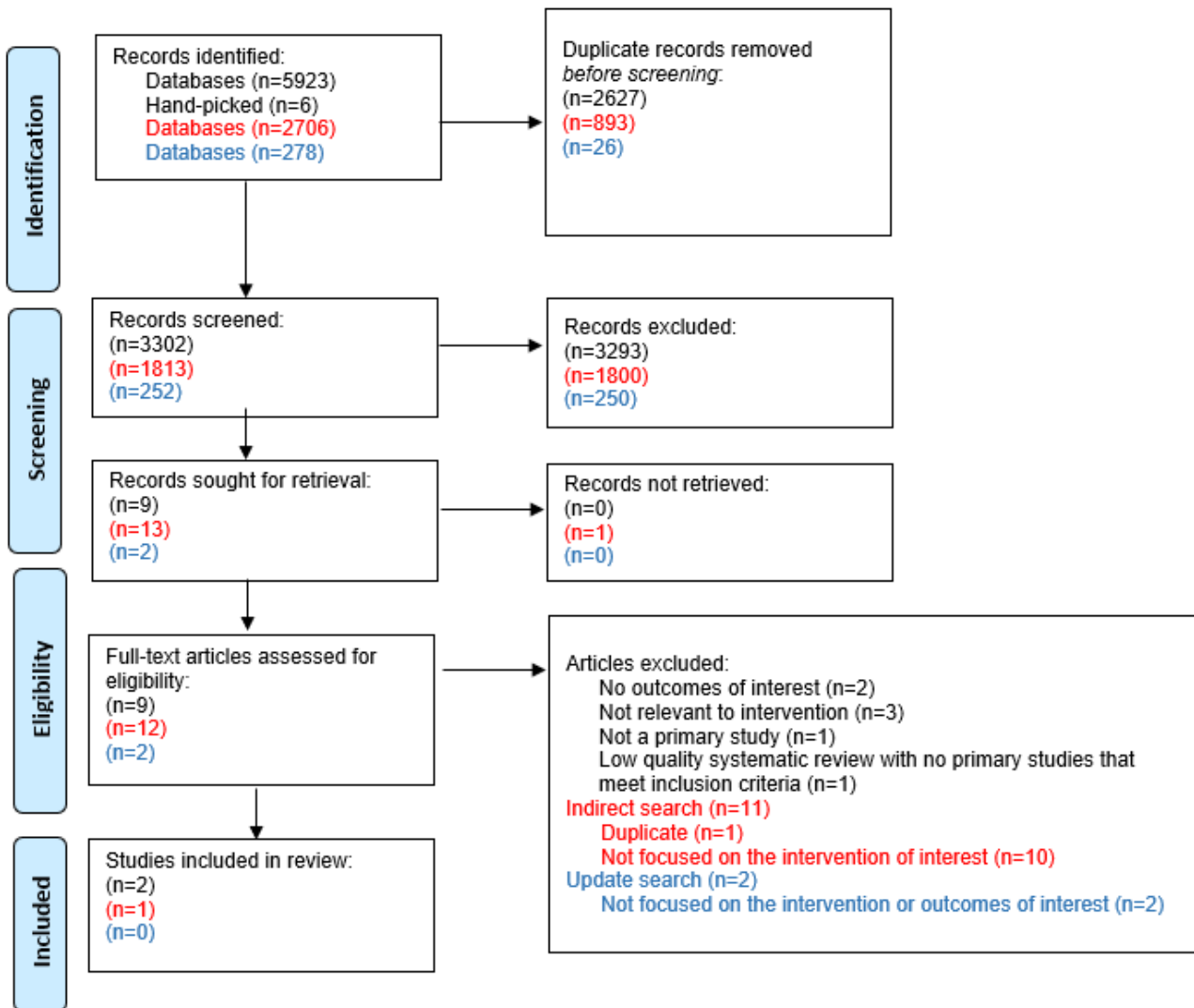


Figure 4. PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) flow diagram for recommendation question 4: “Should the use of predictive analytics software or systems (eg, command centers and risk assessment software tools) for nurses providing care in all practice settings be recommended or not to inform clinical decision-making and improve clinical outcomes?” Adapted from Page MJ et al [11].



n=original search
n=indirect search
n=update search

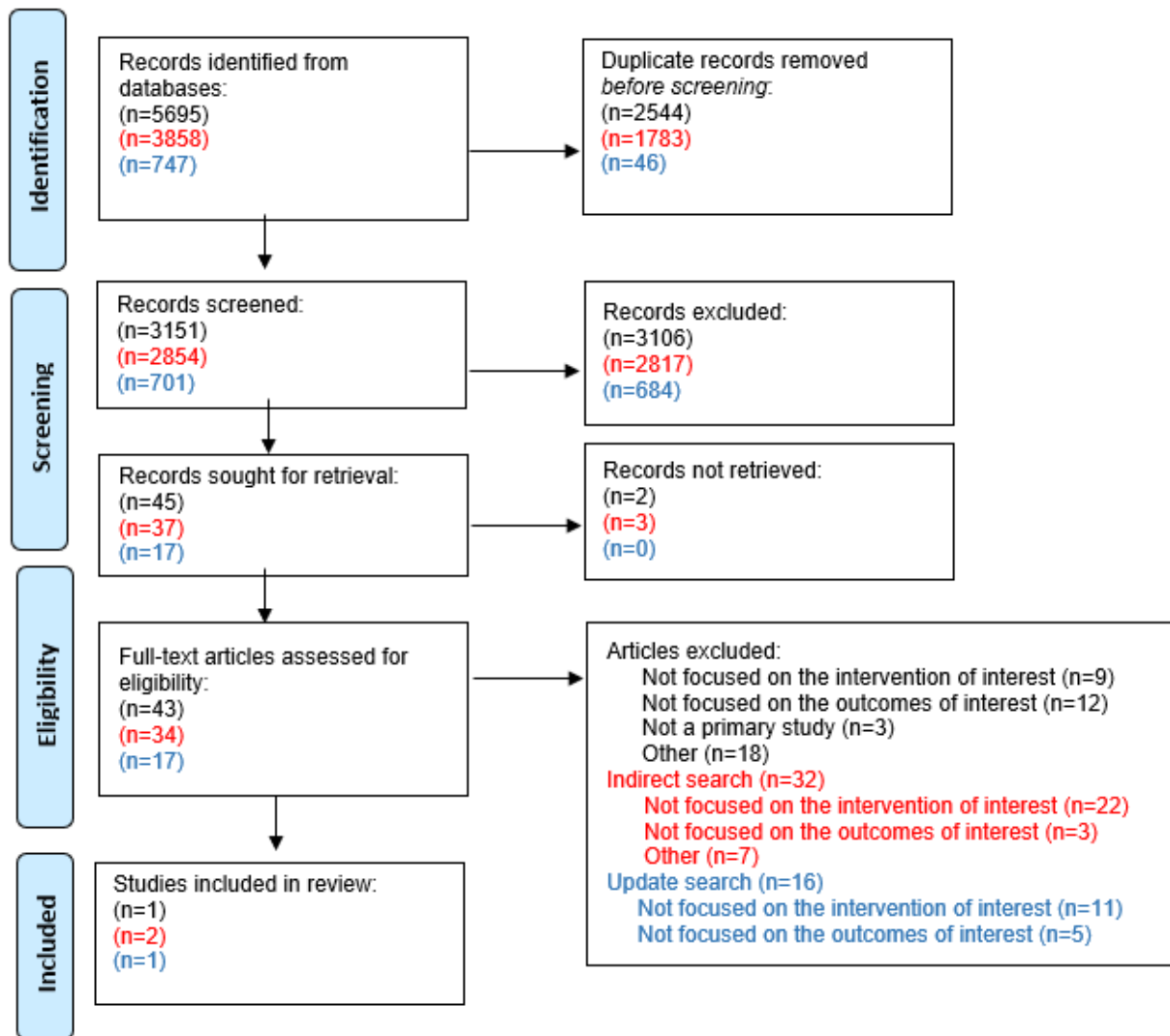


Figure 5. PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) flow diagram for recommendation question 5: “Should a distributive model (vs no distributive model or any other type of change management model) be recommended to integrate digital health competencies into the professional practice roles and responsibilities of nurses at all levels within an organization?” Adapted from Page MJ et al [11].



n=original search
n=indirect search

**An update search was not completed for this recommendation area as no recommendation statement stemmed from this question. More research is needed on this topic.*

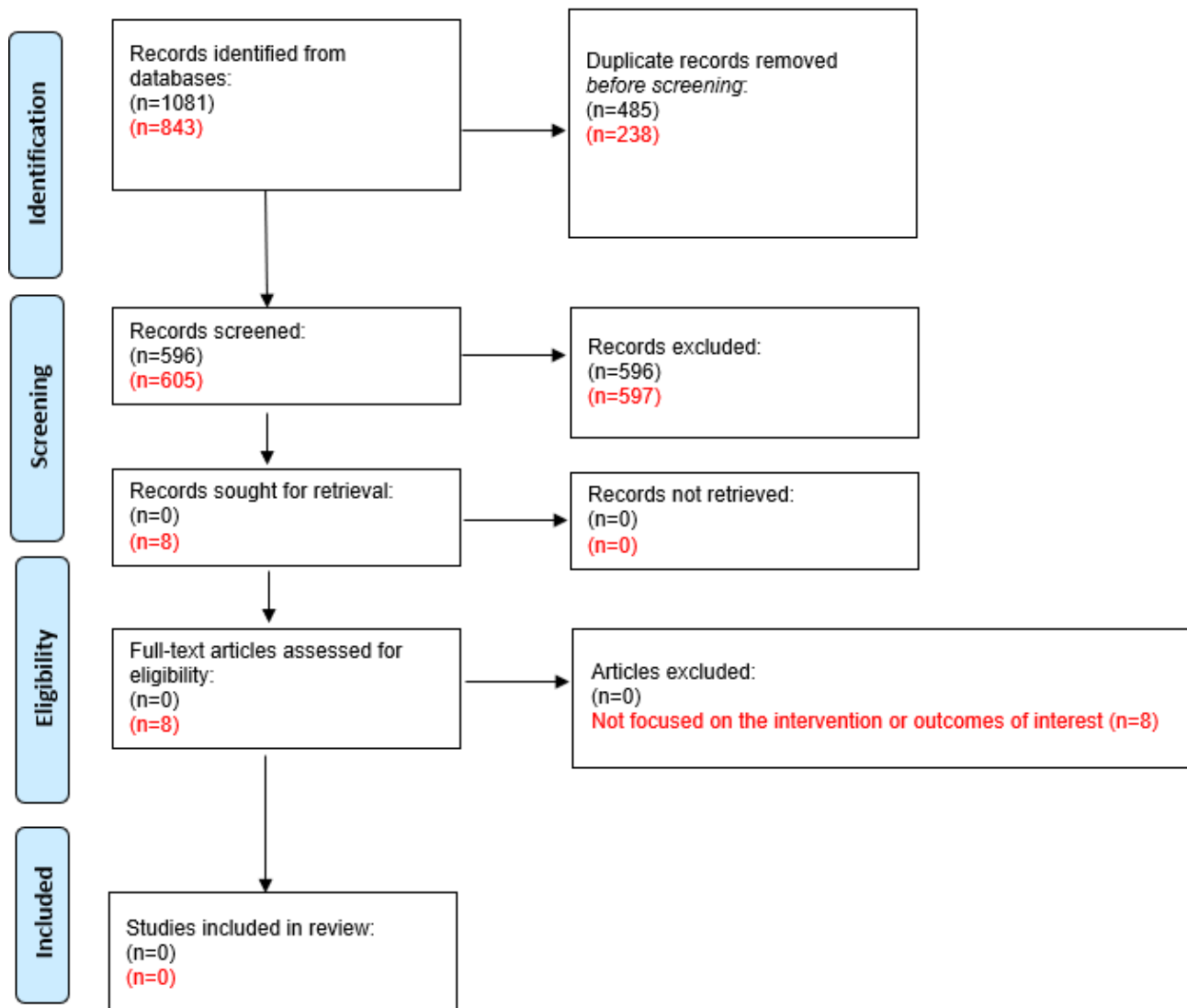


Table . Summary of recommendations in the best practice guideline.

Recommendation	Strength of recommendation
<i>Recommendation 1.0:</i> the expert panel suggests that health service and academic organizations provide ongoing education to nurses and health providers that includes hands-on training for the use of digital health technologies.	Conditional
<i>Recommendation 2.0:</i> the expert panel suggests that health service and academic organizations provide ongoing education to nurses and health providers that focuses on interpersonal communication skills when using digital health technologies.	Conditional
<i>Recommendation 3.0:</i> the expert panel suggests that health service organizations implement interdisciplinary peer champion models to facilitate education for nurses and health providers on the use of digital health technologies.	Conditional
<i>Recommendation 4.0:</i> the expert panel suggests that health service organizations implement CDSS ^a or early warning systems that use artificial intelligence–driven predictive analytics to support nurses’ and health providers’ clinical decision-making.	Conditional

^aCDSS: clinical decision support system.

Recommendation 1.0: The Expert Panel Suggests That Health-Service and Academic Organizations Provide Ongoing Education to Nurses and Health Providers That Includes Hands-on Training for the Use of Digital Health Technologies

Practical or hands-on education refers to deliberate practice, hands-on training, or simulation training (ie, more than just viewing e-learning modules) [4]. The intervention of interest examined whether practical or hands-on education for professional development was more effective than standard education (ie, no-hands-on education component) when training nurses and health providers on the use of digital health technologies [4]. Four meta-analyses informed this recommendation [18-21]. The 4 meta-analyses were assessed for risk of bias using the ROBIS tool, and each one had a low risk of bias [18-21]. Studies included in the meta-analyses were assessed by the authors of the meta-analyses, and they used the Cochrane risk-of-bias 2.0 tool for RCTs, the ROBINS-I tool for nonrandomized studies, and the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence quality appraisal checklist [18-21]. Nine studies within the meta-analyses had a critical risk of bias, 18 studies had high risk of bias, 4 studies had unclear risk of bias, and 1 study had low risk of bias [18-21]. There were concerns noted around allocation concealment, blinding, incomplete outcome data, missing outcome data, selection of the reported results, confounding, allocation concealment, and selection of participants [18-21].

Examples of practical or hands-on professional development education discussed in the studies included nurses practicing using electronic health records while being supervised in a computer lab, and hands-on training for using virtual care platforms [18-21]. For more details on the study designs, the risk of bias assessments, how the interventions were delivered, and outcome measures, refer to the GRADE EP found in [Multimedia Appendix 4](#).

The results of the systematic review suggest that hands-on education for nurses and health providers may improve nurses’ competence and confidence, and the nurse-person therapeutic relationship (while the technology is used with the person receiving care). The expert panel determined that the overall evidence was of very low certainty due to the risk of bias in the primary studies, indirectness in the outcomes, inconsistency in the results, and imprecision due to small sample sizes [4]. Based on this certainty of evidence, the panel determined the strength of the recommendation to be conditional.

Recommendation 2.0: The Expert Panel Suggests That Health-Service and Academic Organizations Provide Ongoing Education to Nurses and Health Providers That Focuses on Interpersonal Communication Skills When Using Digital Health Technologies

Interpersonal communication describes the communication between a nurse or health provider and a person receiving care. It includes both verbal and nonverbal communication, as well as leading and listening skills that enable a person to interact positively with others in an effective manner [4,22]. The types of education varied across the studies and included didactic and simulation-based education (eg, simulated patients) to improve medical students’ interpersonal communication during consultations; training on incorporating computers or electronic health records into nurse-patient encounters; and education on telehealth communication strategies (eg, phone and video consults) [23-29]. Most studies examined focused on medical students [23-27,29], and 1 study focused on nursing students [28].

Seven studies informed this recommendation, including 1 systematic review, 5 additional nonrandomized studies, and 1 mixed methods study [23-29]. The review was assessed using the ROBIS tool and had a low risk of bias [23]. Studies included in the review were assessed by the review authors in accordance with the Cochrane Handbook for Systematic Reviews of Interventions; none were deemed as having a high risk of bias overall [23]. Nonrandomized studies and the mixed-methods

study were assessed using the ROBINS-I tool, and there was a critical risk of bias related to confounding variables, deviations from the intended interventions, missing data, measurement of outcomes, and selection of the reported results [24-29].

The 7 studies illustrated that there may be benefits when health service and academic organizations provide nurses and other health providers with education about the importance of interpersonal communication when using digital health technologies [4,23-29]. Benefits may include improved person, caregiver, or family experience or satisfaction with care, and increased competence and confidence among nurses; however, the overall certainty of the evidence using the GRADE methodology was very low, due to risk of bias in the seven studies, few participants, and inconsistency in results [4]. Based on these factors, the expert panel determined the strength of the recommendation to be conditional. For more details on the study designs, risk of bias assessments, how the interventions were delivered, and outcome measures, refer to the GRADE EP in [Multimedia Appendix 5](#).

Recommendation 3.0: The Expert Panel Suggests That Health Service Organizations Implement Interdisciplinary Peer Champion Models to Facilitate Education for Nurses and Health Providers on the Use of Digital Health Technologies

Interdisciplinary peer champions refer to super-users or champions that are nurses or other members of the interdisciplinary health care team with expertise and additional training in digital health [4]. These individuals function as a resource for other staff, helping to answer questions and teach staff about new technology during implementation. Peer champions can also help identify gaps in the technology or its implementation in practice. This recommendation examined the effects of organizations implementing peer champion models to facilitate education for staff about digital health technologies.

One systematic review of 6 RCTs and 2 nonrandomized single-arm studies informed this recommendation [30-32]. The review was assessed using the ROBIS tool and had a low risk of bias [30]. Studies included in the review were assessed by the review authors using the Cochrane risk-of-bias tool for RCTs; 5 studies had a high risk of bias and 1 study had an unclear risk of bias [30]. The nonrandomized studies were assessed using the ROBINS-I tool, and there was a critical risk of bias related to confounding variables, missing data, measurement of the outcomes, and selection of the reported results [31,32].

The use of peer champions in health service organizations may increase health providers' adoption of technology and health provider competence [4]. The overall certainty of evidence was low due to a serious risk of bias in the individual studies and a low number of participants [4]. Based on the available evidence, the expert panel determined the recommendation to be conditional. For more details on the study designs, risk of bias assessments, how the interventions were delivered, and outcome measures, refer to the GRADE EP in [Multimedia Appendix 6](#).

Recommendation 4.0: The Expert Panel Suggests That Health Service Organizations Implement Clinical

Decision Support Systems or Early Warning Systems That Use AI-Driven Predictive Analytics to Support Nurses' and Health Providers' Clinical Decision-Making

CDSS or early warning systems refer to software found in risk assessment software tools, early warning systems, command centers, and other software systems that use AI machine learning algorithms to interpret data independently [4]. The recommendation question examined whether adding these systems benefits clinical decision-making for nurses and other health providers.

One systematic review of RCTs, 1 nonrandomized single-arm study, and 2 systematic reviews of nonrandomized studies informed this recommendation [33-36]. Included reviews were assessed using the ROBIS tool and had a low risk of bias [33,35,36]. Studies included in 1 review were assessed by the review authors using the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme checklist for RCTs; 2 studies had a low risk of bias and 1 study had a high risk of bias [33]. Concerns were noted around the lack of details describing the methods, and the lack of blinding [33]. Studies included in another review were assessed by the review authors using the Prediction model Risk Of Bias Assessment Tool; all 10 studies had high or unclear risk of bias [36]. The nonrandomized study was assessed using the ROBINS-I tool and had a critical risk of bias due to lack of control for confounding variables, deviations from the intended intervention, and selection of the reported results [34]. Studies in the final review were assessed by the review authors using the ROBINS-I tool; all 5 included studies had a critical risk of bias [35]. Concerns were noted around confounding, selection of participants, missing data, measurement of outcomes, and selection in reported results [35].

There may be benefits when implementing CDSS or early warning systems that use AI-driven predictive analytics to inform nurses' clinical decision-making, such as improved proactive or anticipatory care, decreased failure to rescue, consistent application of evidence-based practice, and improved nurse-sensitive outcomes [4]. The overall certainty of evidence was low due to risk of bias and few participants [4]. As evidence is still emerging on this topic and the results were mixed, the expert panel determined the strength of the recommendation to be conditional. For more detail on the study designs, risk of bias assessments, how the interventions were delivered, and outcome measures, refer to the GRADE EP in [Multimedia Appendix 7](#).

Discussion

Digital Health Considerations

In 2019, the World Health Organization released a global strategy on digital health acknowledging the vital role digital health plays in planning and providing health services [2]. As digital health technologies become increasingly integrated into health care, nurses need leadership and guidance to safely and effectively use technology in practice. RAO's BPG provides evidence-based recommendations to foster nurses' ability to maintain, advance, and strengthen professional practice in the context of a digital health environment [4]. The guideline's

recommendations focus on (1) hands-on education related to the use of digital health technologies, (2) education about interpersonal communication skills when using digital health technologies, (3) using interdisciplinary peer-champion models to provide education about digital health technologies, and (4) implementing CDSS that uses AI to support but not replace clinical decision-making. While not discussed in this article, additional good practice statements are also provided in the guideline [4].

While digital health has the potential to enhance the quality of care and address key health system challenges, the importance of considering the digital determinants of health, including digital literacy and the digital divide, to ensure equitable delivery of care must be considered. Digital literacy refers to a person's ability to effectively interact with digital technology, using skills required to find, understand, appraise, and apply health information specifically from electronic sources [37]. The digital divide refers to the gap between those who have access to digital technologies, including the internet, accessible health websites and portals, versus those who do not [38]. The World Health Organization's global strategy on digital health notes that digital technologies are to be adaptable to different countries and contexts to help address key health system challenges, while incorporating equity, diversity, and inclusion principles [2]. Unfortunately, the use of certain digital health technologies such as CDSS that use AI may be difficult to implement in less affluent health care systems due to the digital divide [39]. The effectiveness of implementing CDSS that use AI to detect changes in a patient's condition is also dependent on having staff who respond appropriately to these digital tools as well as nursing leadership to continuously oversee the refinement of CDSS and algorithms as needed. As outlined by Richardson et al [40] in their framework for digital health equity, there are several domains of equity including biological, behavioral, physical/built environment, sociocultural environment, and the health care system. The framework can help support the work of digital health technology developers to think about and incorporate principles of digital health equity from the very beginning of the technology development process [4,40]. The framework is also important for end-users, researchers, and health systems leaders, as digital health transformation requires health leaders at all levels to understand how the digital determinants impact health equity [4,40].

In addition to considering the digital determinants of health, when discussing the use of digital health technology with a person receiving care and/or their family, nurses must consider: their preferences and goals; capability and motivation for using technology; how the technology fits into their current care routines; and any costs associated with using the technology [4,41]. Digital health technologies have the potential to enhance a person's experience of the care they receive [5]; however, nurses must consider a person's values and preferences for using technology and ensure that using the technology does not negatively impact or compromise the nurse-patient therapeutic relationship [2,5].

Implementation and Evaluation Considerations

Evidence-based guidelines are effective when there are tools and strategies in place to facilitate their implementation into practice [12]. RNAO uses an integrated approach to ensure that guidelines are both trustworthy and applicable in real-world settings [17]. This BPG includes several tools to support its implementation, including implementation tips, supporting resources, appendices related to the recommendations, and good practice statements. The BPG also directs readers to RNAO's Leading Change Toolkit, which can be used to guide change initiatives, including the implementation of BPGs [42]. RNAO has a network of best practice champions who are the change agents that aid in the implementation of the guidelines, and Best Practice Spotlight Organizations[®] (BPSO[®]) internationally from over 13 different countries that partner with RNAO to systematically implement and evaluate RNAO's BPGs [17].

Finally, a monitoring and evaluation table outlines structure, process, and outcome indicators that health service organizations can use to monitor the impact of BPG implementation. Ongoing evaluation is crucial to support the uptake and impact of BPGs on person, organizational, and health systems outcomes [17]. RNAO houses 2 data systems to support BPSOs to monitor and evaluate BPGs: MyBPSO and Nursing Quality Indicators for Reporting and Evaluation[®] [17]. These 2 data systems are used by BPSOs to report evaluation and monitoring data. As of November 2025, implementation of this BPG has begun in BPSOs, and 1 large Canadian community hospital BPSO has demonstrated 99% (555/562) of nursing staff were compliant with orientation to technologies. Evaluation has also indicated that 84% (474/562) of nurses at this hospital reported comfort with hospital-based technologies to deliver care, and 30% (20,188/72,342) of patients enrolled in a digital patient portal over an 18-month period. Evaluation and monitoring of outcomes is ongoing, and it is anticipated that in the coming years, more BPSOs will implement this valuable BPG.

Future Research Considerations

The expert panel noted that although rigorous RCTs are needed, more exploration including qualitative research is also needed in the area of digital health as it pertains to nursing and clinical practice. For example, studies that examine the efficacy, accuracy, and generalizability of AI-driven predictive analytics, and qualitative studies exploring how nurses and health providers adapt their communication skills in digital health environments. National and international research institutes focused specifically on advancing digital health technologies and integrating digital health practices into clinical care for nurses and health providers would also be beneficial.

Limitations

A few limitations were noted by the expert panel and GDMs during the development of the BPG. First, research in digital health that is specific to nurses and clinical practice is an emerging area. As research is yet to be well established, most evidence for the prioritized research questions was of low or very low certainty; thus, all the recommendations contained in the BPG were deemed conditional. There were few well-designed RCTs, and many of the nonrandomized studies

had a high risk of bias, small sample sizes, and inconsistent results. In addition, due to the paucity of research evidence focused on nurses and digital health, the expert panel considered indirect evidence. According to the GRADE methodology, directness is assessed based on the relevance to the target population, intervention, and outcomes of interest [10]. Although GRADE methods allow for the use of indirect evidence, the reliance on indirect evidence due to insufficient direct evidence is a limitation in this BPG, recognizing that indirect evidence may introduce potential biases or uncertainties. The absence of research and use of indirect evidence is noted in the BPG as research gaps, stressing areas for further exploration.

Despite these limitations, expert panel members and additional external reviewers noted the need for guidance on this topic and the importance of publishing this guideline. Conditional recommendations are not to be seen as less important or less trustworthy; they simply imply that there is a need to consider more carefully than usual the individual person or family's circumstances, preferences, and values [10]. When implementing conditional recommendations, health providers need to allocate more time to shared decision-making and comprehensively explain the potential benefits and harms to people and their families [10]. It is becoming increasingly common for clinical guidelines to only include conditional recommendations, as guideline panels and developers recognize the importance of thinking holistically [43,44]. As evidenced by the COVID-19 pandemic, guideline developers also must balance the need for guidance with rapidly evolving research topics [43]. In this BPG specifically, conditional recommendations allow for guidance

on an emerging topic (clinical practice in a digital health environment) while recognizing the need for nurses and health providers to consider the implications within their own health care context. Additionally, it has been argued that the implementation of all recommendations, including strong recommendations, depends on social and relational processes governing decision-making for individuals [43]. With this argument in mind, end users of all guidelines should think about contextual implications and the values and preferences of patients when implementing both strong and conditional recommendations.

A final limitation is that the authors only included studies published in English from 2017 onwards. They did not search for gray literature or search reference lists of included studies for further evidence due to timelines and feasibility. Therefore, it is possible that some additional studies were missed.

Conclusions

Digital health within the context of the clinical environment is an emerging topic. This BPG provides 4 evidence-based recommendations, along with good practice statements, implementation and evaluation, and monitoring resources. At the time of BPG development, no guidelines had been developed addressing evidence-based recommendations in this unique and growing area, especially as it relates to nurses and health providers. It is anticipated that this BPG can support nurses, other health providers, and health and academic organizations to make informed decisions about education and care related to digital health that can ultimately improve provider, patient, and system outcomes.

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Data Availability

All data generated or analyzed during this review are included in this published article and its supplementary multimedia appendices. This information is also publicly available on the BPG website [4].

Authors' Contributions

Conceptualization: LB, LH, NN, CB, MC, JY

Formal analysis: LB, CB, LH
Funding acquisition: NN, JY
Project administration: LH, NN, CB
Supervision: MC, JY
Writing – original draft: LB, CB, LH, NN
Writing – review & editing: LB, LH, NN, CB, MC, JY

Conflicts of Interest

None declared.

Multimedia Appendix 1
Guideline Search Strategy.
[PDF File, 201 KB - [nursing_v9i1e74942_app1.pdf](#)]

Multimedia Appendix 2
Systematic Review Search Strategies.
[PDF File, 4325 KB - [nursing_v9i1e74942_app2.pdf](#)]

Multimedia Appendix 3
Sample Data Extraction Tables.
[XLSX File, 30 KB - [nursing_v9i1e74942_app3.xlsx](#)]

Multimedia Appendix 4
Recommendation 1 Evidence Profile.
[PDF File, 246 KB - [nursing_v9i1e74942_app4.pdf](#)]

Multimedia Appendix 5
Recommendation 2 Evidence Profile.
[PDF File, 333 KB - [nursing_v9i1e74942_app5.pdf](#)]

Multimedia Appendix 6
Recommendation 3 Evidence Profile.
[PDF File, 259 KB - [nursing_v9i1e74942_app6.pdf](#)]

Multimedia Appendix 7
Recommendation 4 Evidence Profile.
[PDF File, 310 KB - [nursing_v9i1e74942_app7.pdf](#)]

Checklist 1
PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) checklist.
[PDF File, 193 KB - [nursing_v9i1e74942_app8.pdf](#)]

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Abbreviations

AI: artificial intelligence

BPG: best practice guideline

BPSO: Best Practice Spotlight Organization

CDSS: clinical decision support system

EP: evidence profile

EtD: evidence to decision

GDM: guideline development methodologist

GRADE: Grading of Recommendations, Assessment, Development, and Evaluation

PRISMA: Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses

PROSPERO: International Prospective Register of Systematic Reviews

RCT: randomized controlled trial

RNAO: Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario

ROBINS-I: risk of bias in nonrandomized studies—of interventions

ROBIS: risk of bias in systematic reviews

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The Effects of Adequate Rest on Nurse Job Satisfaction, Burnout Prevention, and Physical Health in Medical and Emergency Units at a Hospital in Western Jamaica: Qualitative Study

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Abstract

Background: The demanding work environment of nurses in medical and emergency units often results in high stress, job dissatisfaction, and burnout. Adequate rest is crucial for maintaining nurses' physical health, mental clarity, and emotional resilience, yet it is often overlooked in these high-pressure settings. This qualitative study explores the perceptions of nurses at a hospital in Western Jamaica regarding the quality and duration of rest they receive and its impact on their professional, mental, physical, and personal well-being. The hospital was selected due to the unique challenges health care workers face in Jamaica, including limited resources, high patient loads, and frequent staff shortages, which may exacerbate rest-related issues.

Objective: This study aimed to explore the perceptions of registered nurses working in the emergency and medical units of the hospital in Western Jamaica regarding their rest experience and its implications for burnout, job satisfaction, and overall health.

Methods: The study used a constructivist epistemological lens and used purposive sampling to select 12 registered nurses. The principal researcher conducted in-depth interviews with each participant via Zoom, using a semistructured guide. Interviews lasted 25 to 45 minutes, were audio-recorded, and attended only by participants and the researcher. Thematic analysis was used to transcribe, code, and analyze the data, culminating in the development of a thematic map of findings.

Results: The findings indicated that nurses face significant challenges in obtaining adequate rest due to staff shortages, heavy workloads, irregular shifts, and limited management support. A total of three primary themes emerged: (1) noncompliance with rest policies, (2) resource limitations, and (3) management issues, each influencing job satisfaction, burnout, and overall health. Within noncompliance, nurses highlighted suboptimal nurse-to-patient ratios, absenteeism, and inadequate break time. For example, ratios as high as "30 to 2" or "60 to 3" were cited, affecting nurses' ability to take breaks. Resource constraints included inadequate staffing, insufficient staff replacement, and the absence of suitable rest areas. Management concerns included weak policy enforcement, inadequate policy awareness, and limited support for rest breaks. These challenges collectively contributed to poor sleep quality, increased stress, and diminished job satisfaction.

Conclusions: The study highlights the need for systemic improvements to address nurse rest and well-being, including increased staffing, structured policies on break enforcement, and enhanced management engagement. While the study is specific to the hospital in Western Jamaica, the findings may have broader implications for health care systems in similarly resource-constrained settings in the Caribbean and other low- and middle-income regions.

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KEYWORDS

emergency nursing; Jamaica; job satisfaction; nurse burnout; nurse-patient ratio; nurse well-being; qualitative research; rest; staffing shortages

Introduction

Registered nurses (RNs) are among the most vital resources globally, a reality that was illuminated during the COVID-19 pandemic [1]. The pandemic not only highlighted the essential role that nurses play in maintaining health care systems but also

brought global attention to the immense pressures they face [1]. As reported by the British Broadcasting Corporation, nurses were at the frontline, often working extended hours under extreme conditions, which magnified the importance of addressing issues such as adequate rest, burnout, and job satisfaction [2,3]. This growing global realization of the system relevance of the nursing profession continues to shape

discussions on health care reforms and support for the nursing workforce.

While nurses are vital in delivering health care and patient care, there has been less focus on their health promotion. The demanding nature of nursing in medical and emergency units puts professionals at high risk for stress and burnout [3,4]. The World Health Organization defines burnout as emotional exhaustion from chronic workplace stress, leading to fatigue and decreased performance [5,6]. Reports of burnout among RNs are prevalent, particularly in high-pressure environments like the US health care system [7]. However, there is a noticeable gap in the literature regarding the role of rest in preventing burnout among nurses, particularly in Caribbean or low-resource contexts. Most existing research focuses on high-income countries, leaving a lack of context-specific understanding in regions such as Jamaica.

RNs are expected to provide high-quality care while managing intense workloads and irregular hours, underscoring the need for effective strategies to enhance nurse well-being and job satisfaction [7]. Job satisfaction reflects a positive emotional response to one's role and work environment [6,8,9]. Among these strategies, ensuring adequate rest is a crucial yet often overlooked component, essential for physical recovery and maintaining mental clarity and emotional resilience [10,11].

Despite being an upper-middle-income country, Jamaica faces a low nurse-to-patient ratio that negatively affects the rest quality and job satisfaction of RNs [12]. In contrast, socio-economically similar countries like Cuba and the Dominican Republic have much higher ratios [12,13]. Given the significant role of rest in job satisfaction, burnout prevention, and overall health, there is a lack of comprehensive research on its effects in Jamaican health care settings. This study aims to fill this gap by examining the perceptions of nurses at the hospital regarding the quality and duration of their rest and its impact on their well-being. This study focuses specifically on the medical and emergency units due to their particularly high levels of stress and burnout, as well as practical access considerations. These wards also represent high-acuity environments where the effects of inadequate rest are likely to be most pronounced. In fact, burnout rates on these wards are notably higher, ranging from 25% to 55% [14,15].

Through an in-depth analysis of how rest influences nurse satisfaction and burnout, this research seeks to generate evidence that can drive meaningful improvements in health care work environments. By focusing on the specific context of Western

Jamaica, an underresearched region facing high patient loads and limited staffing, this study offers context-specific insights into the impact of rest on nurse well-being and performance. Its findings aim to support the development of evidence-based policies and institutional practices that prioritize staff recovery, reduce burnout, and ultimately improve patient outcomes. Beyond contributing to academic understanding, this research aspires to influence workforce planning and retention strategies, offering actionable recommendations to help build a more resilient, efficient, and sustainable health care system in Jamaica.

Methods

Setting

The hospital, established in 1964, is a key facility in western Jamaica. As a type B hospital, it provides 5 basic specialties: general surgery, internal medicine, obstetrics and gynecology, orthopedics, and pediatrics, ensuring comprehensive care for its diverse population. Although its capacity is 190 patients, it currently houses up to 300, leading to significant overcrowding and challenges for the health care system and medical staff [16].

This was a qualitative study that used purposive sampling to identify research participants, grounded in a constructivist epistemological approach. This perspective recognized the coconstruction of knowledge between the researcher and participants, aligning with the study's aim to explore the subjective experiences of nurses [17].

The principal researcher acknowledged their potential influence on the research process, particularly given prior acquaintance with 2 participants. Efforts were made to remain self-aware and neutral during interviews and analysis, to minimize bias and enhance the credibility of the findings.

Participant Recruitment

Permission was obtained from the Director of Nursing Services at the hospital on April 8, 2024, after discussing the research's objectives, methodology, and potential impacts. A formal written request outlining the research aims, methodology, ethical considerations, and data management was submitted on April 11, 2024. Following approval, a signed permission letter was issued. The hospital administration assisted in ethically disseminating recruitment emails to 15 potential participants (see Table 1 for inclusion/exclusion criteria). While all 15 acknowledged receipt, only 12 participated: 1 did not sign the consent form, and 2 failed to respond after signing.

Table . Inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Employment	Registered nurses currently employed in the medical or emergency units at the hospital.	Nurses who do not work in the medical or emergency units at the hospital.
Clinical experience	Minimum of 1 year of clinical experience in their respective units.	Nurses with <1 year of clinical experience in their respective units.
Educational qualification	Possession of a Bachelor of Science degree in Nursing or a higher-level nursing qualification.	Nurses who do not possess a Bachelor of Science degree in Nursing or a higher-level nursing qualification.
Willingness to participate	Willingness to participate in qualitative interviews discussing their experiences and perceptions related to rest, job satisfaction, burnout, and physical health.	Nurses who are unwilling to participate in qualitative interviews discussing their experiences and perceptions related to rest, job satisfaction, burnout, and physical health.
Availability	Availability to participate in a 45 - to 60-minute interview session, either in person or virtually.	Nurses who are not available to participate in a 45 - to 60-minute interview session, either in person or virtually.
Language proficiency	Ability to understand and communicate in English effectively, as the interviews will be conducted in English.	Nurses who are unable to understand or communicate effectively in English, as the interviews will be conducted in English.
Male nurses	Male nurses who meet the above criteria are included, ensuring a diverse representation within the study.	Male nurses who do not meet the above criteria are excluded to maintain consistency in the participant pool and ensure a focused analysis.

Data Collection and Analysis

An interview guide was developed with open-ended questions exploring nurses' practices in managing rest, perceptions of rest's impact on satisfaction and burnout, and the role of hospital policies in promoting well-being. It also included recommendations for improving rest in the medical and emergency units at the hospital (see [Multimedia Appendix 1](#)).

Prior to the interview, participants were emailed the participant information sheet and subsequently the consent form and were asked to sign them via DocuSign. Interviews, averaging 45 minutes, were all conducted via Zoom using a semistructured guide with only the participants and the principal researcher present. Each session was audio recorded for accuracy, with no photos or videos taken. Data from interviews were transcribed, coded, and analyzed thematically following the 6-step framework of Braun and Clarke [18], which involved familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing up. An inductive approach was used, allowing themes to emerge from the data without being driven by preexisting theories or frameworks [18].

The trustworthiness of the data was reinforced through transparency in the research process and ongoing critical reflection. While one researcher led the initial coding, all authors reviewed the coding framework and contributed to the interpretation of findings. This collaborative process helped ensure consistency, reliability, and analytical depth, supported by clear documentation maintained throughout. Feedback from all authors further shaped the development of the analysis and structure of the paper, enhancing its overall rigor and quality.

Ethical Considerations

The research was conducted in adherence to ethical guidelines outlined by the Declaration of Helsinki and followed institutional protocols to ensure quality, integrity, and ethical responsibility [19]. The methodology was rigorously designed to ensure reliability, validity, and participant protection, following best practices for qualitative research [20].

Ethical approval was granted by the Research Governance and Integrity Team at Imperial College London (ethics application ID 7069331).

Data management was robust, with clear documentation and secure storage. Paper forms were scanned into the primary author's OneDrive space and then securely shredded. The data were securely stored. Any sensitive data archived were encrypted and access was restricted to authorized personnel only. Risks were managed by transparent communication, voluntary participation, and anonymization of data. To anonymize the data, personal identifiers such as names were removed and replaced with pseudonyms. Unique codes were assigned to each participant, and any identifying information was stored separately from the research data to maintain confidentiality.

All participants received a Participant Information Sheet prior to recruitment and provided written informed consent electronically before taking part in the study. Participation was voluntary, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time without consequence. No financial or material compensation was provided for participation.

Results

Participant Characteristics

Twelve RNs participated in the study (see [Table 2](#)). The mean age of the participants was 28 (SD 2.2; range 25 - 33) years.

All nurses held a Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree, with 1 nurse also possessing a critical care certificate.

Participants had a mean of 3.6 (SD 1.8; range 1.2 - 6) years of experience working at the hospital. The sample was evenly distributed across clinical units, with 50% (6/12) of participants assigned to the Accident and Emergency (A&E) unit and 50% (6/12) to the Medical unit.

Table . Demographic and professional characteristics of nurses at the hospital: female participant 1 - 11, male participant 12; numbers indicate the chronological order of interviews.

Pseudonyms	Age (y)	Educational background	Experience at hospital (y)	Current unit	Sex
Female Participant 1	29	BSN ^a	5	A&E ^b	Female
Female Participant 2	28	BSN	4.5	Medical	Female
Female Participant 3	33	BSN	5.5	Medical	Female
Female Participant 4	28	BSN	5	Medical	Female
Female Participant 5	30	BSN	3	Medical	Female
Female Participant 6	29	BSN	5	A&E	Female
Female Participant 7	27	BSN	1.5	A&E	Female
Female Participant 8	25	BSN	1.2	Medical	Female
Female Participant 9	29	BSN+critical care certificate	6	A&E	Female
Female Participant 10	27	BSN	3	A&E	Female
Female Participant 11	28	BSN	1	Medical	Female
Male Participant 12	32	BSN	2	A&E	Male

^aBSN: Bachelor of Science in Nursing.

^bA&E: Accident and Emergency unit.

Themes

Overview

Three key themes emerged from the interviews, on factors influencing rest quality and its impact on job satisfaction, burnout, and physical well-being. These themes were as follows: (1) noncompliance with rest policies, with subthemes of high nurse-patient ratios, high absenteeism, and rest duration; (2) resources, including limited human resources and the absence of rest facilities; and (3) management, focusing on policy improvement and implementation, as well as nonadherence to duties (see [Multimedia Appendix 2](#) for coding table).

Noncompliance With Rest Policies

Overview

Noncompliance with rest policies among nurses in public hospitals is a persistent and multifaceted issue that has serious implications for staff well-being and patient care. Although formal guidelines are in place to ensure that nurses receive adequate breaks during their shifts, various systemic challenges make it difficult to adhere to these policies. Three critical subthemes emerged in relation to this problem: high nurse-patient ratios, high absenteeism, and inadequate rest duration.

High Nurse-Patient Ratios

The issue of noncompliance with rest policies among nurses is exacerbated by unsustainable nurse-patient ratios, making it nearly impossible for nurses to take their designated 1-hour breaks. Participants reported ratios as high as “sometimes 30 to 2, 35 to 2, 60 to 3, it varies” (Male Participant 12: A&E), highlighting the overwhelming workload they face. It is also common for a single RN to manage a unit with only an enrolled assistant nurse, meaning that while the RN receives assistance, they are still solely responsible for the entire unit, including supervising the enrolled assistant nurse. The consensus was clear; without addressing these staffing imbalances, compliance with rest policies will remain a significant challenge.

High Absenteeism

High absenteeism among nurses is a significant consequence of noncompliance with rest policies, as many nurses report having various medical illnesses, feeling overwhelmed, and burnt out, leading them to take frequent sick days. One participant noted, “the call-in rate is very high because when you realize that you are burnt out and tired you’ll find that persons are not coming in” (Female Participant 1: Medical). Another participant echoed this sentiment, stating, “I will wake up in the morning and say, OK, yes, I’m going to make it to work today... I just find that I am tired, not just physically tired, but emotionally tired” (Female Participant 2: Medical). This

chronic fatigue often results in nurses prioritizing their health over work obligations. The pervasive culture of exhaustion and the lack of adequate rest contribute to a cycle of absenteeism that further strains the already limited nursing staff, ultimately impacting patient care and overall hospital operations.

Rest Duration

Rest duration remains a significant issue among nurses in public hospitals in Jamaica. Although the policies mandate a 1-hour break during 8-hour day shifts and 2 hours for night shifts, these rest periods are rarely observed in practice. One participant verbalized, “You’re supposed to get one hour in the day shift and two hours in the night, but we don’t get that” (Female Participant 6: A&E). Participants highlighted that despite these official guidelines, the reality of high patient complexity and understaffing often makes it impossible to take the full allotted break or even time to eat. Many nurses expressed frustration with the gap between policy and practice, noting that the workload and staffing shortages leave little time for adequate rest. This chronic lack of rest not only exacerbates fatigue, medical illnesses, and burnout but also negatively impacts patient care [21,22].

Resources

Overview

The availability and quality of resources, particularly human resources and physical infrastructure, play a critical role in shaping nurses’ ability to rest during their shifts. Inadequate resources contribute significantly to poor rest quality, increased burnout, and decreased job satisfaction. Two key subthemes emerged under this category: limited human resources and the absence of adequate rest facilities.

Limited Resources (Including Human Resources)

The theme of resources, particularly limited human resources, emerged as one of the main factors influencing rest quality and, consequently, job satisfaction, burnout, and physical well-being among nurses. Participants consistently expressed concerns about inadequate staffing levels, which directly impact their ability to take necessary breaks. Among all, 1 nurse articulated the challenge succinctly when asked if management does not actively hire new staff, stating, “If you go there now and say, oh, we need staff, they’re going to say based on the quota that they have... but be reminded they have opened a lot of different areas and the population has expanded” (Female Participant 9: A&E). The overwhelming workloads resulting from these staffing shortages leave little room for rest. The lack of adequate resources not only hinders compliance with rest policies but also exacerbates feelings of burnout, as nurses struggle to manage their responsibilities without sufficient support.

Absence of Adequate Rest Facilities

The lack of adequate rest facilities at the hospital severely affects nurses’ ability to recuperate during shifts. All participants expressed dissatisfaction with the current designated rest areas, citing issues such as overcrowding, noise from nearby units, and the combination of a bed and lunch area with a microwave in the same space, posing safety and health risks. While some nurses resorted to resting in their cars, others had no choice but

to endure the suboptimal conditions. This shows that without proper rest facilities, nurses struggle to fully recover during their shifts, which in turn affects their physical well-being and their ability to provide quality patient care.

Management

Overview

The role of hospital management, particularly nursing leadership, is central to ensuring that rest policies are effectively implemented and that nurses are supported in their demanding roles. However, participants highlighted ongoing management-related challenges that undermine nurse well-being and disrupt the delivery of quality care. Two key subthemes emerged: the need for policy improvement and implementation, and nonadherence to managerial duties.

Policy Improvement and Implementation

Participants expressed a clear need for more effective policies that not only address staffing levels but also prioritize the well-being of nursing staff. Among all, 1 participant noted, “I think we need more policies to actually not just cater for the staffing of the hospital... but also to cater to the nurses” (Female Participant 1: Medical). Despite the existence of policies that outline break times, the implementation of these policies is often lacking. As one nurse stated, “the policy exists... however, there’s no implementation of the actual policy” (Female Participant 7: A&E). This sentiment was echoed by another participant who remarked, “I don’t think there is a collaborative effort among the hospital, administration, and nurses in promoting nurse well-being through proper rest practices” (Female Participant 3: Medical). The need for management to actively engage in policy enforcement and to create a supportive environment for nurses is paramount, as inadequate rest not only affects nurse satisfaction but also compromises patient care and safety.

Nonadherence to Duties

The issue of nursing managers not adhering to their duties at the hospital has been a significant concern among the interviewees. Participants expressed frustration over the lack of support from nursing managers, particularly during critical times when the unit is short-staffed. One participant noted, “the sisters are supposed to come there and assist and ensure that the unit is running to full capacity... but you find that when you fall into an emergency situation... they either tell you that they are short-staffed or they tell you did you call this ward for this” (Female Participant 4: Medical). This lack of responsiveness leaves nurses feeling overwhelmed and unsupported, as they are often left to manage high patient loads and intense emergency situations without adequate assistance. Another participant highlighted that “most of their tasks, they leave it for the nurses to do while they basically do nothing” (Female Participant 9: A&E), indicating a perceived neglect of managerial responsibilities on the units. The absence of proactive engagement from nursing managers not only exacerbates the challenges faced by nurses but also compromises patient care and safety, as the staff is unable to effectively manage their duties under such conditions.

Differences Based on Gender, Unit Type, and Experience Level

To further contextualize these findings, differences based on gender, unit type, and experience level were also observed among participants, offering deeper insight into how individual and situational factors shape nurses' experiences with rest policy compliance.

Gender Differences

The male nurse often highlighted issues related to workload and understaffing with a strong focus on managerial support and policy enforcement. For example, the male participant in the A&E unit emphasized frustration with the lack of implementation of break policies. Female nurses frequently discussed challenges around balancing work demands with personal responsibilities, such as family care, which impacted their ability to rest adequately during shifts. They also noted more about the emotional toll and burnout symptoms.

Unit Differences (A&E vs Medical)

Nurses working in A&E units reported higher stress levels due to patient complexity and unpredictability of cases. They described fewer opportunities for breaks and greater difficulty taking rest because they were often the only RN on the unit during shifts. Nurses in the Medical units acknowledged the challenges of patient care but reported slightly more opportunities for breaks compared to A&E. However, they also noted the workload increased significantly during night shifts.

Experience and Role

More experienced nurses, working 3 years or more, tended to express frustration with systemic issues such as staffing policies and managerial accountability. Less experienced nurses, working less than 3 years, were more likely to discuss immediate physical fatigue and emotional exhaustion, focusing on day-to-day survival rather than broader systemic changes.

Discussion

Summary of Major Findings

This study examined the role of adequate rest in nurse satisfaction, burnout prevention, and physical well-being in medical and emergency units. It uncovered systemic challenges that hinder nurses from obtaining sufficient rest. High patient-to-nurse ratios, staffing shortages, and lack of managerial support were identified as key contributors to fatigue and burnout. Nurses' personal responsibilities, such as caregiving at home, also affected their ability to prioritize rest. These findings show how both institutional and personal factors compromise nurses' well-being and, in turn, patient care.

Interpretation of Demographic Differences

Demographic differences reflect social, cultural, and professional dynamics shaping nurses' experiences. Female nurses often balance work and caregiving roles, heightening stress and burnout risk [23]. A&E nurses reported higher fatigue levels than those in Medical units, due to the unpredictable nature of emergency care. Experienced nurses highlighted systemic issues, while newer nurses focused on the immediate

physical and emotional toll, reflecting their frontline pressures [24].

Interpretation of Findings

The study reaffirms the link between rest and well-being. Nurses with more rest reported better physical and mental health, supporting global research on this topic [25]. Challenges at this hospital, such as high workloads and weak managerial support, mirror trends in other resource-limited settings [26]. For example, a Namibian study also found burnout tied to understaffing and lack of rest infrastructure [27]. Nurses at the hospital in Western Jamaica frequently reported physical exhaustion and long-term health concerns, echoing global findings on rest-related health risks, including musculoskeletal pain and emotional exhaustion, key components of burnout [7,25,28].

Relation to Wider Context and Integration With Existing Literature

Jamaica faces a severe brain drain, with 80% of skilled workers emigrating, including health care professionals [29]. Ranking second globally on the brain drain index [30], Jamaica's workforce shortages worsen burnout. Similar trends are noted in Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago [31]. Cultural and economic pressures often lead nurses to work extended hours without adequate compensation or rest. In contrast, high-income countries enforce stricter work hour regulations. At Spanish Town Hospital in Southeast-Central Jamaica, the nurse-patient ratio is 1:10, far above ratios in wealthier nations, contributing to burnout and absenteeism [32-34]. The Maslach Burnout Inventory indicated "very high" burnout among nurses, especially in emotional exhaustion [22,35]. The International Council of Nurses [36] highlights the negative outcomes that occur from high-income countries attempting to address their nursing shortages through "inequitable international recruitment." Through recruiting via migration, it leaves nursing workforces in low- and middle-income countries without adequate care, masks the underlying issues leading to high turnover, and costs low- and middle-income countries lost training expenses after public investment in education.

Nurses struggle to maintain work-life balance in these settings. Overcrowding and understaffing lead to long hours and little time for self-care [37,22]. The State of the World's Nursing Report 2025 [38] illustrated that only 55% of countries had regulations on working hours and conditions, whereas the remaining 45% had partial or no regulations. Care packages for mental well-being of nurses were implemented in 42% of countries, whereas 64% only implemented partial or no care packages. A study in Iceland showed higher satisfaction among nurses working standard hours versus those on overtime [39]. However, extended shifts remain necessary at this hospital in Western Jamaica, negatively affecting health and morale. These findings call for urgent action to support nurses and improve patient care through systemic reform. This is supported by the International Council of Nurses 2025 report [36], which states that solutions such as "ensuring adequate staffing and a balanced skill mix and workforce capacity aligned with patients demands" need to be implemented.

Strengths and Limitations

This study's strength lies in its qualitative design, which captured rich personal narratives often missed in quantitative research [17]. Familiarity between the researcher and some participants may have encouraged openness. However, it may also have introduced bias. The lead researcher's nursing background may have shaped interpretations. Additionally, excluding non-English-speaking nurses, such as Cuban staff [1], limited the diversity of views. With only 12 participants from 2 units, generalizability is limited. Self-reported data also carry risks of under- or over-reporting.

Future Work

Future studies should explore strategies for staff recruitment and retention to reduce burnout. Research is needed on how managerial practices affect rest and well-being. Peer support systems and cultural change around rest and self-care should be evaluated. Post-COVID recovery efforts should prioritize mental health support and enforceable rest policies [40].

Policy and Intervention Recommendations

The hospital should address high nurse-to-patient ratios by increasing staff, ensuring breaks without compromising care. California's Nurse-to-Patient Ratios Law (1:2 in intensive care units; 1:4 in medical-surgical) reduced burnout and improved outcomes [4]. Structured break policies and cross-unit support systems are vital. UK hospitals implementing scheduled breaks reported reduced stress and higher job satisfaction [41]. Australia's cross-unit model ensures continuity of care and relieves pressure during breaks [39,42,43].

Hospital leadership should prioritize nurse well-being. Programs in Australia train managers to promote self-care and regular breaks, leading to greater satisfaction and lower turnover [44]. At Cleveland Clinic in the United States, managerial training on rest and mental health improved morale and retention [45,46]. Wellness programs like Johns Hopkins' Resilience in Stressful Events provide peer support and counseling, significantly reducing burnout and emotional exhaustion among nurses [47].

Conclusion

This study underscores the role of adequate rest in preventing burnout and enhancing job satisfaction among nurses in medical and emergency units. The findings reveal that systemic barriers, such as high workloads, inadequate staffing, and chaotic work environments, significantly hinder nurses' ability to achieve sufficient rest. Nurses in the emergency unit, in particular, face higher stress levels due to the demanding nature of their work, which worsens fatigue and burnout. The lack of localized studies focusing on the physical and mental well-being of Jamaican nurses, particularly in high-pressure emergency units, creates a significant academic gap.

Addressing these issues can enhance the global understanding of burnout in various contexts while providing region-specific strategies to improve nurse retention, job satisfaction, and overall health care quality in Jamaica. A multifaceted approach is required to tackle these challenges, incorporating policy changes, management training, and the creation of supportive work environments. By prioritizing the well-being of nurses through adequate rest, health care institutions can not only improve nurse satisfaction but also ensure better patient care outcomes.

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Data Availability

The datasets generated or analyzed during this study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Authors' Contributions

Conceptualization: CS (lead)
Data curation: CS
Formal analysis: CS
Funding acquisition: NC, KKM
Investigation: CS
Methodology: CS
Project administration: CS
Supervision: NC, KKM

Validation: CS

Writing – original draft: CS (lead)

Writing – review & editing: NC (supporting), KKM (supporting)

Conflicts of Interest

None declared.

Multimedia Appendix 1

Interview guide.

[[DOCX File, 12 KB - nursing_v9i1e84106_app1.docx](#)]

Multimedia Appendix 2

Coding table: from quotes to theme.

[[DOCX File, 12 KB - nursing_v9i1e84106_app2.docx](#)]

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Abbreviations

A&E: Accident and Emergency

RN: registered nurse

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Nurses' Experiences of Interprofessional Collaboration in Digitally Supported Hospital Discharge Planning: Qualitative Study

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Abstract

Background: Effective interprofessional collaboration (IPC) in patient discharge planning is essential for ensuring continuity of care, improving patient outcomes, and strengthening coordination among health care professionals. Nurses often serve as primary coordinators due to their continuous engagement in patient care. However, the implementation of IPC continues to face barriers at the individual, team, and organizational levels. Many hospitals have adopted digital tools, such as integrated patient progress notes (IPPNs), to facilitate information sharing. Nevertheless, the use of these tools to support IPC remains suboptimal and has been insufficiently explored, particularly within the Indonesian digital health context.

Objective: This study aimed to explore how IPPNs support IPC during patient discharge planning, particularly from the nursing perspective.

Methods: A qualitative phenomenological study was conducted at a hospital in Bukittinggi, West Sumatra. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and a focus group discussion involving 9 purposively selected health care professionals. Thematic analysis was used to identify key patterns related to IPC practices and communication dynamics involving the use of IPPNs.

Results: The findings revealed 3 main themes: (1) individual understanding and motivation in IPC, encompassing motivation, role expectations, personality style, and professional strengths; (2) team dynamics, including leadership, management, communication, and social support; and (3) organizational support for IPC, comprising collaborative culture, institutional goals, organizational structures, and the organizational environment. Participants perceived IPC as essential yet inefficiently utilized for coordinating patient care across disciplines, with limitations in standardization, accessibility, and clarity of digital documentation hindering effective collaboration.

Conclusions: This study demonstrated that IPC practices were shaped by individual, team, and organizational factors, with digital communication holding a potentially transformative role in facilitating collaboration. These findings contribute to existing knowledge by highlighting context-specific challenges in Indonesian digital health settings, including digital literacy, system usability, and institutional support, which influence IPC and discharge planning outcomes. Integrating digital optimization within IPC frameworks may represent a valuable strategy for advancing digital health practices.

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KEYWORDS

digital health; digital communication; discharge planning; electronic health records; health information systems; interprofessional collaboration; integrated patient progress notes; qualitative study

Introduction

Patient discharge from hospital care represents a critical stage in the care continuum, particularly for individuals with chronic or complex conditions [1]. Effective discharge planning requires interprofessional collaboration (IPC) to ensure continuity of care and minimize adverse health outcomes [2]. Nurses play a central role as patient and family educators and function as key

coordinators of interprofessional communication. However, IPC remains suboptimal in many health care systems, particularly in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), contributing to prolonged hospital stays, medication errors, fragmented care, and reduced patient satisfaction [1,3].

Technological innovations have been identified as potential strategies for enhancing IPC. Web-based platforms, such as *Discharge Today*, have demonstrated improvements in team

coordination without increasing workload, with most users perceiving the information as accurate and useful [3]. In situations with limited face-to-face interaction, such as shift handovers, these tools support continuity of information exchange among team members [4]. Virtual simulation-based interprofessional education (IPE) has also been shown to strengthen collaborative competencies among health care professionals, particularly nursing students [5]. However, the successful implementation of such interventions is highly dependent on health care professionals' digital readiness, motivation, and technological competence.

Barriers to effective IPC persist at both institutional and individual levels. Organizational constraints, including weak leadership and inadequate managerial support, hinder technology-enabled collaboration and contribute to poor communication and reduced team performance [6,7]. At the individual level, resistance to change, heavy workload, limited digital literacy, and unclear professional roles impede collaboration, particularly during discharge transitions [2,6].

Digital documentation tools, including electronic health records, shared care plans, and standardized discharge forms, are designed to support IPC by improving clarity and consistency of clinical information [3]. However, practical challenges, including documentation fatigue, limited training, and system incompatibility, often limit their optimal use in clinical practice [4].

In Indonesia, hospitals have adopted an integrated patient progress notes (IPPNS), locally known as *Catatan Perkembangan Pasien Terpadu*, as part of the national electronic health records system to support multidisciplinary documentation [8]. Although nurses are required to routinely document patient progress using this system, studies have reported implementation inconsistencies, including incomplete entries, lack of standardization, and suboptimal use during discharge planning [9], compounded by unclear protocols, administrative workload, and limited digital literacy training [10].

Similar implementation gaps are evident in a type B teaching referral hospital in West Sumatra that has adopted the IPPNS system as part of its digital health strategy. However, despite being policy-mandated, no formal evaluation has examined the use of IPPNS in supporting IPC during discharge planning, particularly from nurses' perspectives. Existing studies have primarily focused on technical or administrative aspects of documentation, with limited examination of IPPNS as a digital collaboration tool within clinical practice.

This hospital was selected as the study site because it functions as a regional referral center and teaching institution that actively implements national digital health integration and manages multidisciplinary, high-complexity cases requiring intensive interprofessional coordination. These characteristics make it representative of mid-level health care facilities transitioning toward integrated digital health systems. Therefore, this study aimed to explore how IPPNS are used as a digital collaboration tool to support IPC during patient discharge planning, with a particular focus on nurses' perspectives and interprofessional practice.

Methods

Study Design

This study used a qualitative phenomenological design to explore health care professionals' experiences of IPC in patient discharge planning supported by digital documentation in a hospital setting. The phenomenological approach was selected because it enables an in-depth exploration of participants' subjective experiences and the meanings they ascribe to the phenomenon under investigation [11-15].

Setting and Samples

This study was conducted between January and February 2025 at a type B teaching referral hospital in West Sumatra, Indonesia. The hospital has implemented IPPNS, locally known as *Catatan Perkembangan Pasien Terpadu*, as part of its digital service standards. The hospital was selected because it involves multiple health care professions in the collaborative process of patient discharge planning.

Participants were recruited using purposive sampling and comprised 9 participants: 3 physicians, 2 nurses, 2 pharmacists, and 2 nutritionists. This interprofessional composition was intended to reflect collaborative dynamics among health care team members. Data saturation was achieved, as no new themes emerged after the eighth interview, and the ninth interview confirmed thematic repetition. In phenomenological studies, data saturation is typically achieved with 6 to 10 participants who have direct experience with the phenomenon under investigation [12,13].

Although the study was nursing-oriented, 2 nurses were included because the primary focus was IPC in discharge planning rather than nursing practice alone. The selected nurses had direct clinical and coordinative experience in the discharge process, providing sufficiently rich insights to represent nursing perspectives. In phenomenological research, depth and richness of meaning are prioritized over sample size, making this sample appropriate for addressing the research objectives [13,14].

Participants were selected based on the following inclusion criteria: (1) Physicians must hold a valid practice license (Surat Izin Praktik, SIP) and a clinical competency certificate (Surat Keterangan Kewenangan Klinik, RKK), have at least 2 years of work experience at the hospital, and consent to participate; (2) Clinical nurses (level III) must possess an SIP and a signed RKK, have at least 2 years of work experience at the hospital, and consent to participate; (3) Pharmacists must hold an SIP and an RKK, have at least 2 years of work experience at the hospital, and consent to participate; and (4) Nutritionists must hold an SIP and an RKK, have at least 2 years of work experience at the hospital, and consent to participate.

All participants were anonymized and assigned codes to ensure confidentiality and protect personal information throughout the research process.

Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected through in-depth interviews and face-to-face focus group discussions (FGDs) conducted at the hospital. The interview guide was developed based on the World Health

Organization (WHO) IPC framework and King's Interpersonal System Theory, focusing on 4 main domains: (1) perceptions of IPC in discharge planning; (2) roles and responsibilities of each professional group within the team; (3) barriers and facilitating factors influencing IPC implementation in the hospital; and (4) utilization of the IPPNs as a digital communication tool for coordination among professionals.

The following are the example interview questions:

1. How do you perceive IPC in the discharge planning process?
2. What challenges have you encountered when using IPPNs to coordinate with other professionals?
3. In your view, what factors could strengthen interprofessional teamwork in this hospital?

Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes, was audio-recorded with participants' consent, and was transcribed verbatim.

Following the individual interviews and initial thematic analysis, an FGD was conducted to validate and refine the themes that emerged from the interviews. The FGD served as a member-checking process to confirm the credibility of the findings and to provide cross-professional reflection on shared experiences. Importantly, the FGD was not intended to generate new themes but to enhance trustworthiness through data triangulation and ensure consistency of meaning across professional perspectives.

All participants received a clear explanation of the study objectives and procedures, and informed consent was obtained before data collection.

Data Analysis

Data collection and analysis were conducted in 2 stages. The first stage involved 9 in-depth interviews using a semistructured interview guide consisting of open-ended questions based on the WHO framework for IPC and the core IPC competencies as outlined by the Institute of Medicine in the expert panel report. The information obtained from these face-to-face interviews was recorded with consent and transcribed verbatim. As the interviews and FGD were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia, data analysis was performed in the original language. Quotations included in the manuscript were translated into English carefully to retain conceptual accuracy. Interview data were analyzed thematically following the approaches proposed by Braun and Clarke [12,13], including open coding, theme development, and interpretation. The coding and theme categorization process was supported by NVivo 15 software (Lumivero) to ensure analytic consistency and traceability.

The reporting of this study adhered to the COREQ (Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research) checklist to ensure transparency and methodological rigor. The coding process followed the 6 phases of thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke, including data familiarization, generation of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing, defining, and naming themes. A preliminary codebook was developed inductively

from the data, then refined through iterative discussions among the research team to ensure conceptual clarity. Coding discrepancies were resolved through peer debriefing and consensus meetings to achieve analytic consistency.

The second stage of data collection was an FGD conducted only once, including 4 participants selected from the initial participants based on the richness and relevance of the information provided during the previous analysis. FGD data were analyzed using the same thematic method, and the results from both stages were integrated using triangulation.

Potential bias was addressed in the FGD by ensuring equal opportunities for all participants to speak and by avoiding dominant voices that overshadowed others. The discussion was guided neutrally, with questions designed to elicit further reflection rather than primary responses.

Trustworthiness and Rigor

To maintain the trustworthiness and rigor of qualitative data, the strategies outlined by Nowell et al [14,15] were applied as follows: credibility was ensured through data saturation, verbatim transcription, and triangulation of in-depth interviews and FGDs; transferability was supported by a detailed description of the study context, including participants' profiles and data collection procedures; dependability was ensured through detailed documentation of the data collection and analysis processes; and confirmability was established through triangulation and discussions with study team members to ensure consistent and objective interpretations [14,15].

Ethical Considerations

This study underwent ethical review and was approved by DR Drs M Hatta Brain Hospital, Bukittinggi, Indonesia (002555/KEP.RSOMH Bukittinggi/2024). Before data collection, participants were provided with a study information sheet explaining the purpose, benefits, methods, and participant rights. Participation was voluntary, and participants could withdraw at any time without consequences. Written consent was obtained from each participant after they read and understood the information provided. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by excluding individual identities from the report. Data were used solely for this study and stored securely in accordance with privacy policies. The research was conducted in accordance with the Helsinki Declaration. Participants did not receive any financial or material compensation for their participation in this study.

Results

Descriptive Results

Before presenting the main findings, an overview of participant characteristics is provided in Table 1, which summarizes the characteristics of 9 participants, all within the productive age range (25 - 64 y) as defined by the WHO. Most participants were female (n=7, 78%) and held a master's degree (n=7, 78%). The majority were married (n=7, 78%) and had more than 10 years of work experience (n=6, 66.7%).

Table . Participants' characteristics.

Characteristics	Frequency, n (%)
Age (y)	
25 - 64: adult (productive age range) according to WHO ^a	9 (100)
Sex	
Male	2 (22)
Female	7 (78)
Education	
Bachelor's degree	2 (22)
Master's degree	7 (78)
Marital status	
Married	7 (78)
Not married	2 (22)
Profession	
Doctor	3 (33.3)
Nurse	2 (22.2)
Pharmacist	2 (22.2)
Nutritionist	2 (22.2)
Work period (y)	
<5	0 (0)
5 - 10	3 (33.3)
>10	6 (66.7)

^aWHO: World Health Organization.

Participants represented 4 professional backgrounds: doctors, nurses, pharmacists, and nutritionists, reflecting multidisciplinary involvement in patient discharge planning.

Health Care Professionals' Experiences in Implementing IPC in Hospital Settings

Overview of Emergent Themes

Three main themes and 12 subthemes emerged from the analysis, describing health care professionals' experiences in implementing IPC during patient discharge planning. The main themes and subthemes are summarized in [Table 2](#).

Table . Themes of health professionals' experiences in IPC^a practice at a type B teaching referral hospital in West Sumatra, Indonesia.

Code	Themes	Subthemes
1	Individual understanding and motivation in IPC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Motivation • Role expectations • Professional power • Personality style
2	Team interaction dynamics in the discharge planning process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group leadership • Coping • Communication • Social support
3	Organizational support for IPC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizational culture • Organizational goals • Organizational domain • The organizational environment

^aIPC: interprofessional collaboration.

Further details of each theme, including supporting categories and illustrative participant quotations, are presented in Figures 1-3, which were generated using NVivo 15 to visualize the thematic structure, and described in the following sections.

Figure 1. Thematic analysis of theme 1: individual.

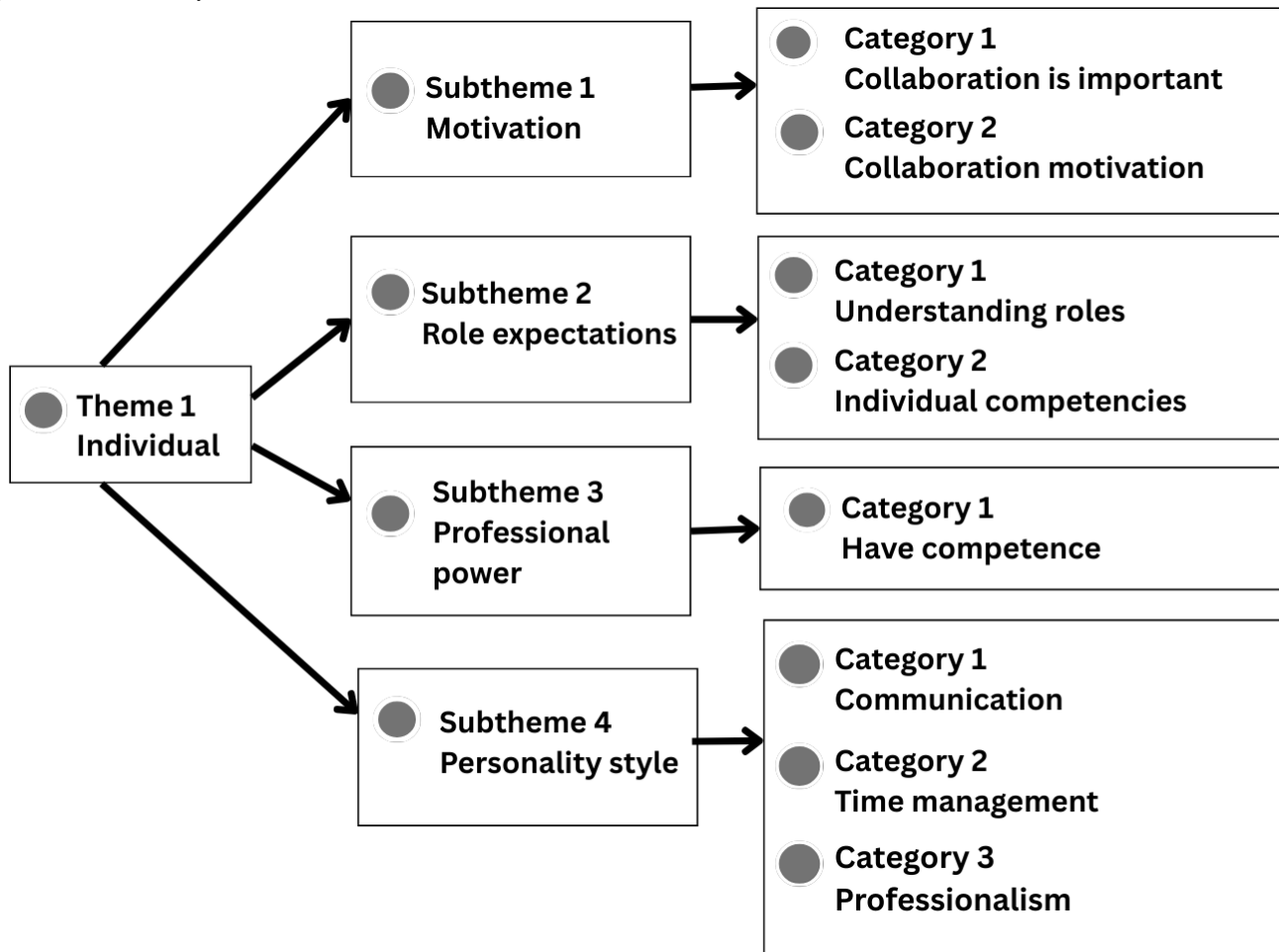


Figure 2. Thematic analysis of theme 2: team

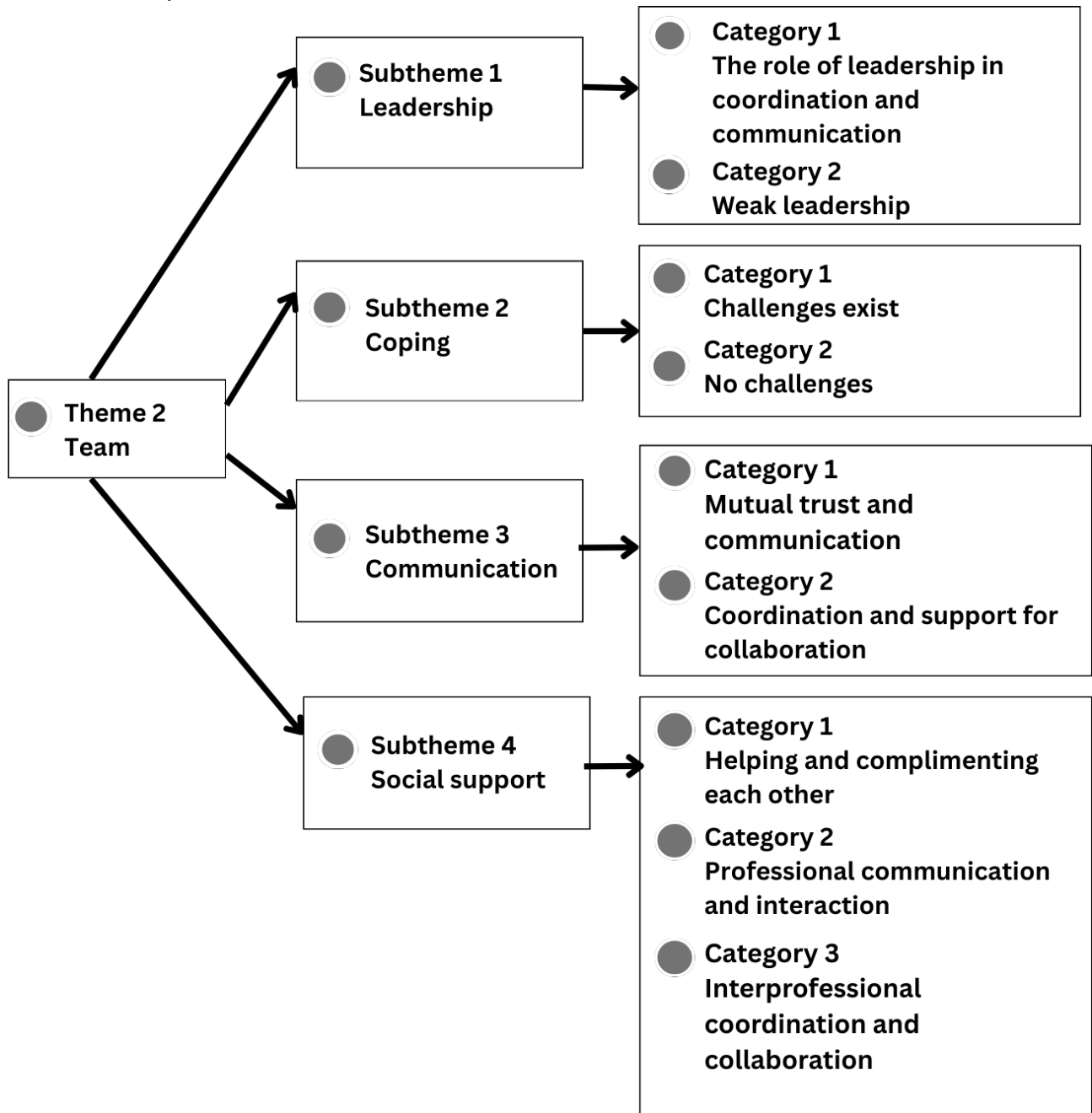
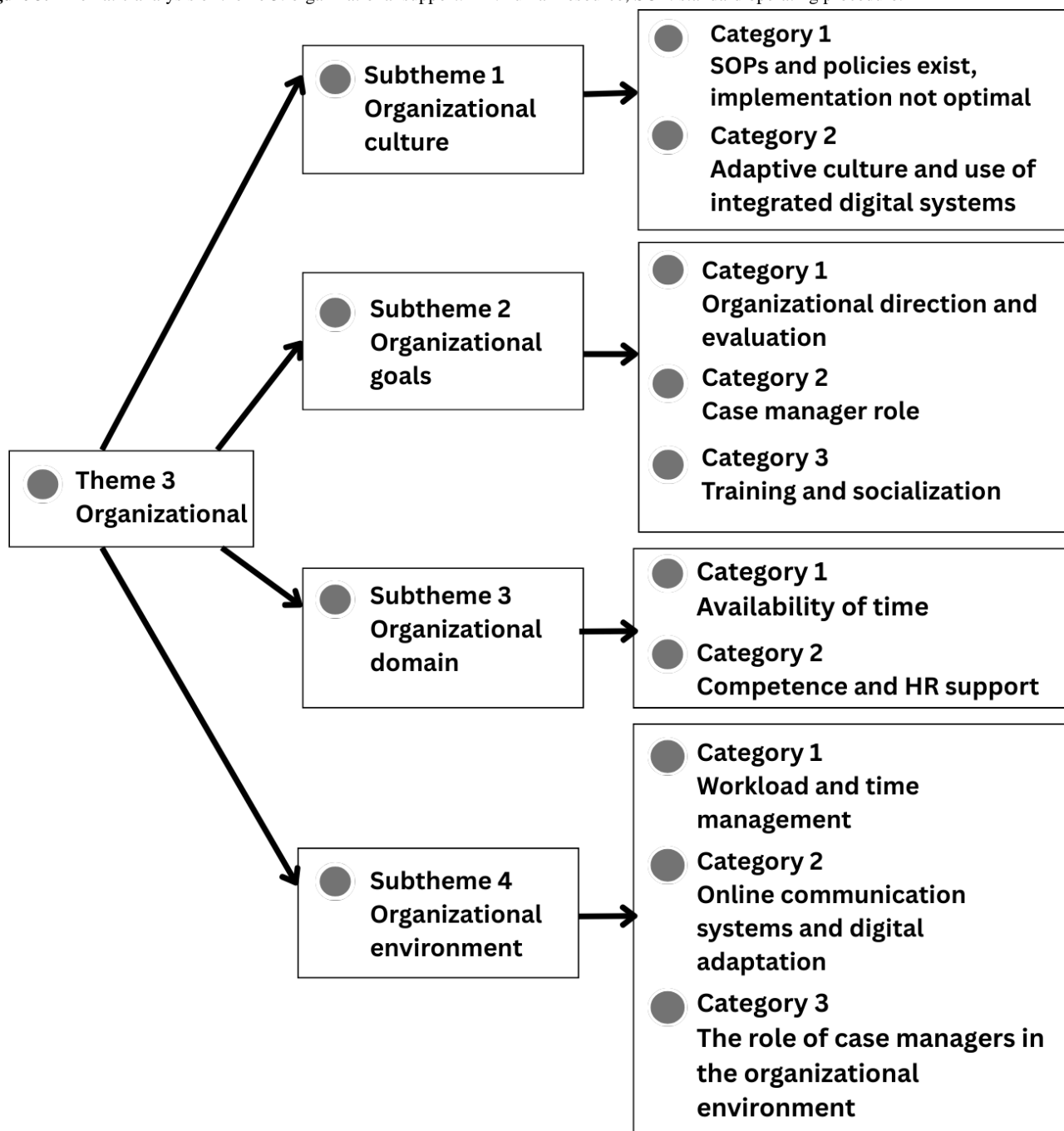


Figure 3. Thematic analysis of theme 3: organizational support. HR: human resource; SOP: standard operating procedure.



Theme 1: Individual Understanding and Motivation in IPC

Overview of Theme 1

Qualitative findings suggest that individual factors play a crucial role in the implementation of IPC, particularly in the context of patient discharge planning. This theme comprises 4 subthemes: motivation, role expectations, professional authority, and personality styles, as presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1 illustrates theme 1, “individual factors”, which includes 4 subthemes with associated categories: (1) motivation, including the importance of collaboration and collaborative motivation; (2) role expectations, including understanding professional roles and individual competencies; (3) professional

authority, including possession of professional competence; and (4) personality style, including communication, time management, and professionalism.

The following sections elaborate on each subtheme and present supporting quotations from the 9 participants.

Subtheme 1: Motivation

Internal motivation emerged as a key driver encouraging nurses to participate actively in collaborative discharge planning. Several participants recognized teamwork as essential to ensuring patient safety and continuity of care.

Collaboration is essential, especially in planning patient discharge to avoid mistakes. [Participant 2]

Nurses also expressed motivation stemming from a desire to provide comprehensive patient education before discharge.

I'm driven to collaborate so patients receive the right information before going home. [Participant 4]

This intrinsic drive was reinforced by shared professional goals and a sense of collective responsibility.

I feel more enthusiastic when working with a cross-professional team because we share the same goal—the patient's recovery. [Participant 5.]

Some participants noted that motivation diminished when their contributions were not equally recognized.

Subtheme 2: Role Expectations

Role clarity influenced participation in discharge planning. Participants emphasized that understanding their professional responsibilities guided their involvement in team discussions.

I understand that as a nurse, my responsibility is to educate the patient before discharge. [Participant 2]

Several participants identified interprofessional communication as part of their professional role.

I report the patient's condition to the team before they are discharged. [Participant 3]

Some nurses reported frustration when their roles were perceived as limited to routine tasks.

Sometimes we're seen only as medication providers, but we also educate patients about side effects. [Participant 9]

This perception gap between professions can act as both a facilitator and a barrier to collaboration, suggesting the need for clearer role delineation and mutual respect in team settings.

Subtheme 3: Professional Power

Professional hierarchy influenced collaborative dynamics. Some nurses expressed confidence in their clinical competence and independence.

As a nurse, I feel capable of carrying out discharge planning. [Participant 3]

Others reported discomfort when expressing opinions in the presence of physicians.

Sometimes it's difficult to share opinions because we're seen as subordinates. [Participant 5]

Training and institutional support were described as contributing to professional confidence.

After attending training, I felt more confident managing discharge planning. [Participant 6]

Conversely, some participants reported that dominant attitudes from certain professionals affected collaboration.

Sometimes doctors act like they know everything, which makes it hard for others to express their views. [Participant 7]

These findings illustrate the dual nature of professional power; it can empower individuals through competence and training or hinder collaboration through entrenched hierarchies.

Subtheme 4: Personality Styles

Interpersonal communication and personal traits influenced teamwork. Participants associated effective collaboration with openness, confidence, and adaptability.

I'm used to coordinating and listening to team members' input.

[Participant 7]

I prefer being open if there's a different view, I take it as constructive feedback. [Participant 8]

Adaptability was identified as helpful when working with professionals from different disciplines.

I'm adaptable and used to working across different professions. [Participant 9]

Nevertheless, communication gaps were occasionally reported, especially when individuals lacked confidence or were hesitant to speak up. This subtheme underscores that successful IPC depends not only on technical skills but also on interpersonal awareness and flexibility.

Summary of Theme 1

Individual factors influenced participation in IPC during discharge planning. Participants described motivation, role understanding, professional hierarchy, and personal communication styles as shaping their collaborative experiences.

Theme 2: Team Interaction Dynamics in the Discharge Planning Process

Overview of Theme 2

Team interaction dynamics played an important role in the discharge planning process and influenced the implementation of IPC. Participation and coordination among different professional groups were described as central to daily collaborative practice. Participants from various professions, including doctors, nurses, pharmacists, and nutritionists, described diverse interaction patterns that shaped how collaboration was formed, maintained, or hindered during discharge planning. These interaction dynamics encompassed leadership, communication, coordination, and social relationships within the health care team. The identified patterns illustrate how team members worked together to support patient discharge planning in routine practice. The structure of the themes, subthemes, and categories related to team interaction dynamics is presented in [Figure 2](#).

[Figure 2](#) presents Theme 2, “team interaction dynamics”, which includes 4 subthemes with associated categories: (1) group leadership, including leadership roles in coordination and communication and weak leadership; (2) coping, including collectively managed challenges and absence of challenges; (3) communication, including mutual trust in team communication and coordination and support for collaboration; and (4) social support, including helping and complementing each other, professional communication and interaction, and interprofessional coordination and collaboration.

Subtheme 1: Leadership

Group leadership influenced the effectiveness of collaboration in discharge planning. Participants described leaders as facilitators who initiated meetings, allocated responsibilities, and guided discussions.

Our leader always starts the discharge planning meeting and divides the tasks. [P1]

The team leader always guides the discharge planning discussion firmly but openly. [P2]

Participants described leadership styles characterized by fairness and openness: “Our leader encourages all members to express their opinions” (P3), and “Our leader is wise and willing to listen to all input” (P5). Some participants highlighted emotional control and role modeling by leaders: “Our team leader can maintain harmony, not authoritarianism” (P6), and “Our leader sets an example and supports joint decisions” (P7). Collectively, these narratives underscore leadership that balances authority with inclusivity.

Subtheme 2: Coping/Handling

Participants described both the presence and absence of challenges in IPC. Reported barriers included inconsistent evaluation, limited family engagement, and uneven participation across professions: “The challenges exist, especially because there has been no proper evaluation” (P1); “Coordination is a challenge because not all professions are present during joint visits” (P5). Differences in patient contact among professionals were also noted (P3). Some participants reported minimal challenges due to clear standard operating procedures (SOPs) and defined roles: “There are no challenges because all professions already have clear SOPs” (P6).

Subtheme 3: Communication

Participants described communication as occurring primarily through digital platforms, particularly WhatsApp groups: “Communication is carried out via WA groups” (P2, P7, P8, P9). Verbal discussions and documentation were also used to share patient updates: “We routinely inform each other about patient progress” (P1); “I routinely report patient progress to the team via medical records” (P3). Some participants reported communication challenges among new staff unfamiliar with interprofessional communication practices: “There are minor challenges if there are new employees who do not yet understand the ethics or interprofessional communication” (P6). This indicates the need for structured orientation and communication training within multidisciplinary teams.

Subtheme 4: Social Support

Participants described social support as contributing to team cohesion. They reported mutual trust, respect, and shared responsibility. As participant 1 stated, “I feel supported by other team members, so I am more confident,” while participant 3 added, “We respect each other; no one feels more important.” Participants also described encouragement and practical support among team members: “My team members always give encouragement and moral support” (P4). Moreover, collective accountability was evident when colleagues substituted for absent members without complaint: “If someone is absent, the

team still covers for each other without protesting” (P6); “If someone is absent, the others are ready to change shifts without any problems” (P8).

Summary of Theme 2

Team interaction dynamics influenced IPC during discharge planning. Participants described leadership, communication, coping with challenges, and social support as shaping their collaborative experiences.

Theme 3: Organizational Support for IPC

Overview of Theme 3

Organizational support influenced the implementation of IPC in patient discharge planning. Participants described the role of policies, management, resources, information systems, and work culture in shaping collaborative practice. The structure of the themes, subthemes, and categories for organizational support is presented in [Figure 3](#).

[Figure 3](#) presents Theme 3, “organizational support”, consisting of 4 subthemes with associated categories: (1) organizational culture, including existing SOPs and policies with suboptimal implementation and adaptive culture through integrated digital systems; (2) organizational goals, including organizational direction and evaluation, case manager roles, and training and socialization; (3) organizational structure, including availability of time and competence supported by human resources; and (4) organizational environment, including workload coverage, time management, online communication systems, and the role of case managers in supporting IPC.

Subtheme 1: Organizational Culture

Participants reported the presence of SOPs and policies supporting discharge planning. However, limited dissemination and inconsistent implementation were noted.

There are SOPs, but access is uneven across units, which can hinder implementation. [Participant 4]

[A]lthough collaboration is mandated, the execution remains suboptimal. [Participant 9]

Some participants described the integration of electronic medical records as supporting collaboration. For example, a participant shared, “The new H-1 discharge policy is linked to electronic medical records, making it more transparent” (Participants 3, 5).

Others noted that implementation at the unit level remained inconsistent: “Although management has established procedures, their execution at the ward level still needs improvement” (Participants 2, 5). A formal structure supporting IPC exists, while cultivating a shared culture that translates into consistent, collaborative behavior in daily clinical work remains a challenge.

Subtheme 2: Organizational Goals

Participants described management support for collaboration through direction, case management, training, and evaluation.

There are directions from management, but no overarching policy; however, patient satisfaction remains a central focus. [Participant 2]

[The presence of a case manager facilitates cross-professional decisions. Participant 6]

Periodic training and evaluation are carried out to adjust discharge planning practices. [Participant 8]

Some participants highlighted the role of digital systems in monitoring collaboration:

The iKame system allows us to track multidisciplinary participation. [Participant 7]

Subtheme 3: Organizational Structure

Participants reported that the availability of discharge planning teams and digital tools supported collaboration. Several participants described sufficient time allocation and improved efficiency through electronic systems. A participant shared, "Time is sufficient as long as roles are clear" (Participant 4), while another added, "Using the electronic system saves time compared to manual charting" (Participant 9). However, human resource limitations were also reported: "Time remains a challenge, but we hope things improve with more staff" (Participants 3, 5).

Facilities and digital access were described as adequate: "computers are available" and "nutrition leaflets and counseling are provided" (Participant 2). Participants also described the hospital's electronic system as structured and role-based: "the IT system supports collaboration" and "access is structured based on role and profession" (Participants 6, 7). In summary, structural elements such as time, facilities, and information systems play a critical role in enabling IPC, although workload distribution and continuity of IPE still require improvement.

Subtheme 4: Organizational Environment

Participants generally perceived the work environment as supportive of collaboration: "The work environment supports collaboration and discussion" (Participant 2). Scheduling and coordination challenges were commonly reported. For example, "lack of adherence to schedules affects plans like physiotherapy" and "conflicting rounds and outpatient duties disrupt communication" (Participant 6).

Some participants suggested integrated scheduling and dedicated interprofessional meetings. "More integrated scheduling and dedicated interprofessional meeting time" (Participant 8). While digital systems were viewed as helpful, some participants preferred direct communication: "IT helps, but direct coordination is still more effective" (Participant 7).

Participants also mentioned the need for regular evaluations: "There should be routine meetings and comprehensive evaluations beyond administrative aspects" (Participant 2). Importantly, individual commitment was stated: "Even with full organizational support, without individual commitment, collaboration won't work" (Participant 9).

Few participants consider IPC to be running optimally. However, the results suggest that organizational improvements, particularly in scheduling, evaluation, and communication, are still needed to sustain collaborative efforts.

Summary of Theme 3

Participants described organizational policies, digital systems, managerial support, training, case managers, and work environment as influencing IPC during discharge planning. They also reported challenges related to policy implementation, scheduling, workload, and communication.

Discussion

Principal Findings

The findings of this study indicate that the success of IPC in patient discharge planning is influenced by 3 main factors: individual factors, team dynamics, and organizational support. Individual factors include motivation, role understanding, professional competence, and personality styles; team dynamics involve leadership, communication, problem-solving abilities, and social support; and organizational support encompasses work culture, service goals, resource availability, and a supportive work environment. These findings underscore that IPC effectiveness depends on the interaction between personal capabilities, effective team processes, and organizational structures.

Before discussing the findings in detail, participant characteristics should be considered, as they influence experiences and perceptions of IPC. All participants (n=9) were within the productive age range of 25 to 64 years, reflecting readiness for IPC and adaptation to digital systems [16]. Most participants were female (78.0%), consistent with the gender distribution in nursing and public health professions, which may influence collaboration dynamics through communicative and empathetic approaches [17]. Most participants held a master's degree (78%), indicating strong academic capacity for understanding IPC concepts and applying digital communication in clinical practice [18,19]. The majority had more than 10 years of work experience (66.7%), contributing to professional maturity and confidence in interprofessional communication [17].

Although only 2 nurses participated, they were selected due to their strategic role as primary coordinators of discharge planning, making them representative of nursing competencies in IPC [16].

Exploring the Professional Experiences of Nursing Professionals

Theme 1: Individual Understanding and Motivation in IPC

Overview of Individual Factors Influencing IPC

The findings demonstrate the critical role of individual factors in IPC implementation during discharge planning. Motivation, role expectations, professional power, and personality traits shaped health care professionals' engagement and readiness. These findings align with international IPC literature, highlighting individual awareness and intrinsic motivation as foundational to effective collaboration.

Motivation

Motivation emerged as a strong internal driver rooted in responsibility for patient safety and care continuity. This aligns with Smith et al [5], who showed that interprofessional simulation strengthened motivation and collaborative readiness, and with Reinders et al [20], who emphasized intrinsic motivation in sustaining discharge coordination. In Indonesian settings, motivation is influenced by workload, resource constraints, and institutional incentives, indicating that it is both intrinsic and contextually shaped [20].

This study further shows that digital platforms such as IPPNs and WhatsApp function as external motivators by facilitating timely information exchange and shared accountability, consistent with global evidence on digital engagement in teamwork [16]. However, infrastructure limitations, technical barriers, and workload concerns remain as challenges [21]. Thus, technology-supported motivation requires organizational training, leadership, and incentives, particularly in LMIC contexts where motivation is more relational than structurally reinforced.

Role Expectations

Clear role understanding enhanced IPC participation, especially in patient education and communication. Conversely, undervalued or ambiguous roles—particularly among nurses—limited engagement. These findings support Tong et al [22], who found that role clarity improves collaboration and mutual respect. In Indonesia, hierarchical traditions and inconsistent policy enforcement continue to constrain role clarity [9,10]. Compared with high-income settings where roles are codified through standardized policies and digital protocols, local adaptation of IPC policies remains essential [16].

Professional Power

Professional hierarchy remained a persistent barrier. Despite clinical competence, some nurses hesitated to voice opinions due to perceived lower status. This mirrors Tan et al [23] and Nie et al [4], who reported that digital tools alone do not flatten hierarchies without inclusive leadership and policy support. In LMIC contexts, unequal authority and weak institutional enforcement limit the transformative impact of digitalization on power relations [4].

Personality Style

Personality traits such as openness, adaptability, and empathy facilitated IPC, consistent with prior studies linking emotional intelligence to effective handoffs and reduced information loss [10,24,25]. In the Indonesian context, strong family involvement added complexity to discharge planning, requiring sensitivity to sociocultural dynamics [26]. Comparable findings in high-income settings also highlight emotional intelligence as a key IPC enabler [27]. These results indicate that IPC effectiveness is shaped not only by systems but also by personal and interpersonal competencies [28].

Critical Reflection

These findings reinforce that IPC is shaped by individual attitudes and professional culture in addition to formal systems. Digital platforms can enhance coordination, but their

effectiveness depends on leadership, organizational readiness, and equitable governance. Persistent hierarchies and uneven policy implementation in LMICs underscore the need for capacity building that integrates reflective leadership, interprofessional mentoring, and psychological safety.

Theme 2: Team Dynamics in IPC for Discharge Planning

Overview of Team Interaction Dynamics

Team dynamics revealed the importance of leadership, communication, coping strategies, and social support. While digital platforms facilitated coordination, collaboration quality ultimately depended on leadership consistency, institutional accountability, and cultural readiness.

Group Leadership and Participatory Team Culture

Inclusive leadership fostered trust, shared accountability, and psychological safety, consistent with Bornman and Louw [29] and Keniston et al [30]. Conversely, inconsistent leadership resulted in fragmented communication and unclear roles, reflecting uneven policy implementation and limited leadership development common in LMICs [5].

Coping and Operational Challenges in Coordination

Teams faced logistical challenges such as inconsistent participation and fragmented workflows, echoing findings by Nie et al [4]. Clear SOPs and predefined roles mitigated some challenges, aligning with Buljac-Samardzic et al [31]. Persistent hierarchies and uneven enforcement reflected deeper governance barriers, while family involvement occasionally delayed decision-making when authority was unclear [31].

Communication Infrastructure and Team Transparency

Hybrid communication using WhatsApp, face-to-face meetings, and documentation supported coordination, consistent with Keniston et al [30] and Teuwen et al [32]. However, message overload and unequal participation persisted without shared digital literacy and leadership oversight [21,33-35]. Compared with high-income settings, IPC in Indonesia remains dependent on interpersonal initiative rather than integrated systems [27,34].

Social Support and Emotional Climate

Mutual respect, encouragement, and role flexibility strengthened team resilience, consistent with Cadel et al [34]. These findings align with evidence from high-income contexts showing emotional cohesion as a universal driver of IPC effectiveness [35-42].

Critical Reflection

Digitalization facilitates coordination but does not eliminate hierarchies or policy inconsistencies. Compared with high-income settings, IPC success in Indonesia relies more heavily on interpersonal leadership and local initiative, highlighting the need for aligned policy, leadership development, and collaborative governance.

Theme 3: Organizational Support for IPC

Organizational-Level Support for IPC

Organizational support emerged as a prerequisite for sustainable IPC, encompassing culture, goals, structure, and work environment.

Organizational Culture

Although SOPs and policies exist, uneven dissemination and weak supervision limited consistent implementation. Hierarchical norms continued to shape communication despite digital tools. These findings align with Redzewsky et al [40] and Ishii et al [41], emphasizing that policy without localized integration fails to sustain IPC.

Organizational Goals

Leadership support through case managers, training, and evaluation facilitated IPC, although the absence of a comprehensive IPC policy remained a barrier. These findings align with Labrague et al [42], who linked supportive environments to improved safety outcomes.

Organizational Domain

Structural supports such as discharge teams, digital systems, and facilities enhanced IPC efficiency [43-46]. However, workload imbalance and limited IPE persisted [45]. Rawlinson et al [46] emphasized that the success of IPC was strongly influenced by team competencies, including effective communication, clearly defined roles, and consistent organizational support.

Adopting digital systems, such as electronic medical records and the iKame app, streamlines coordination and reduces time burden across professions. However, human resource shortages and compressed work schedules continue to present major barriers. Buljac-Samardzic et al [31] suggested that team structure optimization, including task clarity, adherence to SOPs, and structured time allocation, could alleviate operational barriers to IPC. Digital platforms such as IPPNs and WhatsApp improved responsiveness but remained informally governed, limiting institutional monitoring.

The Organizational Environment

The organizational environment plays a critical role in enabling effective IPC. Factors such as the availability of resources, dedicated time allocation, and structured workflows are essential for fostering a productive collaborative climate. Although digital technologies have been introduced to support interprofessional communication, several structural barriers persist, including noncompliance with schedules, overlapping clinical responsibilities, workload pressure, and a lack of integrated cross-professional scheduling systems. Ginting et al [47] emphasized that while digital tools could facilitate IPC, their effectiveness was limited in the absence of a supportive organizational culture and inclusive leadership.

Beyond systemic factors, individual commitment remains essential to ensure sustainable collaboration. A previous study found that interprofessional trust emerges from the quality and regularity of relationships, individual attitudes, and a supportive organizational culture, and that trust, in turn, enhances

communication, coordination, teamwork, and ultimately collaborative outcomes [48]. Similarly, Reeves et al [49] showed that workplaces promoting team reflection and shared evaluation cultivated trust and accountability among professionals.

When compared to high-income settings, where IPC practices are often embedded in digitalized and standardized systems, hospitals in Indonesia face persistent challenges related to uneven digital infrastructure, informal communication channels, and resource limitations. Similar barriers have been observed in other low- and middle-income contexts such as Ethiopia and the Philippines, where digital and managerial gaps hinder consistent IPC outcomes. These contrasts highlight that while policy frameworks may be globally aligned, contextual and resource-based differences shape IPC implementation in diverse health systems [50-54].

These inconsistencies often stem from institutional hierarchies, variable managerial commitment, and uneven digital literacy among professionals, which prevent the full translation of collaborative policies into daily clinical practice [55].

Holistic Interdependence Between IPC and Organizational Support

Cadel et al [34] and Smith et al [56] reported that peer substitution and team solidarity were critical to sustaining IPC, particularly during workforce fluctuations. Interprofessional simulation-based learning was also shown to strengthen team relationships and preparedness for role substitution when necessary. These findings emphasize the importance of organizational support mechanisms, including structured training and adaptive team models that can withstand staffing dynamics.

Link to Regional Evidence

A systematic review found that satisfaction with organizational support and positive attitudes toward IPC were associated with collaboration effectiveness, although not often statistically significant [50]. This highlights the need for systemic approaches to improve working conditions, promote regular training, and implement inclusive interprofessional models in clinical practice.

Critical Reflection

Organizational support for IPC depends on alignment between structure, culture, and leadership. Policies and digital tools alone are insufficient without consistent supervision, organizational learning, and reflective practice. Strong leadership commitment and structured evaluation forums are essential to embed IPC as a sustainable norm.

Strengths and Limitations

This study's strengths include its qualitative phenomenological approach, inclusion of multiple professions, and focus on digital documentation (IPPNs) within a middle-income country context. Methodological rigor was ensured through triangulation and trustworthiness criteria, contributing to theory building in IPC within resource-constrained systems.

Limitations include the single-site setting and small sample size. The study did not fully examine system usability or interoperability, and cultural hierarchies may limit

transferability. Future research should adopt multisite and mixed-method designs to explore system-level and leadership influences on IPC outcomes.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study revealed the complex dynamics that underlie IPC in hospital discharge planning. A total of 3 interrelated themes emerged: individual understanding and motivation, team interaction dynamics, and organizational support for IPC. The findings demonstrated that intrinsic motivation and clear role expectations were fundamental in fostering individual readiness for collaboration. IPE played a significant role in strengthening professional identity and enhancing collaborative competence among nursing professionals.

Professional hierarchies and leadership styles influenced collaboration outcomes. Power imbalances hindered open communication and participation, whereas inclusive leadership fostered psychological safety and active engagement.

Organizational support encompassing culture, structure, and systems proved essential, although challenges persisted in coordination, communication, and policy implementation.

Effective IPC in discharge planning requires a holistic approach that integrates individual preparedness, cohesive team dynamics, and strong organizational commitment. Actionable strategies, such as structured interprofessional orientation programs, regular digital literacy training, and consistent policy dissemination at the unit level, could strengthen collaborative practice and ensure its sustainability. These efforts can promote more integrated, patient-centered care and enhance continuity of care post discharge.

The findings provide implications for policymakers, hospital administrators, and nursing education institutions to incorporate IPC principles into professional development programs, digital health initiatives, and institutional governance frameworks, supporting collaboration as a sustained norm within health care systems.

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Data Availability

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Conflicts of Interest

None declared.

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Abbreviations

COREQ: Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research

FGD: focus group discussion

IPC: interprofessional collaboration

IPE: interprofessional education

IPPN: integrated patient progress notes

RKK: Surat Keterangan Kewenangan Klinik

SIP: Surat Izin Praktik

SOP: standard operating procedure

WHO: World Health Organization

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Changes in Nurse-Patient Communication Through Health Technologies and Nursing Practices to Recognize and Support Limited Digital Health Literacy: Qualitative Study

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Abstract

Background: In the past decade, the use of health technologies, such as telemonitoring, video consultations, and patient portals, has increased. However, it remains unclear how these technologies have influenced nurse-patient communication. Additionally, little is known about the role nurses play in recognizing and supporting limited (digital) health literacy patients.

Objective: This study aimed to explore which health technologies are currently being used in a hospital context and how nurse-patient communication has changed as a result. Furthermore, we sought to identify the practices nurses use and the barriers they experience in recognizing and supporting patients with limited digital health literacy.

Methods: This is a qualitative descriptive study that used semistructured interviews with nurses working in a hospital (n=21). The interview guide was partly based on the 6-function model of medical communication by de Haes and Bensing. All interview transcripts were analyzed by 2 independent coders using a combination of deductive and inductive approaches.

Results: According to the nurses, health technologies have impacted all 6 functions of nurse-patient communication. They noted improvements in gathering information, providing information, enabling disease and treatment management, and responding to patients' emotions. In contrast, technology made fostering the relationship more difficult, and technologies were seldom used in shared decision-making. Nurses identified limited digital health literacy through intuition, observation of verbal and nonverbal cues, and direct questioning. To support patients with limited digital health literacy, nurses relied on building trust, involving the social network, tailoring communication, and offering additional support. High workload and limited knowledge were the main barriers to applying these practices.

Conclusions: Our findings show that health technologies have significantly influenced nurse-patient communication in the hospital setting. The results highlight the need for tailored training programs to strengthen nurses' competencies in identifying and supporting patients with limited digital health literacy. This is essential to ensure more comprehensible and accessible care and promote equitable patient engagement with health technologies.

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KEYWORDS

health literacy; digital health literacy; nurse-patient communication; hospitals; tailored communication; eHealth literacy; nursing; hospital

Introduction

One of the essential elements of nursing care is communication with patients and their relatives [1]. Communication between nurses and patients serves different functions. The 6-function

model of de Haes and Bensing [2] distinguishes the following functions from the viewpoint of the care professional: (1) fostering the relationship, (2) gathering information, (3) providing information, (4) decision-making, (5) enabling disease and treatment-related behavior, and (6) responding to the

emotions of patients. In practice, these functions overlap and interact during nurse-patient communication. Nevertheless, they are important for positive patient outcomes, including patient satisfaction, adequate diagnosis and treatment, treatment adherence, and even health [3,4].

Over the past decade, the rapid rise of the internet and digital health technologies has begun to reshape the context in which these communication functions take place. Nowadays, patients have access to health information via the internet and social media and to specific information about their own health status and treatment via the hospitals' patient portal. Apps exist for self-management, and the telemonitoring of vital functions may provide care professionals with continuous insight into bodily functions, which was formerly not possible. In addition, nursing consultations are increasingly being conducted digitally, via email, chat, or video conferencing, and health education is frequently supported by websites and videos.

These developments offer various benefits, such as improved patient insight into their health and reduced care costs and patient burden due to fewer hospital visits [5]. However, the benefits may not exist for all patients, and patients with limited health literacy may not experience the benefits from these health technologies. Patients with limited health literacy find it difficult to find, comprehend, or apply health information; they are not able to take responsibility for their health and find communication difficult [6]. The aforementioned digitalization of care requires even more skills of patients, such as the ability to operate devices and navigate on the web, understand and use health apps, and apply digitalized nursing consultations. These skills are called digital health literacy or eHealth literacy [7]. Digital health literacy is not only a technical skill set but the ability to engage with digital technologies in effective, safe, and helpful ways to achieve health goals [8]. It is influenced by sociodemographic factors, such as age, educational level, income, perception of the internet as a health source, and social support [9-11]. In the Dutch context, these inequalities are substantial: it is estimated that 1 in 3 people have a limited health literacy [12], and approximately 20% experience difficulties with digital skills [13]. It can be expected that, in a hospital setting, this number may even be higher because patients may experience tension. For example, in acute or critical care settings, patients may be sedated or intubated, limiting direct interaction, and nurses often need to communicate primarily with family members rather than the patients themselves.

Given these challenges, nurses could play an important role in the care of patients with limited (digital) health literacy, starting with their ability to recognize these patients. However, recognizing these patients is difficult, and studies have shown that nurses often overestimate the health literacy of their patients [14,15]. In addition, limited evidence exists regarding nurses' knowledge and awareness of patients' (digital) health literacy, and little is known about the practices nurses currently use to identify patients with limited (digital) health literacy in clinical practice. Once patients with limited (digital) health literacy have been identified, nurses need practices to support them. Although previous qualitative research has examined how nurses assess and support patients with limited health literacy, attention to

the digital component is mostly lacking. In addition, concept descriptions of (digital) health literacy are available in the literature, and evaluations of nursing practices or interventions remain scarce. Given the increased use of health technologies, an understanding of recognizing and subsequently supporting patients with limited (digital) health literacy by nurses in hospitals is needed.

In conclusion, the increased availability of health technologies is likely to have changed nurse-patient communication. Yet, to date, only a few studies have examined how the rapid digitalization of health care specifically reshapes the 6 communication functions between nurses and patients in hospital settings. In addition, little is known about how nurses can recognize or support patients who experience difficulties in using these health technologies. Therefore, in this qualitative study, we aim (1) to explore which health technologies are used by nurses within a hospital context and how the 6 functions of nurse-patient communication have changed through the use of these technologies and (2) to examine nurses' current practices, as well as the barriers they experience, in recognizing and supporting patients with limited (digital) health literacy.

Methods

Design and Setting

A qualitative descriptive study was conducted, using thematic analysis of semistructured interviews. The interviews were conducted in Isala, a teaching hospital in Zwolle, and at Windesheim University of Applied Sciences in Zwolle, and a vocational education program at Drenthe College in Meppel, all in the Netherlands. This study is reported in concordance with the COREQ (Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research) guidelines [16].

Participants

Purposive sampling was used to obtain a heterogeneous sample of nurses, intentionally selecting participants with diverse specialisms and experiences. Inclusion criteria were current employment at Isala, a teaching hospital in Zwolle, the Netherlands, either as a registered nurse or a nurse in training; a minimum of 1 year of clinical experience or completion of at least 1 hospital-based internship; and currently using at least 1 health technology.

Procedures

Potential participants (17 registered nurses and 6 nurses in training) were invited via email, either directly by the researchers or through their supervisor about the study's aim, interview topics, and the implications of participation. Of those invited, 2 did not respond or were unable to participate due to time constraints, while the remaining individuals agreed to participate.

Interviews were conducted a few weeks after the invitations were sent, either face-to-face or via video call. Before each interview, participants provided written informed consent.

Interviews took place between November 2022 and January 2023 at the hospital and were conducted by 2 researchers (EMD and JW), both trained in qualitative research. One researcher

was employed as a nurse researcher at the hospital, and the other was a lecturer at the University of Applied Sciences. A pilot interview was conducted to assess the clarity and structure of the interview guide, leading to minor adjustments in question sequencing.

A total of 21 interviews were conducted, with 17 held in person and 4 online. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' permission and transcribed verbatim. During most interviews, a student assistant was present to help manage time and ensure all questions from the interview guide were addressed. Interviews lasted between 25 and 54 minutes.

Interview Guide

The interviews were conducted using an interview guide, including 3 main topics.

The Use of Health Technologies and Their Impact on the 6 Functions of Patient-Nurse Communication

The data were gathered using the 6-function model of communication (Table 1) [2].

Table . The 6-function model of communication [2].

Six functions	Explanation
Fostering the relationship	Emphasizes the importance of mutual trust, understanding, and commitment, as well as agreement about each other's roles and expectations
Gathering information	Aims to ascertain a correct interpretation of symptoms and establish an adequate nursing diagnosis
Providing information	Aims to provide understandable, accurate, sufficient, and timely information in a manner appropriate to the patient
Decision-making	Aims to make sure decisions are being based on the information and preferences of patients
Enabling disease and treatment-related behavior	Aims to support patients in treatment adherence and a healthy lifestyle
Responding to emotions	Requires nurses to elicit patients' emotional distress, communicate an understanding of the patient's emotions, and respond with empathy and support

Current Practices in Recognizing and Supporting Patients With Limited (Digital) Health Literacy

The critical incident technique [18] was used to gain insight into current practices in recognizing and supporting patients with limited (digital) health literacy. Nurses were asked to describe a situation where the communication with a patient with limited (digital) health literacy failed, followed by several follow-up questions aimed at elaborating on the situation (eg, "What happened?," "What went wrong?," and "What did you do to fix it?"). Then, the opposite was asked to describe a situation wherein the communication was very effective. Again, nurses were encouraged with follow-up questions to elaborate on the situation. Furthermore, some additional questions were asked to gain insight into their current practices regarding recognition, such as, "Can you assess whether a patient you are seeing for the first time can work with that technology?," and support, such as, "How do you ensure that a patient with limited digital health literacy can work with this technology?"

First, nurses were asked how each function was part of the nurses' work and if any health technologies were used in performing this function. Health technology was defined as the application of organized knowledge and skills in the form of devices, medicines, vaccines, procedures, and systems developed to solve a health problem and improve quality of life [17]. An infographic with examples of health technologies (such as video calling, patient portals, and digital leaflets) used in nursing care was presented to stimulate discussions about their own experiences with these health technologies and experiences with other technologies they may have used. Furthermore, nurses were asked if and how these technologies have changed the specific function. Each participant was interviewed about at least 2 functions. If there was enough time, nurses were asked about more than 2 functions. These 2 functions were rotated between interviews so that all functions were addressed equally.

Barriers to Recognizing and Supporting Patients With Limited (Digital) Health Literacy

Nurses were asked which barriers they experienced in recognizing and supporting patients with limited (digital) health literacy. For example, the following questions were asked: Which barriers do you experience in recognizing patients with limited digital health literacy? And how is this for supporting patients with limited digital health literacy?

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using a thematic analysis [19] using Atlas.ti 22. Two researchers (EMD, JW) first independently read all transcripts to familiarize themselves with the data and identified relevant text fragments. Coding was conducted independently, and coders met after 3, 6, and 12 interviews to discuss their findings and refine the coding scheme. Any discrepancies were resolved through discussion, and a third researcher (CHCD) was consulted when necessary to reach consensus. After each round of discussion, the coding scheme was further refined. No formal intercoder reliability metrics were calculated, as this is not standard for thematic analysis, in

which the focus is more on finding patterns of meaning rather than on numerical agreement. We combined deductive and inductive approaches: deductive coding was guided by the main research questions, while inductive coding allowed subcategories to emerge from the data. Text fragments were first sorted (deductively) into categories in line with the research questions: changes in the 6 functions of communication, practices to recognize limited (digital) health literacy, practices to support patients with limited (digital) health literacy, and experienced barriers in recognizing and supporting patients with limited (digital) health literacy. Within each category, subcategories were developed inductively, allowing themes to emerge from the data.

Data saturation was assessed following Hennink et al [20], who distinguish between code saturation, the point at which no new codes are identified, and meaning saturation, the point at which a richly textured understanding of the themes is achieved. In our study, no new codes or themes emerged after 16 interviews, indicating that code saturation had been reached. A total of 21 interviews were conducted, ensuring that all research questions were comprehensively addressed and meaning saturation was also achieved.

Ethical Considerations

The study was conducted following the ethical principles of the Declaration of Helsinki. The Medical Research Ethics

Committees confirmed that the study (reference number 20221009) is not subject to the Medical Research Involving Human Subjects Act (WMO). Participants provided written informed consent prior to the interview. Participants were able to decline to answer any questions and withdraw from the study at any time up to the time of data analysis. All participant-related data were deidentified and kept by the researcher. Only research team members had access to the data. No compensation was provided, apart from reimbursement for the time participants spent participating in the interview.

Results

Characteristics of Participants

The characteristics of the participants (n=21) are presented in [Table 2](#). One nurse worked at the virtual monitoring center, where patients at home are monitored remotely. A chief nursing information officer and 2 nurse information officers also participated; these roles aim to support the integration of health technologies into nursing practice. Additional specialized roles included an electronic medical record (EMR) key user, who acts as a mediator between EMR developers and clinical staff, and a digital health technology coach (“digicoach”) who supports nurses in using digital tools. No compensation was provided, apart from reimbursement for the time participants spent participating in the interview.

Table . Characteristics of participating nurses (n=21).

Characteristics	Participants, n
Age (y)	
20 - 29	10
30 - 39	5
40 - 49	5
≥50	1
Sex	
Male	4
Female	17
Working in	
Clinical wards	
Abdominal and vascular	2
Urology	1
Oncology	1
Dialysis	1
Intensive care	2
Cardiology	2
Nurses in training across various clinical wards	6
Outpatient specializations	
Pulmonary	1
Wound	1
Oncology	1
Ostomy	1
Virtual monitoring center	1
Other	
Chief nursing information officer	1

Health Technologies in Patient-Nurse Communication

Nurses indicated using various health technologies, both in the hospital and in the home environment. For example, at the hospital, nurses are using the EMR to report about the patient's

condition, use videos to support their education for patients, and use a projector with images (eg, nature, animals, or cities) to calm patients. The mentioned health technologies were divided into 5 categories: e-interaction, e-monitoring, e-education, e-recording, and e-support (Table 3).

Table . Overview of health technologies used by the hospital nurses.

Category of health technologies	Health technology
E-interaction	Video consultation, e-coach, translator, email contact (including sending photos), phone call, and notifications for nurses via the app
E-monitoring	Distant monitoring of measurement directly transferred to EMR ^a , online questionnaire about self-reported symptoms, monitoring exercise behavior, and camera surveillance
E-education	Images, digital leaflets, videos, webinars, and websites
E-recording	Electronic medical record, patient portal, and digital diary for family
E-support	Projector with calming images, virtual reality, music, online church services, and VR ^b cycling: stationary bike combined with a screen

^aEMR: electronic medical record.

^bVR: virtual reality.

Health Technology Influence on Patient-Nurse Communication

Overview

We analyzed nurses' responses regarding whether and how health technologies have affected the 6 functions of communication. According to the nurses, health technologies influenced all 6 functions of nurse-patient communication. They

reported positive effects on gathering information, providing information, supporting disease and treatment management, and responding to patients' emotions. In contrast, technology was perceived as making the development of the nurse-patient relationship more challenging, and it was rarely used to support shared decision-making. The results are summarized in [Table 4](#), with + indicating positive changes, – negative changes, and ± changes that were neither clearly positive nor negative, reflecting neutral effect.

Table . How health technologies have positive, negative, or neutral changed the 6 functions of communication.

Functions	Changes
Fostering the relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increases patients' sense of safety (eg, through camera surveillance) (+^a) Lack of eye contact or nonverbal communication (±^b) Creates more distance between patient and caregiver (eg, video consultations) (–^c) Requires more time to build a relationship (–) Patients feel less listened to (–) Less privacy for a patient (eg, through camera surveillance) (–)
Gathering information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Data are more structured in EMR^d (+) Allows measurements to be recorded in the EMR with the patient present (+) Increases safety through automatic transfer of vital signs into the EMR (+) Quick and complete data collection via online questionnaires before or during admission (+) Continuous data collection at home (+) Reduces number of hospital visits through video consultations (+) More insight into the home environment (+) Email consultations offer the opportunity to respond whenever suitable (+) Enables quick and adequate treatment in the home situation through, eg, sending photos of ostomy (+) Missing “the clinical view” (±)
Providing information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increases patient insight into medical data through, for example, portal (+) Provides relatives insight into patient well-being via “digital diary” (+) Increases options for multimodal education, which enhance patient understanding (eg, videos) (+) Can be sent in advance to enhance patient preparation (eg, digital leaflets) (+) Check patient understanding in e-education (±) Check patient understanding in e-education (±) Some images are too complex and reduce clarity (–)
Decision-making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access to (personal) data can contribute to informed decision-making (+) Retrieving information from EMR is simplified (+) Online decision aid can contribute to shared decision-making (+)
Enabling disease and treatment-related behavior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exercise options to stimulate the patient to healthy behavior (+) Requires patients to take a more active role through remote monitoring (±)
Responding to emotions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can contribute to distraction, for example, through VR^e (which can reduce pain) (+) Enables emotional expression via iPad emoticons (+) Builds reassurance through better understanding of condition via e-education (+) Enables nurses to inform their colleagues about patients' emotions fostering coordinated care (+) Enhanced comfort in home situation (+) Emotional support after admission through, for example, messages (+) Requires attentive listening to the emotions expressed, as visual cues are not available (±) Technology can create disruptions, for example, nurse paging systems (–)

^a+: positive change.

^b±: changes that were neither clearly positive nor negative.

^c–: negative change

^dEMR: electronic medical record.

^eVR: virtual reality.

Fostering the Relationship

Building trust and fostering the relationship between nurse and patient constitutes the basis for successful nurse-patient communication. According to participants, this function has changed considerably with the increased use of health technologies, such as video consultation and notifications via patient portals and apps, and mostly in a negative way. It causes a lack of eye contact and nonverbal communication, creates more distance between patients and nurses, and requires more time to build a relationship. Some nurses mentioned that their patients feel less listened to because the nurse is typing during the conversation to add results into the EMR. Regarding e-monitoring, nurses thought that this would increase the patient's sense of safety. However, a negative consequence was also noted, namely that (camera) surveillance could compromise privacy. Finally, the nurses indicated that a good relationship could be established if it starts with a face-to-face interaction before the technology is being used, as is illustrated in the following quote:

It also does bring a bit of distance but I think you can reduce that distance if you have created trust during a [face-to-face] consultation at the outpatient clinic. And, if you have taken time for that. [R10]

Gathering Information

The second function of nurse-patient interaction is gathering information: nurses need to gather information about symptoms and health status to reach an adequate diagnosis and treatment (care) plan. According to the nurses, this function has mostly positively changed with the availability of health technology. For example, e-recording provides more structured data of patients and allows a quick search for information, and the possibility to report the provided information into the EMR in the presence of the patient reduces the chances of mistakes. Automatic measurement and transfer of vital signals into the EMR increases safety and reduces workload for nurses. The use of online questionnaires allows for quick and complete gathering of data before or during hospital admission and continuous data collection also at home. The positive changes of e-interaction (eg, video consultations) included more insight into the home environment of the patient and that patients have to come less often to the hospital. In addition, nurses indicated that online consultations are less often interrupted, and email consultations or messages offer the opportunity to respond whenever suitable. For patients with ostomy or wounds, especially, the opportunity to send photos enables quick and adequate treatment in the home situation.

As a downside, nurses emphasized that by e-interaction, they sometimes miss "the clinical view." This makes listening skills particularly important, as is outlined in this quote:

It is very different to have a clinical view over the phone or email than live, where you can also watch someone. Yes, you have to listen very carefully and you have to start asking a lot more questions, so you don't just look at how someone is sitting, but you also ask, what did you just do when someone is out of breath? Because I didn't see all that. Where are you

right now? Are you standing? So I have to start asking very specific questions about a measurement. [R8]

Providing Information

The third function of nurse-patient interaction is information provision: nurses have to provide clear information tailored to the patient, for example, information about symptoms, diagnosis, disease, and treatment. Nurses felt that this function was mostly changed in a positive way. Regarding e-recording, the patient portal provides more insight for patients into their personal medical data, and a "digital diary on the ward" provides patients and their relatives insight into nurses' interpretation of patients' well-being and daily activities. Regarding e-education, websites, visualizations, and videos provide options for multimodal education and thereby enhance patients' understanding, as is illustrated in the following quotation:

A video with illustrations is a much better tool and easier than a leaflet, I think. Many leaflets that I hand out, turn out to be still unread at the bedside table by the end of the admission. [R5]

Moreover, education via the internet can easily be sent in advance, enhancing patient preparation and improving personalized communication. On the other hand, one nurse indicated that some images are so difficult that they make the information less understandable. When oral education is replaced by e-education, for example, digital leaflets, it is important to check if the information is found and understood by the patient.

Decision-Making

Nurses play a pivotal role in facilitating shared decision-making by providing information and taking into account preferences. Currently, nurses use a limited number of health technologies in the decision-making process. Regarding e-recording, patient access to (personal) data can contribute to informed decision-making, and retrieving information by nurses from EMR is simplified. E-support, such as online decision aids, can contribute to shared decision-making. Although most interviewed nurses had not yet incorporated online patient decision aids into their daily practice, these technologies were recognized as potentially valuable additions for shared decision-making with patients. This potential valuable was described by one of the nurses as follows:

They exist [Patient decision aids], but are not used very often in practice. I was introduced to a digital colorectal cancer decision aid, explaining types of cancer and the advantages and disadvantages of different treatments, help patients choose what they want. I liked that, but in practice, it is hardly used. [R11]

Enabling Disease and Treatment-Related Behavior

The fifth function includes enabling disease and treatment-related behavior, which involves supporting patients in treatment adherence and promoting a healthy lifestyle. Nurses described different changes in this function resulting from the increased use of health technologies. About e-support, the

implementation of virtual cycling increases exercise options to stimulate the patient to healthy behavior.

Regarding e-interaction, the use of health technologies, such as apps and sending photos by email, facilitates a more active role of patients as they are required to make choices and take actions on their own. For example, patients have to make medication intake changes or have to make changes in the wound care treatment, such as stopping flushing the wound. This more active role is mostly regarded as positive but also requires extra effort and skills of the patient, as becomes clear from the following quote:

I always say [to patients]; care at a distance is good care, but it is care in which you are in charge, you have to take the steps yourself. But the patient also needs to understand those steps. [R10]

Responding to Emotions

Patients often experience a range of emotions, such as anxiety, anger, and sadness, as a result of their disease. Nurses can play a crucial role in identifying and responding to these emotions, which can provide patients with a sense of support, but is also a basis for other functions, such as adequate information exchange, decision-making, and self-management. Nurses mentioned that health technologies mainly caused positive changes in this function. Technologies mentioned under e-support included music, virtual reality, video calling with relatives, and online church services that can provide distraction and support to patients. For example, one nurse explained how projected images could distract and calm patients:

For example, you find yourself in a forest that was really an experience, and you notice that patients are

really happy with that, so in that way, yes, offering something with images and sound, brings distraction. Being in another world for a moment. [R2; an image projector was used]

In a similar way, virtual reality can lower the experienced pain, for example, during wound treatment.

In addition, if patients are not able to talk, an app was used that allows them to digitally indicate emotions by selecting an emoticon on an iPad. This technology makes it possible to express emotions without using voice. E-education can establish reassurance because a better understanding of their condition or treatment can reduce emotional stress. Using e-interaction can contribute to enhanced comfort in the home situation and create the opportunity for emotional support after an admission. Additionally, as a result of new opportunities to communicate digitally with patients (such as via messages, phone consultations, and emails), nurses are required to attentively listen to the emotions expressed by patients as visual cues are not available. Finally, e-recording, such as the EMR, enables nurses to inform their colleagues about patients' emotions and feelings, fostering comprehensive and coordinated care. On a downside, nurses also admitted that interruptions caused by health technologies, such as nurse paging systems, can affect the emotional support provided by nurses.

Recognizing Patients With Limited Digital Health Literacy

In the interviews, nurses describe different practices to recognize a patient with limited digital health literacy, which could be divided into three categories: (1) intuition, (2) observation of verbal and nonverbal signals, and (3) explicitly ask and register in EMR (Table 5).

Table . Current practices in recognizing patients with limited (digital) health literacy.

Current practices and subthemes	Examples
Intuition	
Intuition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gut feeling, intuition
Observe verbal and nonverbal signals	
Patient characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advanced age • Low educational level • Poor lifestyle • Comorbidities
Depending on network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social network • Care network
Behavior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-compliant with advice • Not having a critical attitude • No motivation or not taking initiative • Asking less or irrelevant questions • Use of language: choice of words, writing style • Not understanding or not reading health information • Only using a few health technologies or difficulties with using them • Not willing to use health technologies • Excuses or avoiding information or do not want any information
Explicitly ask and register in EMR ^a	
Ask questions to identify limited digital health literacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explicitly ask about digital skills and health literacy • Apply a validated assessment tool
Ask patients to demonstrate how they use health technologies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instructions are not carried out sufficiently • Ask the patient to demonstrate and observe difficulties
Register in the EMR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low literacy registered

^aEMR: electronic medical record.

Intuition

One frequently used answer to the question on how nurses identify patients with limited (digital) health literacy was intuition. Twelve nurses mentioned that they use their gut feeling to assess if patients have limited or adequate (digital) health literacy. It was difficult for them to explain what this was based on, as is illustrated in the following quote: “You have a gut feeling that the patient is going to perform it properly, but on what do I base that ... I don’t know” (R3). Several nurses acknowledged that this nursing practice is quite uncertain and can lead to incorrect assessments.

Observe Verbal and Nonverbal Signals

Other nurses were more explicit about the cues they used for inferring limited literacy or digital literacy in their patients. Certain patient characteristics were mentioned, including advanced age, low educational level, multiple comorbidities, and an unhealthy lifestyle. Some of these characteristics were observed, such as being overweight, advanced age, smoking, and shabby clothing. Other characteristics were indirectly deduced, such as a low educational level and the presence of comorbidities.

Nurses also identify patients with limited digital health literacy based on the level of dependence on their social or care network.

They either asked or observed during a hospital admission the extent to which patients rely on their family or acquaintances, for example, with reading or understanding health-related information or completing online questionnaires. Hospital nurses can collaborate with home care nurses or health care professionals from other departments to gather additional information of the patient.

Another nursing practice to identify patients with limited (digital) health literacy is by observing certain behaviors or verbal cues, such as lack of critical attitude, noncompliance with advice, asking irrelevant questions, and not being motivated. The following quote explains how a lack of a critical attitude is being used as a cue for limited (digital) health literacy:

I observe how critical a patient is, or whether he will let everything happen to him. For example, do they take their medication willingly, or do they ask me, what is it or what is it for? I take that into account in my assessment. [R1]

Explicitly Ask and Register in EMR

Finally, nurses sometimes explicitly asked or assessed (digital) health literacy levels with questions or observed the patient while using the technology. An example of a question that was typically used by nurses to identify patients with limited health

literacy was as follows: “Do you feel overwhelmed by the abundance of health information?”

Digital skills were mostly identified with straightforward questions about the patients’ use of email, WhatsApp, or social media. Another nursing practice to identify limited digital literacy was to observe how a patient works with health technologies:

If we have the equipment on the ward to let them do it themselves and then I will observe them: How does the patient handle it, does the patient know how it works, what does someone do with the explanation? Does it then go right at once or does the patient need more frequent explanations? That does say something about the skills. [R5]

Formal assessment tools to measure limited (digital) health literacy were never used, and most of the interviewed nurses

did not know about the existence of such tools. During the interviews, it also became clear that low literacy is not or only scarcely registered in the EMR. Yet, several nurses indicated that it would be helpful to report about (digital) health literacy in the EMR to facilitate awareness and enable them to tailor care accordingly. Documentation in the EMR would also ensure that other involved health care providers would be informed so that the patient does not have to be repeatedly questioned about these skills.

Supporting Patients With Limited Digital Health Literacy

In daily practice, nurses use certain practices to support patients with limited (digital) health literacy in nursing care. Four main practices were identified: (1) create trust, (2) tailor communication, (3) provide additional support, and (4) use the patient network (Table 6).

Table 6. Current practices in supporting patients with limited (digital) health literacy.

Current practices	Subthemes
Create trust	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create trust among patients in the health professional • Support the self-confidence of the patient • Normalize having limited (digital) health literacy
Tailor communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repeat information • Limit the amount of information and use short explanations • Plain or easy language • Visualize • Use additional methods; write information down or use a whiteboard • Check if information given to the patient is understood (teach-back) • Step-by-step explanation • Clear instructions • Ask open questions • Develop tailored health technologies
Provide additional support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More frequent contact (phone or face to face) • Provide a summary of the provided education and instructions • Create a place where patients can ask questions about the use of health technologies • Offer the nondigital method
Use the patient network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involving relatives to support the patient in using health technologies • Asking relatives to use health technology instead of the patient • When various relatives are receiving the information, relatives can also repeat it for the patient • If the patient does not understand the explanation, the nurse can use the patient’s network • Relatives can help the patients formulate questions • If no relative is available, arrange home care • Consult and coordinate with other caregivers

Create Trust

To support patients with limited (digital) health literacy, 5 nurses indicated that it is important to create trust. This practice included addressing patients’ distrust of health technologies, supporting and increasing patients’ self-confidence, and also creating trust in health professionals. Nurses mentioned that these are important skills to support patients in understanding health information and support patients in using health technologies. It is crucial to normalize having limited (digital) health literacy and inform patients that many patients are

experiencing difficulties in understanding and applying (digital) health information. This was explained by one of the nurses as follows:

Some patients ask me, why are you asking if I can’t read? I always say, there are quite a lot of people in the Netherlands who cannot read at all. And if that is the case, we like to take that into account because then we can also show you information in a different way. [R10]

Normalizing having limited (digital) health literacy hopefully contributes to less shame about having limited (digital) health literacy and makes it easier for the patient to ask questions or to indicate if something is not fully understood.

Tailor Communication

Different types of practices exist to tailor the communication to patients with limited (digital) health literacy. These include repeating information, using short explanations, using plain language, and visualizing information. Additional methods to support the patient's understanding of health information are to write down information or draw pictures and use a whiteboard in a hospital patient room. Certain nurses indicated using the teach-back method to ensure the patient's understanding. This method asks patients to state in their own words what they understood or remembered from the given health information [21]. Even though this method was mentioned, it was unclear whether all nurses performed it correctly, as several nurses subsequently indicated they were only asking if a patient still had any questions.

Provide Additional Support

Providing additional support is described as a useful nursing practice by the majority (n=16) of the nurses. An example was frequent telephone contact to establish more guidance and more opportunities to practice with health technology. Another suggestion was to create a support team who can be reached by phone, where patients can ask questions related to the use of health technologies.

In addition, nurses described that face-to-face communication instead of digital communication should remain possible, recognizing that not all patients may be capable of using health technologies even with extra support. Some nurses described that patients who were not willing or able to use health technologies were excluded from using health technologies. This means that these patients do not have the opportunity to participate and experience the positive effects of it. One nurse indicated that patients were never excluded from home dialysis, including the use of health technologies due to insufficient skills. Excluding none of the patients was a conscious decision, as long as the patient was willing to learn and try. Consequently, this requires nurses to invest time, patience, and creativity in guiding these patients.

Use the Patients' Network

The majority (n=15) of nurses reported that patients' social networks are also utilized to support patients with limited (digital) health literacy. For example, relatives can assist patients in working with health technologies and repeat important educational instructions: "But you can also check if the son, daughter, or grandchildren might know a little more about technology and could offer help" (R18). Besides, the health care network of a patient (eg, home care) can help if there are no relatives available. Consulting other caregivers about the care for the patient can lead to comprehensive care and appropriate support.

Barriers to Recognize and Support Patients With Limited (Digital) Health Literacy

Several barriers to recognize and support patients with limited (digital) health literacy exist. Regarding the work environment, one frequently mentioned barrier was the experienced workload. The continuous high workload often leaves limited time to identify patients with limited (digital) health literacy and provide tailored support. Moreover, nurses often see patients only for a very short time, which makes it particularly difficult to get to know the patient very well:

You don't know the patients when they enter the hospital and just being admitted. You have to get to know them first. That is sometimes difficult. [R4]

Related to the patient, the nurse described that numerous patients feel ashamed about having limited (digital) health literacy and try to disguise this. This makes recognition more difficult. Another barrier is the family members who speak consistently on behalf of patients instead of giving the patient the opportunity to talk. This may make it difficult to gather the right information because it may be the opinion of the family rather than that of the patient. The last barrier is nurses' own lack of knowledge. Nurses indicate that they have little knowledge about recognizing and supporting these patients. As a result, they often rely on intuition.

Discussion

Principal Findings

The results of this study show that nurses in hospitals use a wide variety of health technologies, and this has affected the nurse-patient communication significantly, mainly in a positive way. Nurses mentioned intuition, observing verbal and nonverbal signals, and explicitly asking as nursing practices to identify patients with limited digital health literacy. Nursing practices to support patients with limited (digital) health literacy included building trust, tailoring communication, providing additional support, and engaging the patient's network. Several barriers were identified in recognizing and supporting patients with limited (digital) health literacy, including a high workload, lack of knowledge, and not knowing the patient.

Our results revealed that according to the nurses, health technologies affected all 6 functions of the de Haes and Bensing's communication model [2]. Positive consequences were seen in gathering and providing health information, enabling disease and treatment management, decision-making, and supporting patients to handle their emotions. These results are in line with previous research reporting benefits such as reduced unnecessary consultations, improved accessibility for patients, and the potential of messaging systems to facilitate nursing care [22]. While our study primarily observed positive changes, we also identified certain challenges. These included, for example, verifying patients' understanding and addressing complex images or content that required additional explanation for patients. Similar challenges have been reported in other qualitative studies, including the additional workload associated with training patients [23]. These studies have further highlighted nurses' limited digital skills, as well as the rapid

pace of technology implementation [24]. Although overall changes were largely positive, it was notable that our study identified predominantly negative changes within the function of fostering the nurse-patient relationship. Similar challenges were reported in a study using focus groups with primary health care nurses exploring their views on eHealth tools for patient self-management [24]. Nurses expressed concerns about losing personal contact, perceiving digitalization as a potential threat to the nurse-patient relationship [24]. To overcome this challenge, nurses in our study recommended always starting with a face-to-face meeting and switching to digital communication only after the relationship is built. The preference for initial face-to-face consultations, as well as for combining digital and in-person consultations, has also been noted previously [25]. Our findings suggest that task-oriented functions of the 6-function model, such as providing health information and supporting disease management, benefit from technology through increased efficiency, accessibility, and structure. In contrast, relational functions, such as fostering the nurse-patient relationship, are harder to support digitally, as they rely on nonverbal cues and trust-building [2].

To the best of our knowledge, this study is the first to examine the impact of health technologies on nurse-patient communication using the 6-function model of communication [2]. Although the 6-function model was not specifically designed for use in the nurse-patient communication context, it proved to be highly usable, and nurses could easily relate to the 6 identified functions. This is in line with a previous study in which the model was used to examine nurse-patient communication [26]. Although the model was also not developed to study the impact of health technologies, it turned out to be helpful in providing insight into their impact on the various functions of communication.

In nurse-patient communication, it is important to identify the patients who experience difficulties in using health technologies. Patients with limited health literacy are less likely to use health technologies or perceive them as difficult and useless [27], while these patients can actually benefit from them, for example, from the visualization of health education through videos. To reduce exclusion of patients with limited (digital) health literacy, nurses can play a pivotal role in recognizing and supporting these patients. Nurses in our study mentioned different practices to recognize patients with limited (digital) health literacy. These are intuition, observed verbal and nonverbal signals, and explicitly asking patients about their (digital) health literacy skills or asking them to demonstrate the use of the health technology. Previous studies also showed that nurses often use their intuition to estimate health literacy [28] and use verbal and nonverbal cues, such as patients' use of simple language, facial expressions, or level of interaction [29]. Unfortunately, "intuition" and "observing verbal and nonverbal signals" are very subjective. Relying only on intuitions may not be an appropriate practice, since it is known that nurses frequently overestimate the health literacy of their patients [30]. Some verbal and nonverbal signals, such as lower education, low self-management, less motivation, and low self-efficacy, are indeed associated with limited (digital) health literacy [31,32], but this does not apply to every individual patient and may be

difficult to observe. Moreover, for some nonverbal signals, such as looking slobby, evidence is lacking. A potentially more reliable nursing practice is to explicitly ask patients about their (digital) health literacy skills or to demonstrate how they use technology. Although the importance of this was acknowledged by a few of the interviewed nurses, it was not common practice. A reason for being hesitant to ask patients about their health literacy is that many patients feel ashamed about having limited (digital) health literacy [33]. Our results highlight the importance of educating nurses on how to assess patients' (digital) health literacy in a neutral and nonoffensive manner, so as to avoid causing discomfort or feelings of shame.

Interestingly, our results showed that patients' levels of (digital) health literacy are only occasionally documented in the EMR, despite the availability of numerous questionnaires to assess digital health literacy [34]. The systematic documentation of this information could reduce the need for repeated assessment and could enhance continuity of care among health care professionals within hospital settings.

To support patients with limited (digital) health literacy, nurses used different practices: building trust, tailoring communication, providing additional support, and engaging the patient's network. To tailor communication, the "teach-back method," already proven to be effective [21], was often mentioned. Unfortunately, it appears that the teach-back method is not always performed correctly. A recent review including similar health literacy practices as in our study showed positive effects on patient support, including activation, patient comprehension, and engagement [35]. Strategies often included multimedia or technology-based approaches, simplification of written material, and facilitation of in-person sessions. More research is needed to examine if these practices are actually effective and how nurses can be motivated to use these in daily practice.

Our study revealed that many nurses are experiencing multiple important barriers while recognizing and supporting these patients. These include a high workload, lack of knowledge, and not knowing the patient. For some of these barriers, training could be helpful. Training, encompassing various educational programs and online resources, has been identified as an effective intervention that significantly contributes to improving digital health literacy [36]. Several studies have shown that offering training for nurses on how to recognize and support patients with limited health literacy shows positive effects on knowledge, attitude, confidence, and increased usage of strategies to recognize and support patients with limited health literacy [37-43]. Unfortunately, the digital component is often not included (yet) in these existing training. It is recommended that nursing education and existing training programs systematically integrate the digital component, with particular emphasis on enabling nurses to recognize and support patients with limited (digital) health literacy.

Strengths and Limitations

A strength of this study is that a heterogeneous group of nurses from different wards and various specializations was included. This contributed to more generalizable results regarding nurses working in hospitals. This study was conducted in the Dutch hospital context, where the implementation of health

technologies is relatively advanced. However, it remains unclear how these findings translate to other countries, as differences in health care systems, digital developments, digital literacy of nurses, and organizational structures may influence the adoption and impact of health technologies. Further research in diverse international contexts is needed to explore their applicability beyond the Netherlands.

In this study, we selected participants who had at least some experience with health technologies to explore their perspectives based on actual use. As a result, our findings primarily reflect the experiences of nurses with some engagement in digital technologies. Future research including nurses with little or no prior experience could provide additional insights into potential barriers and challenges.

Future Research

Since this study primarily used self-reported data, it would be valuable to observe actual nursing behaviors in practice, for example, how frequently nurses use strategies to recognize and support patients with limited digital health literacy. Furthermore, gaining a deeper understanding of patients' perspectives is equally important. Patients with limited digital health literacy may experience challenges with health technologies that differ from or overlap with those faced by nurses. It is still unclear to what extent patients recognize potential disadvantages or barriers related to technology use. Therefore, future research should explore the specific difficulties patients encounter and the types of support they need to effectively engage with digital health tools.

Besides the patient perspective, future research may explore potential differences across hospital departments, as communication challenges may vary by clinical context. For example, nurses working in intensive care units may face distinct communication challenges, such as needing to communicate

primarily with family members or navigating ethical considerations related to digital consent.

Providing training to nurses on how to support patients with limited (digital) health literacy could be beneficial. Such training may help nurses apply structured strategies rather than relying solely on intuition. When developing this training, it is important to cocreate its content with nurses from diverse clinical settings and with varying levels of experience, ensuring that the modules align with current practice. In addition, integrating these competencies into nursing education is essential so that future nurses also develop the necessary skills.

Moreover, involving nurses in the selection and implementation of health technologies is important. Their perspectives can guide the choice and adoption of new technologies, the design of training programs, and the development of user-friendly systems, such as EMRs. This approach helps ensure that digital health innovations are accessible, practical, and responsive to the needs of both nurses and patients. Ultimately, the impact of these technologies depends not only on the tools themselves but also on organizational and systemic factors, including staff readiness, training support, and supportive organizational structures [44-46].

Conclusions

This study shows that health technologies have strengthened nurse-patient communication and extended de Haes and Bensing's model [2] to the digital context. Yet, challenges persist, particularly in fostering relationships. It also reveals that systematic (digital) health literacy assessment remains lacking and that current practices to identify and support patients with limited (digital) health literacy may not always be effective. Once effective approaches are established, they should be integrated into nursing care plans and education.

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Data Availability

The datasets generated or analyzed during this study are not publicly available.

Authors' Contributions

Conceptualization: CHCD, CD, DE, EMD, JW

Data curation: ED, JW

Formal analysis: CHCD, ED, JW

Investigation: ED, JW

Methodology: CHCD, CD, ED, JW

Project administration: ED

Supervision: CD

Writing – original draft: CHCD, CD, DE, ED, JW

Conflicts of Interest

None declared.

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Abbreviations

COREQ: Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research

EMR: electronic medical record

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The Relational Playbook Nurse Leadership Development Program Using the Whistle Systems Employee Recognition Platform: Feasibility Mixed Methods Study

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Abstract

Background: Leadership development programs in health care often fail due to their lack of adaptability to the schedules of busy clinicians. This study addressed the need for scalable, flexible programs tailored to nurse leaders.

Objective: This study evaluated the acceptability, appropriateness, and feasibility of the Relational Playbook, an evidence-based leadership development program developed in the Veterans Health Administration delivered through the Whistle Systems employee recognition web application and mobile app.

Methods: A 1-year, single-team pilot was deployed using descriptive survey data and qualitative interview analysis. The Relational Playbook's educational content and interventions were hosted on the Whistle platform, which integrates behavioral science and gamification strategies. Content was delivered weekly via app-based nudge notifications and email. Engagement metrics included activity completion rates. User experience data were collected through weekly reflection surveys (with Likert-scale responses and open-text options); monthly check-ins; and a postimplementation acceptability, appropriateness, and feasibility survey and interview. Descriptive statistics summarized engagement levels and trends, and qualitative data were analyzed using content analysis to identify recurring concepts. Quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed sequentially for comprehensive insights.

Results: The section chief and 4 practicing cardiology nurse practitioners from a large academic medical center participated. The nurse practitioner section chief deemed the Whistle platform an acceptable, appropriate, and feasible technology for delivering the Relational Playbook content. They valued the weekly nudges, microlearning content, and flexibility of the web application and mobile app. The Relational Playbook content supported their personal growth and fostered positive shifts in attitudes toward work.

Conclusions: Delivering leadership development content through the Whistle platform is an acceptable approach to support the growth and well-being of busy nurse leaders. The small sample and absence of a comparison group limit generalizability.

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KEYWORDS

leadership; nursing; mobile app; development; workforce

Introduction

The well-being of nurse leaders and the nursing workforce is an urgent concern worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic, increasing patient complexity, evolving hospital systems, and high workloads [1]. Nurse leaders play a pivotal role in improving nurse well-being, patient care, and clinical outcomes

by managing frontline clinical staff [2]. However, leadership is a challenging role that requires skills to foster interdisciplinary teamwork, continuous learning, and high reliability. Most nurse leadership training occurs through face-to-face didactic education or on-the-job training that falls short of true leadership development [3]. Digital leadership programs are available; however, most lack scientific rigor and impact evaluation [4].

With many nurse leaders nearing retirement, developing the next generation is essential to sustaining the profession and ensuring high-quality care [5].

The Relational Playbook is an innovative leadership development program grounded in adult learning principles, including experiential learning [6] and situated learning theories [7]. The Relational Playbook is designed to equip frontline clinical leaders with the skills to foster a culture of learning and high reliability within clinical teams. The Relational Playbook integrates evidence-based concepts and practices from positive psychology, team science, servant leadership, the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Whole Health model, and clinical team training [8-10]. The Relational Playbook's key innovation lies in bringing these principles together into a single, cohesive

program tailored specifically for frontline health care leaders. These principles are presented in an e-book with five chapters on (1) creating a positive culture, (2) teamwork, (3) leading teams, (4) creating joy in work, and (5) communication and high reliability. The Relational Playbook contains brief asynchronous learning modules, 11 kick-off interventions, and 39 additional evidence-based interventions. Table 1 provides more details on the Relational Playbook chapters, their resource topics, and their kick-off interventions. Frontline leaders complete weekly self-directed education and then select and implement specific Relational Playbook interventions into existing meetings or trainings. Each chapter builds on the previous one and results in the development of supportive learning environments.

Table 1. Relational Playbook chapters, modules, and kick-off interventions.

Relational Playbook chapter	Resource topics	Kick-off interventions
Chapter 1: Creating a Positive Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Positive culture Assessing team well-being Appreciative inquiry 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Three Good Things" practice [11] Appreciative inquiry questions [12]
Chapter 2: Teamwork	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Building a team Relationships at work Difficult relationships at work Hiring for high-performing teams 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Walk in My Shoes" exercise [13] Ice breaker questions [13]
Chapter 3: Leading Teams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wellness-centered leadership Servant leadership Essential leadership skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Stop, Start, Continue" method [13] "Situation-Behavior-Impact" feedback [14]
Chapter 4: Creating Joy in Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Burnout Joy and happiness Gratitude 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understanding what matters [15] "Was It Worth It?" method [16] Gratitude huddle [17]
Chapter 5: Communication and High Reliability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Effective communication High-reliability practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Start-of-day huddles [18] Debriefs [18]

Pilot research with the Relational Playbook has suggested improvements in employee engagement and retention while reducing burnout and turnover, which are critical workforce challenges [8]. The Relational Playbook aligns with multiple priority areas in health care, including the shift toward learning health systems to improve patient safety. In 2022, the Relational Playbook was registered as an invention with the VHA Technology Transfer Program (VHA ID 2022-474) to foster partnerships with external digital technology innovators and leverage emerging technology to expand and scale the program.

The Relational Playbook team collaborated with Whistle Systems, a company specializing in digital programs and trainings to sustain employee behavior change and improve workplace culture. Leveraging a mobile-first design, the Whistle platform integrates evidence-based strategies such as microlearning, gamification, and strategic nudges to optimize user engagement and adherence [19]. The platform delivers real-time feedback through notifications, on-demand resources, and a user-centric interface to enhance accessibility. Whistle has shown measurable success in improving employee engagement and reducing turnover across sectors, including aviation, finance, and construction [20]. The partnership aimed

to adapt Relational Playbook content to the Whistle platform and assess whether this innovative technology is an acceptable, appropriate, and feasible tool for delivering the Relational Playbook to nurse leaders.

Methods

Overview

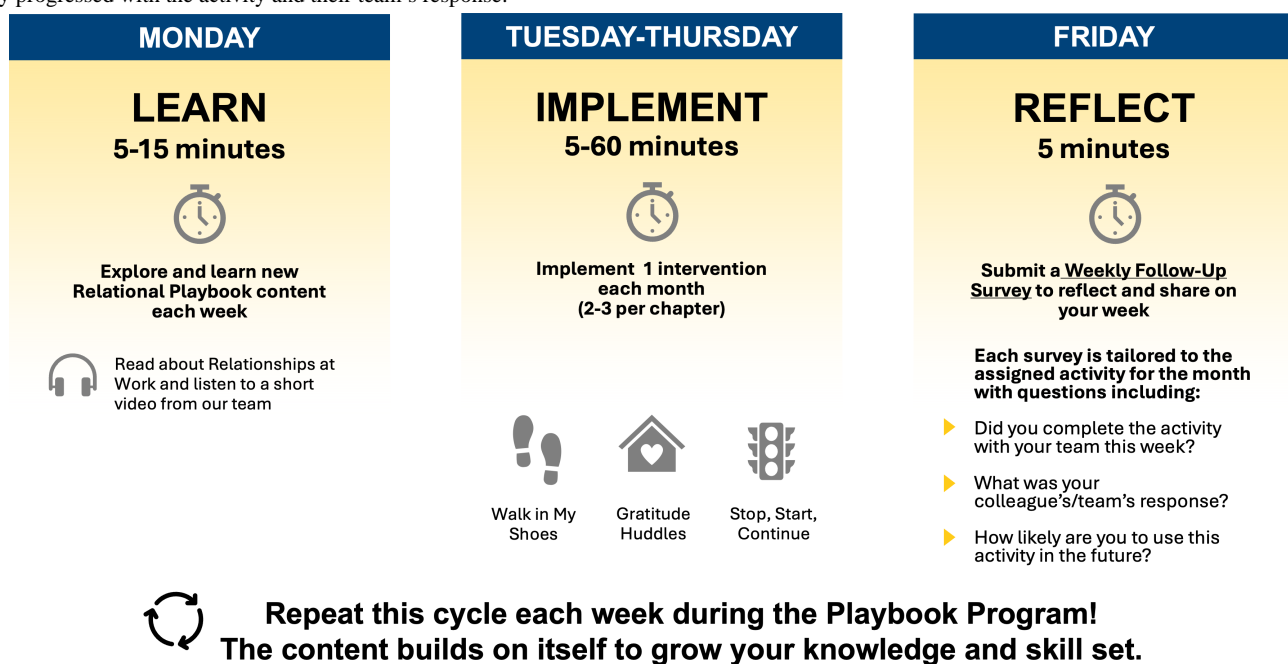
We conducted a 1-year, single-team feasibility study of the Relational Playbook delivered on the Whistle platform within a real-world clinical setting using descriptive survey data and qualitative interview analysis. A cardiology nurse practitioner (NP) team (n=5) at a large academic medical center volunteered to pilot the Relational Playbook on Whistle driven by an interest in leadership development training to improve team dynamics. The NP section chief was the primary participant, and their team members were invited to engage with the platform to enhance team understanding and participation. To maintain participant confidentiality, detailed demographic information was not reported. The inclusion criterion was a formal supervisory role in the department. Participation was voluntary and considered part of the employees' work.

The Relational Playbook and Whistle team established a cooperative research and development agreement enabling collaboration between the VHA and private companies. The first author adapted the Relational Playbook content for delivery on the Whistle platform with input from the Relational Playbook developers (HMG and BC) and Whistle engineers. The educational content was reformatted into a microlearning flash card model incorporating short text, colored images, videos, and kick-off interventions (Multimedia Appendix 1). The Whistle-enabled Relational Playbook used multiple behavioral science mechanisms, including celebratory feedback (confetti) to trigger dopaminergic reward responses, progress indicators (completion bars) to leverage the goal gradient effect, microlearning modules to reduce cognitive load and enhance perceived task simplicity, and strategic nudges to serve as action triggers and mitigate decision inertia. The Whistle web platform hosted the content, with accessible iPhone and Android mobile apps.

The Relational Playbook on Whistle begins with participants completing the 13-item Learning Environment Assessment Tool

(Multimedia Appendix 2), an abbreviated version of the validated 64-item Learning Environment Survey [10,21]. The Learning Environment Assessment Tool evaluates key aspects of supportive learning environments through statements such as “The cardiology team demonstrates trust and mutual respect with each other,” “The cardiology team is comfortable asking for help and feedback from others,” and “The cardiology team can control their own practice and regularly participate in decisions about their work.” Each item is rated on a 3-point scale (1=“rarely,” 2=“sometimes,” and 3=“almost always”). Responses are automatically summed in Qualtrics (Qualtrics International Inc) and ranked from lowest to highest. Using these data, the research team assigned initial (lowest ranking) and subsequent chapters to the participants in order. The Relational Playbook consists of 5 chapters, each delivered over a 2-month interval across 1 year (Figure 1). Participants receive weekly email and app notifications (“nudges”) linking to flash card-based learning modules. Each module concludes with a brief comprehensive quiz and celebratory feedback to reinforce engagement. Modules end with details about the next chapter’s kick-off intervention to implement.

Figure 1. The Relational Playbook program weekly activities. This figure shows what a week in the Relational Playbook looks like for a cardiology nurse practitioner team. On Monday, they are instructed to take 5 to 15 minutes and learn new content by completing learning modules and watching short videos. The rest of the week, they implement their learnings and activities through 1 intervention each week, such as “Walk in My Shoes” or “gratitude huddles.” At the end of the week, they submit a weekly follow-up survey that is tailored to the assigned activity for the month to see whether they progressed with the activity and their team’s response.



The evaluation data were collected through surveys and interviews from the NP section chief (eg, primary participant) to measure implementation, engagement, and adoption outcomes. Primary implementation outcomes were the acceptability, appropriateness, and feasibility of the Relational Playbook on Whistle assessed using the Acceptability of Intervention Measure, Feasibility of Intervention Measure, and Intervention Appropriateness Measure [22] (Multimedia Appendix 3). These surveys assess the acceptability, appropriateness, and feasibility of the Relational Playbook on Whistle through statements such as “The Relational Playbook on Whistle meets my approval,” “The Relational Playbook on

Whistle seems suitable,” and “The Relational Playbook on Whistle seems implementable.” Each item is rated on a 5-point scale (1=“completely disagree”; 5=“completely agree”) and analyzed using mean scores [22]. The secondary outcomes of engagement and adoption were assessed using all participant platform visit data and survey responses (n=5), supplemented by a follow-up interview with the NP section chief to contextualize the findings. Whistle’s reporting tools were used to track platform visits, module completions, survey completions, and responses.

Quantitative data, including platform use and survey responses, were summarized both by chapter and for the Relational

Playbook overall. Chapter and Playbook completion rates were calculated as the percentage of completed modules relative to the total number of modules using Microsoft Excel. Platform visit data were reviewed to confirm that all participants accessed the Relational Playbook content on Whistle at least once. For qualitative data, we used a rapid qualitative matrix approach [21]. Two team members (BC and MD) met to discuss data and reach consensus on the concepts; given the informal nature and small sample (n=1), all data were analyzed instead of stopping at a point of saturation. The initial matrix summary was developed by 1 team member using identified concepts and illustrative quotes from the data. A second team member independently reviewed and refined the matrix to ensure accuracy, completeness, and consistency in data representation. To enhance rigor, discrepancies were discussed and resolved collaboratively. The full analytic team then conducted a review of the finalized matrix, engaging in consensus building to identify cross-cutting concepts and key insights.

Ethical Considerations

This study was deemed an exempt human research study by the Colorado Multiple Institutional Review Board (17-1153) and did not require informed consent. All participant data were handled in accordance with institutional privacy and confidentiality guidelines.

Results

The NP section chief and 4 cardiology NP team members participated in the study, with the NP section chief acting as the primary implementer and evaluator due to their formal supervisory role. The NP team provides clinical care across various inpatient and outpatient settings (eg, heart failure clinic and structural heart and valve clinic) and meets virtually each month for updates and professional development.

Acceptability, Appropriateness, and Feasibility and Platform Visits

The NP section chief, the primary participant, strongly agreed (5/5) on all measures that the Relational Playbook on the Whistle platform was acceptable (Acceptability of Intervention Measure), appropriate (Intervention Appropriateness Measure), and feasible (Feasibility of Intervention Measure). They engaged with 86% (73/85) of the learning content and reflection surveys and adopted all 11 kick-off interventions at least once with their team. The 4 cardiology NP team members engaged fully with the introduction, and their engagement declined over the subsequent 5 chapters. During scheduled check-ins, NP team members reported that their busy schedules, their direct care responsibilities, and not leading their own teams made it harder for them to implement the Relational Playbook interventions as they were not directly applicable to their roles. They found the learning components valuable and noted that these resources enhanced their understanding of and engagement in the section chief's activities. However, the lack of applicability in their daily work led to disengagement with the platform. [Figure 2](#) shows the completion rates by chapter for the Whistle-enabled Relational Playbook.

The NP section chief provided generally positive feedback on the kick-off interventions and reported that their team adopted a more positive outlook, identifying what mattered most to them, such as “‘family,’ ‘friends/relationships,’ ‘fulfilling my responsibilities,’ and ‘being good at my job.’” They had specific successes with using debriefs:

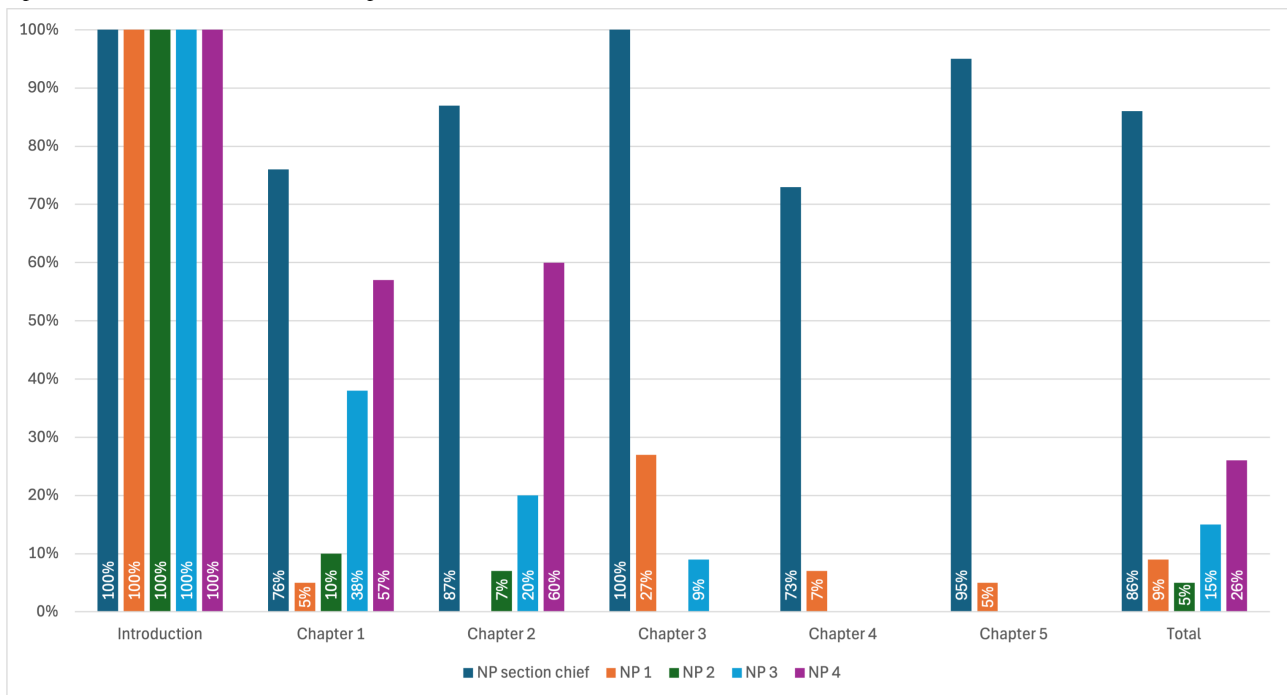
Worked well with a co-worker to solve a problem!

However, the *Walk in My Shoes* and *Was It Worth It* interventions were more challenging to implement, as the NP section chief explained:

...I think it needs to be the right timing and people.

They also reported adapting some interventions, such as replacing the “Stop, Start, Continue” group discussion with an online survey and incorporating the “What was a win this week” question from chapter 4 as a meeting icebreaker.

Figure 2. The Relational Playbook on Whistle completion rates. This figure displays the chapter completion rates for each participant alongside their total completion rate for the entire program. While all participants completed the introduction chapter, participation rates declined for everyone but the nurse practitioner (NP) section chief for chapters 1 to 5.



Interview Results

Platform Usability and Learning Content

The NP section chief primarily used the website, rating it as easy to use (4 out of 5 on a verbal ease-of-use scale) and preferable to the mobile app, which required frequent log-ins and multiple clicks to access content. They appreciated the ability to navigate seamlessly through the program and liked the push notifications (ie, nudges). The Relational Playbook content was described as “bite size enough to be done in one sitting and...easily digested.” However, they observed that the Relational Playbook was designed for teams that “work together in a clinical way.” Considering that the NP group did not physically work together, they suggested modifying the content to better reflect virtual team dynamics.

Relational Playbook Implementation

The NP section chief rated the implementation of the Relational Playbook practices as moderately easy (3 out of 5 on a verbal ease-of-implementation scale). They confirmed that the practices fostered a more positive team outlook, stating the following:

...there's some hard days.... And we focus a lot on the negative...instead of what went right. I liked that about the Playbook.

They emphasized that the learning content only took 5 to 10 minutes to complete. Overall, the NP section chief described the Relational Playbook on Whistle as a valuable program:

You can always improve as a leader—I highly recommend it.

Adaptations and Sustainment

The NP section chief suggested adaptations before expanding the program: (1) tailor Relational Playbook content for virtual

teams that do not meet routinely in person, (2) condense the program to 6 months (from 1 year), (3) reduce nudges to every other week (from weekly), and (4) develop an educational module for team members without formal leadership roles. At the conclusion of the 1-year program, the NP section chief reported ongoing use of the huddles and appreciative inquiry practices.

Discussion

This feasibility study demonstrated that the Relational Playbook on Whistle is an acceptable, appropriate, and feasible intervention for a nurse leader. The NP section chief engaged with 86% (73/85) of the educational content and implemented all 11 kick-off interventions, confirming the platform's usability. Participant feedback emphasized the Relational Playbook's strengths, including its concise, “bite-sized” content; intuitive navigation; and direct relevance to clinical practice. By applying Relational Playbook practices, the NP section chief fostered a culture of learning and positivity within the team. The NP clinical team accessed the platform and participated intermittently. This may reflect the absence of opportunity for practicing NPs to put the leadership interventions into practice, the unique challenges of virtual teams that do not routinely work in person (noted above), or the assumption that leadership development is only for those who have formal leadership titles. Their reports of finding the education components valuable reinforce the section chief's recommendation for an educational module for team members without formal leadership roles.

The Whistle platform behavioral science features guided participants to set learning intentions, assume responsibility for their goals, and receive feedback on progress. While our study data did not allow for a granular analysis of each feature's individual contribution to engagement, this is an area that we

will explore in future research. Rapid application of newly acquired skills in practice represents the gold standard of leadership development programs. Our single-team study process and findings align with recent work by Güntner et al [23], which reported that a web-based leadership transfer intervention positively influenced leaders' mindsets and self-regulated learning. The significance of these studies lies in demonstrating that digital microlearning interventions can effectively support leadership development in high-demand clinical environments, offering a scalable and cost-efficient alternative to traditional programs. Future studies of the Relational Playbook on Whistle will advance the evidence base for digital leadership training programs, ensuring positive outcomes in a cost-effective manner.

The partnership with Whistle Systems was an opportunity to integrate an evidence-based leadership development program into a digital technology innovation that delivered microlearning content using behavioral science and gamification principles. This technology overcame time constraints, a common barrier for busy nurse leaders [24,25], and promoted engagement and new habits. The Whistle platform's usability was rated favorably by the NP section chief, with the website preferred over the mobile app due to frequent re-log-ins and navigation challenges. Nudges effectively promoted engagement by linking directly to assigned content; however, a decrease in frequency was suggested to reduce response burden.

Additional behavior-driving tools offered by the Whistle platform were not leveraged in this feasibility study that could increase engagement and effectiveness among team members. These include real-time automated acknowledgments; hospital-branded Visa cards for monetary reward; peer or community recognition engagement through Whistle's "Town-Square" social feature; or the platform's artificial intelligence engine Robin, which tailors nudges informed by behavioral personalization algorithms to effectively prompt individuals while considering their unique motivational drivers

[19]. Future iterations of the Relational Playbook on Whistle will include an educational module for team members in clinical roles to motivate them to learn and engage in culture change, content for virtual and hybrid teams, and additional Whistle tools.

This study's strengths include the real-world evaluation of the Relational Playbook on Whistle and its focus on clinical leadership development. The feasibility approach provided early insights into implementation outcomes, user experience, and potential program impact. However, several limitations should be noted: the small sample size and single-team design, reliance on 1 primary participant, absence of a control group, and lack of objective leadership or patient-related outcomes reduce the ability to attribute observed changes to the intervention. These factors limit generalizability, and findings should be interpreted with caution. Future research will address these limitations by including a larger, more diverse sample; detailed demographic data; a comparison group; and multisource ratings to capture changes in leader behavior and team culture before and after implementation.

The Relational Playbook on Whistle shows strong promise as an acceptable, appropriate, and feasible nurse leadership development program capable of addressing critical workforce challenges such as burnout, team dynamics, and leadership readiness. To maximize its impact, future iterations should include adaptations for virtual teams, streamline program delivery, actively engage all team members, assess the impact on patient safety, and evaluate cost-effectiveness compared to traditional leadership programs. Scaling the Relational Playbook across diverse clinical settings will require strategic collaboration with technology partners to ensure accessibility, flexibility, and sustained implementation. By leveraging digital platforms for leadership development, health care organizations can accelerate skill acquisition, strengthen team culture, and build resilient leaders in an increasingly complex care environment.

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Data Availability

The datasets generated or analyzed during this study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request after US Department of Veterans Affairs permissions are obtained for release.

Authors' Contributions

MD and HMG conceived the intervention and study design. MD, HMG, and BC designed, collected, analyzed, and interpreted the mixed methods data. All authors contributed to writing and approved the final manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

MD, BC, and HMG receive salaries from the US Department of Veterans Affairs. The other author declares no other conflicts of interest.

Multimedia Appendix 1

Screenshots from the Whistle platform showing its unique features, with the Relational Playbook's educational content reformatted into a microlearning flash card model incorporating short text, colored images, videos, and kick-off interventions.

[[DOCX File, 849 KB - nursing_v9i1e79188_app1.docx](#)]

Multimedia Appendix 2

The 13-item Learning Environment Assessment Tool (LEAT) is an abbreviated version of the validated 64-item Learning Environment Survey. The LEAT assesses key aspects of supportive learning environments, and each item is rated on a 3-point scale (1="rarely," 2="sometimes," and 3="almost always").

[[DOCX File, 27 KB - nursing_v9i1e79188_app2.docx](#)]

Multimedia Appendix 3

Primary implementation outcomes assessed using the Acceptability of Intervention Measure, Feasibility of Intervention Measure, and Intervention Appropriateness Measure tailored to the Relational Playbook on Whistle. Each item is rated on a 5-point scale (1="completely disagree"; 5="completely agree") and analyzed using mean scores.

[[DOCX File, 49 KB - nursing_v9i1e79188_app3.docx](#)]

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Abbreviations

NP: nurse practitioner

VHA: Veterans Health Administration

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Exploring Nursing Students' Experiences in a Brief Virtual Reality–Enhanced Workshop: Cross-Sectional Exploratory Study

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Abstract

Background: There is limited evidence on how brief, optional virtual reality (VR) experiences can be used with first-semester nursing students as experiential learning strategies to support understanding of foundational nursing concepts, outside of mandatory coursework or full-scale simulations. Additionally, little is known about students' and teachers' perceptions of VR as a low-stakes, supplemental learning strategy introduced early in nursing education. Examining these experiences can provide insight into the pedagogical value and scalability of VR-enhanced learning within the formal nursing curriculum.

Objective: This study explored students' and teachers' experiences of a brief, optional, VR-enhanced workshop offered outside mandatory coursework in first-semester nursing education and described students' perceptions of cognitive, social, and teaching presence.

Methods: This was a cross-sectional evaluation at a Swedish public university. A single-session workshop, co-designed by nursing teachers and the university library makerspace (implementation context), combined brief headset exposures (sympathetic arousal via a short roller coaster experience and parasympathetic engagement via a short guided meditation), peer vital-sign practice (instructional aid), small-group synthesis, and a guided debrief aligned with the community of inquiry (CoI) framework. Immediately after the session, students completed a demographics questionnaire, a 7-item workshop-specific VR-perception set, and the 34-item CoI instrument, plus 2 open-ended items; teachers provided short reflections. Analyses were descriptive for quantitative data and summative content analysis of open-ended responses. Participants included 11.9% (16/134) of the invited first-semester students (mean age 25 years, SD 5.1; 15/16, 93.8% women; 6/16, 37.5% with prior VR exposure) and 3 teachers.

Results: Most students agreed or strongly agreed that VR enhanced analysis and observation (12/16, 75%), exploration of phenomena (14/16, 87.5%), conceptual understanding and engagement (13/16, 81.3%), teacher support (13/16, 81.3%), and relevance to the session (14/16, 87.5%). CoI ratings indicated moderately positive perceptions (total mean 3.36, SD 0.44 on a 5-point scale), with cognitive presence rated the highest (mean 3.48, SD 0.41) and exploration being the top subdomain (mean 4.48, SD 0.49); design and organization and facilitation were similar (mean 3.42, SD 0.55 each), whereas direct instruction was rated lower (mean 2.88, SD 0.92). Open-ended remarks described links between theory and embodied experience and noted practical challenges.

Conclusions: This study used an early, optional format; the results showed that brief, contrastive VR exposures paired with scaffolded inquiry and a guided debrief were perceived as pedagogically valuable for exploring foundational physiological concepts, while also highlighting feasibility and logistical considerations for routine teaching. Findings are preliminary and reflect session-level perceptions from a small, self-selected sample; nevertheless, they suggest that structured, low-stakes VR may serve as a feasible supplemental strategy in first-semester nursing education, with implications for potential scalability.

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KEYWORDS

virtual reality; education; community of inquiry; cross-sectional studies; experiential learning; education 4.0; academic library makerspace; nursing

Introduction

Background

Contemporary educational paradigms increasingly emphasize the need for immersive, interactive learning environments that

integrate theoretical instruction with practical, hands-on experiences, grounded in educational theory and supported by institutional pedagogical frameworks [1-4]. In undergraduate nursing, where foundational concepts about physiology and patient care must be internalized early, there is a growing interest in introducing virtual reality (VR) early in the curriculum as an

optional, low-stakes complement to core coursework to spark engagement and support conceptual understanding in the first semester [5].

A growing evidence base suggests that VR can enhance learning by providing immersive, repeatable, and safe experiences that bridge abstract concepts and embodied understanding. Meta-analyses in nursing education have reported positive effects on theoretical knowledge, technical skills, self-confidence, and learner satisfaction when VR is integrated with attention to design features and instructional support [6-8]. At the same time, findings are not uniform: outcomes vary by intervention design and outcome type, and some studies note that while presence increases, learning can suffer when cognitive load is high or scaffolding is insufficient [5,9,10]. Practical considerations, such as cybersickness risks influenced by exposure duration, content, and locomotion, also warrant attention when working with first-time users [11].

There is limited evidence on how brief, optional VR experiences can be used with first-semester nursing students as experiential learning strategies to support understanding of foundational nursing concepts, outside of mandatory coursework or full-scale simulations. Additionally, little is known about students' and teachers' perceptions of VR as a low-stakes, supplemental learning strategy introduced early in nursing education. Examining these experiences can provide important insight into the pedagogical value and scalability of VR-enhanced learning within the formal nursing curriculum. Reports frequently emphasize usability or novelty yet underdescribe how short VR exposures are pedagogically integrated to connect conceptual content (eg, autonomic physiology) with immediate experiences and collaborative sensemaking [5,10].

To guide a purposefully designed, concise activity, we drew on education 4.0 (learner-centered, experience-driven, and digitally supported learning); constructive alignment (coherence among intended learning outcomes, teaching and learning activities, and assessment); and the community of inquiry (CoI) framework (cognitive, social, and teaching presence) [12-18]. Framing VR as one tool within an aligned pedagogical design helps ensure that brief exposures are structured to foster inquiry, link embodied responses to concepts, and support facilitated reflection.

To address these gaps, we implemented and evaluated a brief, optional, VR-enhanced workshop offered outside mandatory coursework in first-semester nursing education. The model combined short headset exposures designed to elicit contrasting autonomic responses, peer practice of vital-sign measurement to support observation and discussion, small-group synthesis, and a guided debrief aligned to the CoI practical inquiry cycle.

Table . Time structure of the workshop.

Component of the workshop	Time (min)
Virtual reality exposure and peer vital-sign practice	60
Working on answering the given questions and preparing a PowerPoint presentation	75
Group presentations and reflection	45

We describe the implementation and examine students' and teachers' experiences, focusing on students' perceptions of cognitive, social, and teaching presence as indicators of the perceived learning environment [15-17].

Objective

This study explores students' and teachers' experiences of a brief, optional VR-enhanced workshop offered outside mandatory coursework in first-semester nursing education and described students' perceptions of cognitive, social, and teaching presence.

Methods

Design and Reporting

This cross-sectional study evaluated an optional, VR-enhanced workshop using postworkshop surveys (Likert-type items and open-ended responses). No behavioral observation checklists were used. Reporting follows STROBE (Strengthening the Reporting of Observational Studies in Epidemiology) guidance for cross-sectional studies [19].

Setting, Participants, and Recruitment

The activity took place at a Swedish public university (south central region). All first-semester nursing students (N=134) were invited to participate via announcements on the online classroom platform and brief in-class invitations. Registration remained open for one week, and 16 (11.9%) students who expressed interest received a confirmation message securing their place in the workshop. Participation was voluntary and outside mandatory coursework. In addition, 3 nursing teachers participated across all workshop phases and provided brief reflections. Library makerspace staff co-facilitated implementation (roles are detailed in subsequent sections) but were not included in the teacher feedback items.

Workshop

This optional, supplemental, VR-enhanced experiential learning activity (distinct from a clinical simulation scenario) was offered alongside the first-semester curriculum and was not included in required assessments or mandatory components. Students were divided into 2 groups of 8 for workflow and logistical reasons (nonrandom allocation). Each group completed one VR module, either a short roller-coaster exposure (sympathetic arousal) or a short guided meditation (parasympathetic engagement), followed by inquiry tasks and a guided debrief (Table 1). The workshop was implemented as an optional addition to existing teaching (ie, not part of the school's required simulation infrastructure) to explore perceived experiences with a concise, aligned model.

Implementation Roles (Contextual)

The workshop was co-designed and co-facilitated by 2 units: nursing teachers (pedagogical design, alignment with first-semester concepts, and facilitation of the debrief and links to physiology) and university library makerspace staff (readiness and comfort protocols for first-time VR use; headset onboarding; hygiene, sanitation, and logistics; and facilitation of information-seeking and source evaluation during the inquiry task). This cross-unit collaboration supported delivery; no evaluation of collaboration effects (eg, feasibility, process outcomes, or comparative effectiveness) was undertaken, and collaboration was not a study outcome.

VR Exposures and Rationale

We selected brief headset exposures to contrast autonomic activation states: (1) sympathetic activation via an approximately 4-minute Epic Roller Coasters track and (2) parasympathetic engagement via an approximately 5- to 6-minute TRIPP guided meditation, primarily to support conceptual understanding of autonomic physiology and secondarily to maintain comfort and accessibility for first-time users [20,21]. Evidence summarized in prior reviews indicates that cybersickness risk is associated with exposure duration, visual stimulation, and locomotion and content; comfort-oriented, shorter sessions are commonly recommended for first-time users [11,22].

Vital-Sign Practice Procedure

Before headset use, each student had resting baseline values recorded (heart rate, blood pressure, respiratory rate, oxygen saturation, and tympanic temperature) using standard training instruments in the student practice ward. To minimize movement artifact and measurement reactivity, spot-checks were obtained immediately after the VR exposure (not during). These measurements were intended to support observations, understanding of sympathetic and parasympathetic responses, and postexperience discussion, rather than research-grade physiological inference; no continuous monitoring was performed, and readings were not designed to isolate specific organ-system mechanisms.

Grouping and Sequence

Two groups of 8 proceeded in parallel (roller coaster *or* meditation). Assigning 1 module per group supported the single-session timebox, comfort for first-time users, and a contrastive learning design that allowed cross-group comparison during synthesis and debrief. Students could reference their own baseline and immediate postexposure readings (eg, heart rate, blood pressure, and respiratory rate) in slides and discussion to illustrate sympathetic vs parasympathetic patterns.

Inquiry Tasks and Presentation (CoI Aligned)

Small groups completed 3 tasks designed to link embodied responses to conceptual understanding and to support the CoI practical inquiry cycle [15,16].

First, explain observations with evidence—locate and use credible sources (textbooks, peer-reviewed literature, and institutional resources) to interpret observed changes consistent with sympathetic vs parasympathetic mechanisms.

Second, synthesize a brief minilesson—prepare a short slide deck that links observations and theory (autonomic physiology; cardiovascular regulation), applies source appraisal, and communicates clearly to peers. Students could optionally include their own heart rate, blood pressure, and respiratory rate comparisons; content on heart dynamics, signaling pathways, and energy metabolism was addressed via literature-based synthesis.

Third, present and debrief (guided)—deliver the minilesson and then participate in a guided debrief aligned with CoI prompts (eg, triggering event, exploration and integration, and bounded resolution). Facilitation emphasized guided reflection and feedback tailored to the goals of the workshop.

Scaffolds: Prompts and Rubrics

Instructors used structured supports to scaffold the activity. The observation log rubric included baseline vs immediate postexposure readings and salient sensations, along with a brief plain-language interpretation. The source evaluation rubric included authority, accuracy, relevance, and timeliness. The synthesis rubric included claim evidence reasoning, alignment to the learning goal, and clarity for peers. These scaffolds guided observation, evidence appraisal, and coherent explanation and were not graded assessments.

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Data Collection and Measures (Combined)

Students completed an anonymous postworkshop survey with 4 components.

First, the survey collected demographic data on age, gender, and prior VR headset experience.

Second, the survey included 7 VR-perception items that were workshop-specific and targeted perceived analysis and exploration, conceptual understanding and engagement, teacher support, relevance, and the value of learning new technology. These items were tailored to this workshop and were not intended as a validated general instrument; therefore, reliability statistics were not reported for this subscale.

Third, the CoI instrument (34 items) was used and its wording was adapted minimally to the in-person, single-session context (eg, replacing “course” with “workshop activity”) while preserving full coverage of the constructs (cognitive, social, and teaching presence). Given the small sample, we did not estimate reliability in this study; we relied on prior validation literature [15,16].

Fourth, the survey included 2 open-ended questions addressing challenges, barriers, and opportunities for learning with VR, including reflections that could reference sensations experienced. Teachers (nursing teachers) provided brief reflections, whereas makerspace staff co-facilitated implementation but did not complete teacher items.

Ethical Considerations

Participation was voluntary with written informed consent obtained from all participants. Responses were anonymized to protect privacy and confidentiality. Formal ethics review was not required for this type of educational research at our institution and no sensitive personal data were collected [23]. No compensation was provided to participants.

Analysis

Quantitative data were summarized descriptively (no inferential statistics were performed). The 7-item workshop-specific perceptions were reported as distributions; no reliability statistics were calculated. For the CoI instrument, we reported subscale and total scores descriptively and relied on prior validation

literature rather than estimating reliability in this small sample. Open-ended responses underwent summative content analysis (2 coders independently open coded the data and reconciled differences through discussion; categories were not assumed to be mutually exclusive) [24].

Results

Overview of Outcomes

Table 2 summarizes students' CoI scores (teaching, social, and cognitive presence and their subdomains); Figure 1 shows agree and strongly agree distributions for the 7-item VR-perception statements, sorted from highest to lowest.

Figure 1. Nursing student ratings concerning using virtual reality (VR) in education.

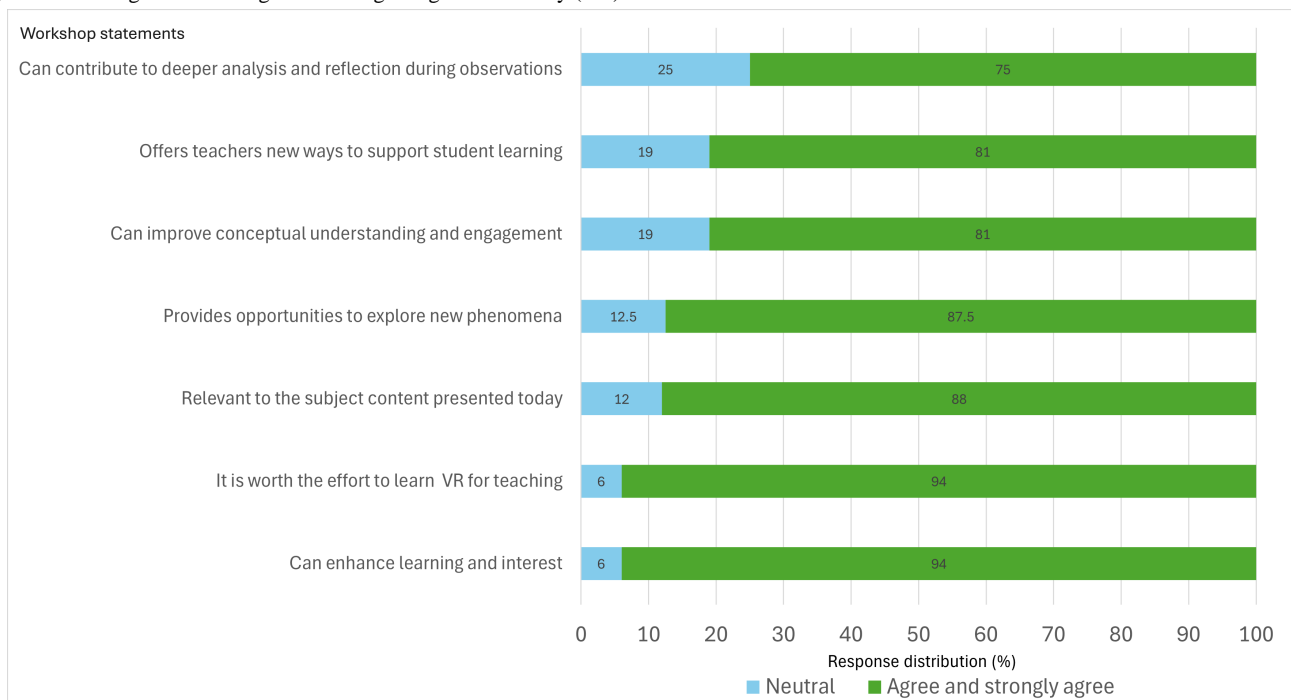


Table . Mean score of the community of inquiry (CoI) survey instrument (n=16).

CoI survey elements	Scores, mean (SD)
Teaching presence	3.28 (0.57)
Design and organization	3.42 (0.55)
Facilitation	3.42 (0.55)
Direct instruction	2.88 (0.92)
Social presence	3.26 (0.60)
Affective expression	3.04 (0.65)
Open communication	3.35 (0.68)
Group cohesion	3.38 (0.69)
Cognitive presence	3.48 (0.41)
Triggering event	3.58 (0.46)
Exploration	4.48 (0.49)
Integration	3.46 (0.46)
Resolution	3.42 (0.49)
Total score	3.36 (0.44)

Of the students at the nursing school (n=134), 16 (11.9%) signed up to participate. The study included 16 students (mean age 25, SD 5.1; range 20 - 38 years), of whom 15 (93.8%) were women. Of the 16 students, 37.5% (n=6) had prior experience using VR headsets. Among these, 2 (12.5%) students had used VR headsets for gaming purposes and 3 (18.8%) students experienced motion sickness or stress during the use of VR. One (6.3%) student did not provide details about their prior experiences with VR. In addition to the students, 3 teachers (mean age 51; SD 10.0, range 43 - 62 years; all male) participated in the workshop. Two teachers had previous experience with VR headsets: one had used them on a few occasions and the other had explored both recreational and pedagogical applications of VR.

Of the 16 students, most agreed or strongly agreed that the VR headsets could increase analysis and observation (n=12, 75%), could help with exploring a new phenomenon (n=14, 87.5%), could increase concept knowledge and engagement (n=13, 81.3%), could create new possibilities for teachers to support their students in learning (n=13, 81.3%), and were relevant to use for the topic of the workshop (n=14, 87.5%) and thought it was worth learning a new technology (n=15, 93.8%; [Figure 1](#)).

CoI Results

For interpretability, teaching presence reflects design and organization, facilitation, and direct instruction; social presence reflects affective expression, open communication, and group cohesion; and cognitive presence reflects triggering event, exploration, integration, and resolution. Participants' ratings indicated moderately positive perceptions of the workshop's learning environment ([Table 2](#)). Within teaching presence, design and organization and facilitation were similar (mean 3.42, SD 0.55 each), whereas direct instruction was lower (mean 2.88, SD 0.92). Social presence averaged 3.26 (SD 0.60), with subdomains ranging from affective expression (mean 3.04, SD 0.65) to group cohesion (mean 3.38, SD 0.69). Cognitive

presence had the highest overall mean 3.48 (SD 0.41), with exploration rated highest among its subdomains (mean 4.48, SD 0.49), followed by triggering event (mean 3.58, SD 0.46), integration (mean 3.46, SD 0.46), and resolution (mean 3.42, SD 0.49). Students referenced their own baseline and immediate postexposure readings (eg, heart rate, blood pressure, and respiratory rate) descriptively to illustrate sympathetic versus parasympathetic patterns; these readings were not analyzed as outcomes.

Qualitative Results (Open-Ended Responses)

Overview

As outlined in the Methods section (summative content analysis), we analyzed anonymous, session-specific open-ended comments. A total of 15 (93.8%) of the 16 students and all 3 teachers provided responses (18/19, 94.7% contributors in total). The unit of analysis was the individual comment. Codes were merged into 3 descriptive categories, and the counts reported represent the number of unique contributors per category. Categories were not mutually exclusive, and the quotations included are illustrative rather than exhaustive [[24](#)].

Challenges to VR Use

Participants (9/18, 50%) noted cybersickness and physiological discomfort, headset comfort and time burden, access, logistical, and technical issues, and unfamiliarity and the learning curve.

What I can think of is that one can easily become nauseous, and that leads to difficulty concentrating.
[Participant 2402]

Overall experience can be time-consuming.
[Participant 2403]

Technical issues. Digital literacy is required in the teacher competency. [Participant 2419]

Everyone is not familiar with the technology.
[Participant 2415]

Opportunities for Learning

Students and teachers (16/18, 88.9%) highlighted visualization and immersion to aid understanding and recall, stronger links between theory and observed autonomic responses, low-stakes practice, and a structured debrief that supported collaborative sensemaking.

I could experience the connection between theory and practice. [Participant 2415]

It allows for your senses to be used in other ways with VR which allows for learning in new ways. [Participant 2407]

To experience something and the symptoms that arise with it makes it easier to remember in the learning process. [Participant 2416]

To mix learning methods gives you a greater understanding and a wider picture. [Participant 2411]

Feasibility and Logistics

Practical considerations according to participants (5/18, 27.8%) included equipment availability, onboarding, hygiene, sanitation, and fit adjustments, occasional software and hardware restarts, and scheduling.

Technical aspects need to work, both software and hardware. [Participant 2418]

Students need guidance to find the right levels where they do not get caught in technical details. [Participant 2417]

There might be a need to educate the students in VR-basics. [Participant 2406]

Immediate sensations (eg, nausea, dizziness, and stress) were self-reported by students during the guided debrief and/or the open-ended survey; vital-sign values were not displayed in-headset.

Interpretation

These brief comments help contextualize the session-level experiences but do not provide evidence of longer-term learning or engagement. The counts are descriptive, and no claims of thematic saturation are made, consistent with STROBE guidance for transparent reporting in cross-sectional studies [19].

Link to Cognitive Presence

The qualitative category “opportunities for learning” (16/18, 88.9%) aligns with several components of cognitive presence. Students’ noticing was primarily subjective during exposure and later referenced to postexposure spot-check readings in the debrief, which together reflect CoI triggering events. Their emphasis on visualization, immersion, and linking theory to physiological responses corresponds to exploration, which also received the highest quantitative subdomain score (mean 4.48, SD 0.49). References to small-group synthesis activities and the guided debrief illustrate integration, as students worked to make sense of information across sources. Comments referring to feasibility constraints and the brief scope of the workshop help explain why resolution was rated lower than exploration (mean 3.42, SD 0.49 vs mean 4.48, SD 0.49), although it remained moderate overall. Together, the open-ended responses

complement and contextualize the quantitative profile of cognitive presence while remaining descriptive and limited to session-level experiences.

Instructor Observations

Instructors noted that the format enabled students to observe VR-elicited physiological responses and link these observations to autonomic physiology concepts during the group debrief. These impressions are limited to the session; given the brief, individual VR exposure and the supplemental nature of the workshop, the study does not provide evidence for sustained changes in active or reflective learning or overall engagement. Terms such as “personal” or “meaningful” engagement were not measured. Peer vital-sign measurements were used to facilitate discussion and illustrate concepts (not to evaluate learning outcomes).

Discussion

Principal Findings

This study explored students’ and teachers’ experiences with a brief, optional, VR-enhanced workshop introduced outside mandatory coursework in first-semester nursing education. Students perceived the activity as pedagogically valuable for linking autonomic physiology to embodied experience and for exploration within the learning environment. Interpreted through the CoI framework, the overall profile suggested moderately positive perceptions, with the strongest pattern in cognitive presence: exploration. That pattern is consistent with short, inquiry-driven designs that prompt noticing, questioning, and sensemaking during and after exposure [15,16]. In doing so, this study addresses the identified gap by showing how a brief, optional, low-stakes VR exposure can be positioned early in the curriculum and by documenting students’ and teachers’ perceptions of its pedagogical value and perceived feasibility, with implications for potential scalability as a supplemental strategy. These results reflect session-level perceptions during the workshop’s collaborative elements (peer readings, small-group synthesis and presentations, and guided debrief) and should be interpreted cautiously given the brief, optional, single-session design and small sample (n=16); the study did not assess longer-term changes in engagement or learning.

What the Findings Contribute

A central contribution of this work is the demonstration of a low-stakes, early-semester format in which students experience contrasting autonomic states themselves via a short roller-coaster exposure (sympathetic arousal) and a short guided meditation (parasympathetic engagement) and then interpret those experiences through peer discussion, literature-informed minilessons, and a guided debrief. This sequence appears well-suited to catalyzing curiosity (CoI “triggering event” to subsequent “exploration”) and to making abstract physiological concepts more tangible early in the curriculum [15,16]. The optional nature and the brief duration likely reduced performance pressure while preserving focus on conceptual understanding and engagement, which helps explain the salience of exploration even in a single session. Students’ noticing was primarily subjective during exposure (eg, feelings of arousal or

relaxation) and was later referenced to postexposure spot-check readings during the guided debrief and minilessons, providing concrete anchors for interpretation.

Positioned against the broader VR literature, these session-level perceptions align with findings that VR can enhance learning, particularly motivation, satisfaction, knowledge, and skills, when instructional design and scaffolding are explicit [5-8,25]. At the same time, they are consistent with evidence that presence alone does not guarantee learning and that insufficient scaffolding can increase cognitive load and dampen outcomes [5,9]. Our brief, contrastive exposure format with a structured debrief addresses that design dependence by pairing immersive moments with meaning-making activities rather than treating VR as a standalone novelty.

Interpretation in Context (Education 4.0, Constructive Alignment, and CoI)

The workshop design drew on education 4.0 as a high-level orientation to learner-centered, experience-driven, and digitally supported learning, and on constructive alignment to ensure coherence among intended learning outcomes, teaching and learning activities, and reflection [12-14,18]. Notably, vital sign values were not displayed in-headset; students' "triggering events" arose from subjective sensations during exposure and subsequent reference to postexposure spot checks in the debrief. In practical terms, alignment was enacted by contrastive exposures that instantiate target concepts (autonomic arousal vs relaxation), scaffolded inquiry that connects observations to theory (minilessons with source appraisal), and a brief guided debrief aligned with CoI (cognitive, social, and teaching presence) to support sensemaking and closure [15,16]. The study did not conduct competency assessments and does not claim competence gains; rather, it offers exploratory evidence that a concise, optional format can be perceived as pedagogically valuable and feasible for early supplemental use.

Implementation Considerations

Students' reflections and facilitator notes highlighted pragmatic factors important for routine teaching: headset fit and hygiene protocols, onboarding time for first-time users, and occasional software and hardware restarts. Such start-up frictions are common when integrating immersive devices and should be planned for in scheduling and staffing [5]. The brief contrastive design also served a comfort and accessibility function (limited headset time and seated options), which is advisable given that cybersickness risk is associated with exposure duration, visual stimulation, and locomotion; carefully shorter, comfort-oriented sessions are appropriate for novices [11,22].

Implications and Future Recommendations

The findings of this study suggest several practical implications and directions for future research. Positioning early integration of VR as an optional, low-stakes supplement may be beneficial. Offering brief, clearly scaffolded experiences in the first semester may help to prime curiosity and anchor foundational physiology in embodied experience [5,6].

In addition, using contrastive exposures to make mechanistic contrasts vivid (eg, sympathetic vs parasympathetic) and

following these with a guided debrief that traces CoI's practical inquiry cycle from triggering events to bounded resolution may support learning [15,16].

Scaffolding with simple tools (observation logs and source evaluation and synthesis rubrics) allows students to produce evidence-informed explanations without adding grading burden [12,13].

Planning for logistics and comfort includes onboarding, sanitation, fit checks, and rapid troubleshooting, and exposures should be kept brief for first-time users [11,22].

Research next steps include moving beyond session-level perceptions to comparative and mixed methods designs that examine knowledge retention, reflective writing quality, and observational rubrics, as well as assessing accessibility (nonheadset alternatives) and scalability (equipment and time models) across cohorts [7,9,25].

Limitations

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the activity was optional, single-session, and conducted in a single institution with a small, self-selected sample (n=16), which limits generalizability and precludes inference about longer-term effects. Second, outcomes relied on postsession self-report (VR-perception items and the CoI instrument) without objective educational performance measures, comparators, or follow-up; findings therefore reflect session-level perceptions rather than effectiveness or competence.

Third, vital sign readings (eg, heart rate, blood pressure, and respiratory rate) were collected only as instructional aids to support observation and discussion. In this study, we recorded a resting baseline before exposure and spot-checks immediately after exposure; we did not collect data during exposure or conduct continuous physiological monitoring, and values were obtained with standard training instruments by peers rather than research-grade devices. Consequently, these readings are not suitable for physiological inference, characterization of within-session dynamics, or clean separation of phenomena such as anticipatory arousal. Immediate sensations (eg, nausea, dizziness, and stress) were self-reported during the guided debrief and/or in open-ended survey responses and were not systematically assessed with a validated instrument.

Fourth, the 7-item VR-perception set was tailored to this workshop and was not intended as a validated, generalizable scale; therefore, we do not report reliability for this set. For the CoI instrument, we adapted wording minimally to fit an in-person, single-session context, but given the small sample, we did not estimate reliability in this study and instead relied on prior validation evidence reported elsewhere. Finally, equipment and logistical factors and cross-unit collaboration supported implementation but were not evaluated as outcomes.

Taken together, these factors indicate that results should be interpreted as exploratory evidence about perceived learning environment and feasibility for an early, optional, low-stakes VR activity; they do not demonstrate objective learning gains or competency development. Directions for addressing these

constraints (eg, comparative designs, larger samples, objective outcomes, structured measures of discomfort, and continuous physiological monitoring) are outlined in the Implications and Future Recommendations section.

Conclusions

A brief optional VR workshop introduced early in nursing education can provide low-stakes, embodied experiences that

students perceive as helpful for exploring foundational physiological concepts. When paired with scaffolded inquiry and a guided debrief aligned with CoI, short exposures can prompt curiosity and sensemaking within the formal curriculum, offering a practical, scalable supplement to the required coursework [5,15].

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Data Availability

The datasets used and/or analyzed during this study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Authors' Contributions

MW, NFC, and LK contributed to the conceptualization of the pedagogical workshop. Data curation was performed by MW and LK. Methodology was developed by MW, NFC, and LK. Original draft preparation was conducted by NFC and MW. Writing, review, and editing were carried out by LK.

Conflicts of Interest

None declared.

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Abbreviations

CoI: community of inquiry

STROBE: Strengthening the Reporting of Observational Studies in Epidemiology

VR: virtual reality

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Perceptions and Intentions of Nursing Students Regarding Digital Health: Cross-Sectional Study

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Abstract

Background: The integration of digital health technologies (DHTs) in clinical practice is accelerating, creating a need for nursing students to develop digital competencies aligned with professional expectations. In Quebec, curricular reforms aim to enhance digital health literacy, but data are limited on students' preparedness.

Objective: This study aimed to assess nursing students' perceptions, self-reported competencies, and willingness to engage with DHTs across different academic years.

Methods: A cross-sectional descriptive survey assessing self-reported digital health competencies, attitudes, perceived training coverage, and intentions was conducted using an online questionnaire administered through Qualtrics. Participants (N=136) were recruited from 3 cohorts: first-year (group 1; n=58, 42.6%), second-year (group 2; n=55, 40.4%), and third-year (group 3; n=23, 16.9%) nursing students. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and ANOVAs, with post hoc analyses performed via SPSS.

Results: Significant differences were observed among cohorts concerning digital competencies and access to digital tools. Compared with first-year students (group 1), third-year students (group 3) showed higher proficiency with electronic medical records (group 3: mean 3.29, SD 1.31; group 1: mean 2.59, SD 1.32; $P=.01$), virtual reality (group 3: mean 4.53, SD 1.11; group 1: mean 2.90, SD 1.44; $P<.001$), and clinical databases (group 3: mean 4.59, SD 1.00; group 1: mean 3.21, SD 1.55; $P<.001$). Despite positive attitudes toward DHTs across all groups, training coverage for most digital tools was perceived as low, with the highest levels reported for clinical databases (mean 2.97, SD 1.1). This underscored a substantial gap between institutional expectations and actual digital training across all cohorts.

Conclusions: This study highlights critical gaps in digital health training among nursing students, emphasizing the need for targeted curricular reforms such as the one currently underway at the Université de Montréal. These efforts represent a promising opportunity to better align educational content with the evolving demands of health care systems. Today, preparing students in digital competencies is no longer just advantageous but may soon become essential for the next generation of nurses to navigate and lead within technology-driven care environments.

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KEYWORDS

health IT; digital health education; eHealth competencies; technology adoption in nursing; informatics competency; nursing education; health information systems

Introduction

Macro-Level Context: Digital Shift in Health Care

The digital transformation of health care systems is rapidly redefining how care is delivered, documented, and managed worldwide. Across clinical environments, digital health technologies (DHTs)—including electronic medical records (EMRs), virtual care platforms, and artificial intelligence—are increasingly deployed to enhance care coordination, improve

efficiency, and respond to growing service demands [1,2]. In Quebec, this shift is occurring amid a persistent nursing shortage that places additional pressure on health care institutions and personnel [3]. Strategic investments in digital infrastructure, such as those outlined in the province's 2022 to 2025 technological modernization plan and the federal Pan-Canadian Health Data Strategy, have positioned digital tools as key enablers of more responsive, equitable, and sustainable care delivery [4,5].

Professional Standards and Competencies

To ensure that nurses are prepared to operate within these digitized environments, regulatory and educational bodies have issued guidelines calling for the integration of informatics into nursing practice. The Ordre des infirmières et infirmiers du Québec (OIIQ) emphasizes the importance of digital competencies for safe, ethical, and efficient care across both in-person and virtual settings [6,7]. At the national level, the Canadian Association of Schools of Nursing (CASN) has updated its National Nursing Education Framework to include explicit expectations for digital health literacy among nursing graduates [8]. Together, these standards promote the incorporation of information and communications technologies into nursing curricula as both a professional requirement and a pedagogical priority.

Educational Challenges in Nursing Programs

Despite these mandates, gaps remain in the actual delivery of digital health training across Canadian nursing programs. While students often demonstrate general digital literacy, studies show that they are underprepared to use clinical information systems, navigate electronic records, or interpret data generated by digital tools in real-world practice [9-11]. Furthermore, many programs offer inconsistent or superficial exposure to health ITs (HITs), contributing to low confidence and proficiency among graduates [11]. These limitations risk widening the gap between institutional expectations and actual clinical readiness, particularly as the pace of digitalization continues to accelerate. Previous studies indicate that, although nursing students tend to have a positive attitude toward digital health, their clinical readiness remains limited due to inconsistent exposure to health information systems. Competency frameworks such as those from the CASN and OIIQ underscore the need for structured, progressive integration of digital training into nursing education [7,8]. These limitations contribute to low confidence and perceived readiness among graduates entering technology-rich clinical environments.

Study Rationale in the Quebec Context

Although several studies have examined nurses' perceptions of digital health tools, few have focused on nursing students in Quebec, where the educational structure, regulatory environment, and pace of curricular reform differ from those of other Canadian provinces [12]. Given recent efforts at the Université de Montréal (UdeM) to revise its undergraduate nursing program to better align with CASN and OIIQ guidelines, it is crucial to understand students' current perceptions, competencies, and intentions regarding DHTs. To our knowledge, this is the first study in Quebec to use a cohort-comparative design to examine digital health preparedness among nursing students. Grounded in the technology acceptance model and the OIIQ digital competency framework, this study aimed to identify year-based differences in perceptions and training gaps, thereby informing targeted curricular reforms to support Quebec's digital health transformation [12,13].

This study was conceptually inspired by the behavioral framework by Paré et al [14] examining medical students'

intention to integrate DHTs, which combines elements from the theory of interpersonal behavior by Triandis [15] and the technology acceptance model [16]. The survey content was further adapted to the nursing context using insights from the 2020 National Survey of Canadian Nurses on the use and impact of DHTs in practice. The final instrument was reviewed and validated in collaboration with experienced nursing professors from the Faculty of Nursing (Faculté des sciences infirmières in French; FSI) at UdeM to ensure relevance and clarity for nursing students.

Research Objectives

This study had the following objectives:

- Explore the perceptions and intentions of nursing students regarding their knowledge, experiences, and training related to HITs and their beliefs, attitudes, and intentions concerning the use of HITs in their future professional practice
- Compare these perceptions and competencies based on students' year of study to identify potential differences across cohorts
- Provide recommendations for improving HIT-related education in response to the identified needs

Methods

Design, Setting, and Participants

This study used a cross-sectional descriptive design. It was conducted at the FSI at UdeM in May 2023. The target population included 1274 students enrolled in the FSI at UdeM. A target sample size of 300 was chosen based on recommended minimum thresholds for descriptive surveys in large student populations [17] to ensure reasonable representation as no formal power calculation was required for this exploratory design. Eligible participants were all students currently enrolled in an undergraduate nursing program who provided informed consent.

It is important to note that participant distribution across academic years was uneven. This reflects actual enrollment sizes within the program during the data collection period.

Ethical Considerations

This study was reviewed and approved by UdeM's Research Ethics Committee in Sciences and Health (2023-4300) and was supported by the FSI. All participants provided informed consent electronically before starting the survey and could withdraw at any time without consequence. Data were collected anonymously to ensure participant privacy and confidentiality. No financial or other compensation was provided for participation.

Recruitment

UdeM was selected as the research site due to its status as a major higher education institution in Quebec and the diversity of its undergraduate nursing student population. Recruitment was conducted electronically through the FSI, which emailed an initial invitation and one reminder to all eligible students via their institutional addresses. Interested participants accessed

the study by clicking a secure link leading to the consent form and the online questionnaire. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. Although IP addresses were not collected to ensure confidentiality, the use of institutional email distribution and limited reminders minimized the risk of multiple entries.

Data Collection

Data were collected through an online self-administered questionnaire designed specifically for this study administered via Qualtrics (Qualtrics International Inc), a platform designed for web-based research that offers basic descriptive statistics tools while ensuring secure data handling.

The questionnaire took approximately 15 minutes to complete and included an open-ended question at the end, allowing participants to share additional comments. Although this open-ended question was included at the end of the questionnaire to capture additional student perspectives, these responses were not systematically analyzed in this study. An exploratory review of these responses was conducted to inductively identify recurring themes and enrich the interpretation of the quantitative findings by reflecting participants' lived experiences and unprompted perspectives.

The survey was developed to operationalize key constructs from the conceptual framework described above. Specific items were adapted from the study by Paré et al [14] and the 2020 National Survey of Canadian Nurses to align with the nursing context and relevant DHTs. The draft instrument was then reviewed and refined in collaboration with experienced nursing faculty at UdeM to ensure content validity and clarity. The final version included 15 items (Table S1 in [Multimedia Appendix 1](#)) and is available in [Multimedia Appendix 2](#).

Variables

This study assessed nursing students' perceptions, competencies, and training needs related to HITs across 4 main categories of variables.

Sociodemographic and Academic Variables

Sociodemographic and academic variables included the year and type of academic program; the participants' age, sex, and gender; languages of interaction; daily use of digital devices; previous professional experience in the health care sector; and current or intended professional setting after graduation.

HIT Competencies and Training

Using Likert-type scales, participants assessed their level of proficiency with various technologies (1="none," 2="very low," 3="low," 4="moderate," 5="high," and 6="very high"), the extent to which HITs were covered in their nursing education program (1="not covered at all," 2="poorly covered," 3="moderately covered," 4="well covered," and 5="very well covered"), and the level of expertise they believed was necessary for clinical practice (1="no training needed," 2="basic training," 3="functional or intermediate training," and 4="expert or specialized training").

Perceived Impacts of HITs

Participants were asked to rate the perceived impact of DHTs on key aspects of the nursing profession, such as quality of care

and work life. The question was phrased as follows: "Do you believe that the use of digital health technologies has, or will have, an impact on the following dimensions of the nursing profession?" Responses were collected on a Likert scale (1="very negative impact," 2="negative impact," 3="neutral impact," 4="positive impact," and 5="very positive impact"). An open-ended question followed, allowing respondents to elaborate or provide additional comments.

Statistical Analysis

Students were grouped into 3 categories based on their year of study: first year of the integrated diploma of college studies–bachelor's degree (*diplôme d'études collégiales–baccalauréat* in French; DEC-BAC) and regular bachelor's degree (*baccalauréat* in French; BAC) programs (group 1), second year of the DEC-BAC and BAC programs (group 2), and third year of the DEC-BAC and BAC programs (group 3). All Likert scale variables were treated as continuous variables and analyzed using means and SDs.

For categorical variables, frequencies and percentages were reported for each group as well as for the total sample. Group comparisons were conducted using exact *P* values from chi-square tests. For continuous variables, valid sample sizes, means, and SDs were presented. Group means for Likert scale variables were compared using one-way ANOVA followed by Tukey post hoc tests where appropriate.

An exception was made for the variable "training coverage—scheduling software," where the Welch correction for unequal variances was applied and post hoc comparisons were conducted using Games-Howell tests. All statistical analyses were performed using the SPSS software (version 28; IBM Corp), with a significance level set at 5%.

Results

Sociodemographic and Academic Variables

Overview

A total of 173 students accessed the questionnaire. The response rate for the item identifying participants' academic year within the nursing program was 78.6% (136/173). After grouping, group 1 comprised 42.6% (58/136) first-year students, group 2 comprised 40.4% (55/136) second-year students, and group 3 comprised 16.9% (23/136) third-year students.

Participant Profile

Across all groups, more than 67% (92/136) of participants were aged between 18 and 25 years, with group 3 standing out at 80% (19/23) in this age range ($P=.03$). This group also reported significantly higher access to a laptop ($P=.02$). Use of digital tools for specific activities was also significantly greater among groups 2 and 3 ($P=.01$). Additionally, a higher proportion of group 3 participants reported working in the provincial public health care sector ($P=.003$; Table S2 in [Multimedia Appendix 1](#)).

HIT Competencies and Training

HIT Proficiency Levels

Proficiency levels across all work-related HITs were generally rated from low to moderate. Group 2 stood out in terms of proficiency with EMRs ($P=.01$), whereas group 3 demonstrated higher proficiency with virtual reality ($P=.001$) and clinical databases ($P=.001$; Table S3 in [Multimedia Appendix 1](#)).

Training Coverage by Group

Regardless of the specific HIT in question, coverage within the curriculum was generally perceived as very limited to minimal. Group 1 reported greater coverage in the use of scheduling software ($P=.007$), whereas group 3 reported more extensive coverage in database training ($P=.004$; Table S4 in [Multimedia Appendix 1](#)).

Required Expertise for Professional Use of HITs

Participants generally believed that most HITs required little to no specific expertise for professional use. An exception was noted for group 2, which reported a significantly higher need for basic or intermediate training in the use of health care robots ($P=.02$; Table S5 in [Multimedia Appendix 1](#)).

Perceived Impacts of HITs in the Nursing Profession

Perceptions of the impact of HITs on the nursing profession were consistent across all groups. Most students believed that DHTs have a positive or very positive impact on key aspects such as quality of care, therapeutic relationships, and productivity (Table S6 in [Multimedia Appendix 1](#)).

Narrative Comments

Of the 136 respondents, 31 (22.8%) provided written responses to the open-ended question. Most comments reflected key patterns observed in the quantitative results, particularly regarding the perceived lack of formal training in DHTs. Several students reported learning to use digital tools only during clinical placements, consistent with the limited curriculum coverage ratings found across cohorts. One respondent noted that “[w]e only learn to use digital tools during internships,” whereas another remarked that “[a]t university, we have no training on the software we encounter in practice.”

Others described barriers to accessing technologies during clinical placements due to their student status:

As a nurse it's fine, but as a student, it's complicated when we don't have the access.

These comments aligned with cohort-based differences observed in digital tool use and confidence levels.

However, the responses also surfaced dimensions not captured in the structured survey. Several participants mentioned psychosocial or physical impacts of digital tool use, including “less sleep, eye strain, and a more sedentary lifestyle” and “technology sometimes limits social interaction, which affects mental health.” A few students proposed improvements, such as earlier exposure to clinical systems or greater consistency in tools across health care settings:

It would help to learn some of the clinical software in advance.

Please standardize the digital documents, it would simplify things when moving between institutions.

While broadly aligned with the quantitative trends, these narrative comments introduced experiential nuances, such as well-being, autonomy, and implementation barriers, that were not accessible through the Likert scale items alone.

Discussion

Principal Findings

Both the OIIQ Comité jeunesse and the OIIQ [6,12] emphasize the importance of access to IT that supports nurses' clinical decision-making, optimizes care processes, and enhances patient safety, as well as maintaining professional and ethical standards.

Similarly, the CASN, through its National Nursing Education Framework [8], underscores the importance of integrating nursing informatics competencies into academic programs to better prepare future professionals for the increasing technological demands of clinical environments.

However, our findings indicate that students perceive their current training as insufficient. Their self-assessed proficiency with digital tools was limited, and coverage of key HITs was generally perceived as weak without a clear progression across academic years despite students showing an interest in these tools and their potential impact on nursing practice.

These observations suggest a concerning disconnect between the evolving expectations of the health care system and students' perceived preparedness despite the clear guidelines set forth by both the OIIQ and CASN. This aligns with findings by Kleib et al [11], who identified persistent gaps in digital health education that were exacerbated by pedagogical approaches that often overestimate students' technological competencies and fail to adequately prepare them for clinical realities.

The narrative comments reinforced this disconnect by providing concrete examples of students' perceived lack of preparation, particularly in relation to clinical software. The comments also highlighted barriers that were not captured in the structured survey, such as restricted access to digital tools during placements and the personal toll of technology use on well-being. These experiential accounts complement the quantitative findings and emphasize that perceived readiness is shaped not only by curricular content but also by the conditions of access, support, and emotional experience within clinical environments.

The fact that many participants in our study believed that high-level proficiency was unnecessary for the effective use of HITs may reflect a limited understanding of their relevance in nursing practice. Kleib et al [11] emphasize that, while students often demonstrate basic digital literacy, this does not necessarily translate into clinical competence. Consequently, students may underestimate the complexity and significance of digital tools in real-world settings. These findings highlight the pivotal role of nursing educators in bridging this gap by explicitly integrating digital competencies into nursing curricula and grounding them

within authentic clinical contexts to foster both awareness and applied proficiency.

Despite these challenges, the surveyed students remained generally optimistic about the role of HITs, with most believing that these technologies will have a positive or even very positive impact on the nursing profession. This optimism reflects a growing awareness of the digital shift in health care and aligns with the strategic directions promoted by the OIIQ and CASN, who advocate for stronger digital health training in nursing education [7,8].

Beyond these overarching findings, notable differences emerged between academic years in terms of access to digital tools, proficiency with specific technologies, and perceived curriculum coverage. This study identified several statistically significant differences in how students from each cohort perceived and interacted with HITs.

The 18- to 25-year age group predominated across all cohorts, particularly in group 3, where it represented 83% (19/23) of the participants. Group 3 students also reported greater access to digital tools, especially laptops, and more advanced use of EMRs, virtual reality, and databases. These findings are consistent with the broader and more in-depth training coverage that this group reported for these tools.

The observed differences in competencies and training exposure likely reflect curricular progression, with third-year students benefiting from more extensive clinical placements, capstone projects, and practical assignments that integrate digital tools. In addition, group 3 students may have greater opportunities for independent learning and part-time work in health care settings, reinforcing their proficiency with EMRs and clinical databases. In contrast, group 1 students are typically at the beginning of their program, focused on foundational theoretical content with limited hands-on exposure to applied digital health systems.

Group 2 students stood out for their more frequent use of digital tools and a higher reported need for advanced competencies in health care robotics. Meanwhile, group 1 students reported better coverage related to scheduling software, likely reflecting academic needs specific to first-year studies.

Taken together, these findings reveal a persistent and concerning gap between current digital health needs and the perceived preparedness of nursing students, echoing the concerns expressed by the OIIQ [7]. They underscore the importance of continuing efforts to integrate digital health competencies into nursing education in a structured and strategic manner.

Limitations and Future Research

Methodological and Contextual Limitations

Of the 1274 targeted students, 136 (10.7%) completed the questionnaire, representing 45.3% (136/300) of the sample size required to ensure statistical representation. While the target of 300 respondents was chosen based on practical guidelines for descriptive surveys, the absence of a formal power calculation means that the study may be underpowered to detect smaller effect sizes or subtle group differences, particularly given the uneven distribution across cohorts.

The unequal sample sizes between academic years may also have limited the statistical power for some comparisons. However, this limitation mirrors real enrollment patterns and was accounted for using appropriate statistical analyses.

Although no data were available to confirm a nonresponse bias, the relatively low participation rate raises the possibility of such a risk. Therefore, it is possible that respondents had characteristics or perceptions that differed from those of nonrespondents, potentially limiting the generalizability of the findings.

Additionally, the self-administered nature of the questionnaire introduces the possibility of self-selection and self-assessment bias. Students who chose to participate may have been more comfortable with technology or more aware of digital health issues, potentially skewing responses toward more favorable or more critical perceptions than would be typical. Moreover, as the study was conducted at a single institution, UdeM, the transferability of the findings to other educational, institutional, or cultural contexts is limited. The uneven distribution of participants across groups, particularly the low number of participants in group 3, further reduces the robustness of statistical comparisons and may have hindered the detection of significant effects in certain analyses.

In addition, while this study included an open-ended question that generated valuable narrative insights, these data were reviewed only through an exploratory, unsystematic process and were not coded or analyzed using a formal qualitative methodology. As such, they cannot be considered representative or exhaustive. Even so, the added value of these responses, particularly in revealing experiential and emotional dimensions absent from the structured survey, suggests that future research would benefit from an intentionally designed mixed methods approach. Incorporating qualitative inquiry from the outset guided by a clear theoretical framework would allow for a more comprehensive understanding of how nursing students engage with digital technologies across educational and clinical contexts.

Future Research Directions

The FSI at UdeM is currently in the process of implementing a revised version of its undergraduate program in response to recent recommendations from the CASN that emphasize the importance of developing digital competencies aligned with current clinical demands and realities.

In this context, a pretest-posttest design with independent cohorts comparing students who completed the old curriculum with those trained under the revised program would offer valuable insights into the impact of the reform on digital health literacy, integration, and appropriation. Additionally, consultations with key stakeholders within the faculty, including teaching staff, program directors, educational advisors, and student representatives from each cohort, could provide critical institutional perspectives on the validity of the findings presented in this study. As part of a complementary qualitative component, this triangulated approach would not only contextualize the results but also help assess how curriculum reform may influence digital health teaching practices.

Several additional methodological avenues could be explored to build on this work and deepen understanding of students' perceptions and competencies regarding HITs. First, replicating the study across multiple nursing schools through a multisite comparative design would help assess the transferability of findings beyond the UdeM context. Second, adopting a mixed methods approach to combine quantitative questionnaires with qualitative interviews could yield a more nuanced understanding of student expectations, perceived barriers, and enabling conditions for meaningful engagement with digital tools. Finally, longitudinal studies conducted throughout the academic journey would allow for documentation of digital competency development over time in relation to different education milestones and ongoing curricular adjustments.

Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations

This study reveals a significant gap between institutional expectations and perceptions of digital health training by nursing students, particularly in their proficiency with essential tools such as EMRs and clinical databases. Despite recognizing the value of digital technologies, students reported limited curricular coverage and confidence in using them.

These findings call for targeted reforms in nursing education, including the integration of hands-on training, digital simulations, and interactive modules. To address these gaps

more concretely, nursing programs could implement several specific measures: (1) dedicated simulation laboratories focused on EMRs and clinical software; (2) mandatory digital health literacy modules that introduce students to national and provincial informatics frameworks; and (3) interprofessional digital health workshops that mirror real-world collaborative settings involving nurses, physicians, and allied health professionals. These recommendations are further supported by students' own accounts, which reflect both a desire for earlier, more practical exposure to digital tools and a recognition of the limitations in their current training environment.

The current curriculum revision at UdeM offers a timely opportunity to evaluate the implementation outcomes of such changes. Future studies using a clearly defined pretest-posttest design, with precise cohort tracking to distinguish students enrolled before, during, or after curriculum reforms and collecting detailed data on external exposure to HITs (eg, work settings) could help assess the true impact of these reforms.

Broader research across institutions and through mixed methods or longitudinal approaches will be crucial to strengthening the evidence base literature. In an increasingly technology-driven health care landscape, equipping the next generation of nurses with robust digital competencies is no longer optional and has become a professional imperative.

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Data Availability

The datasets generated or analyzed during this study are not publicly available due to privacy and institutional restrictions but are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Authors' Contributions

AC conceptualized the study and led project administration. AC and GP developed the methodology and supervised the study. SH-D curated the data and performed the formal analysis. FAES conducted validation. AC and SH-D wrote the original draft of the manuscript. All authors (AC, SH-D, GP, and FAES) reviewed and edited the manuscript and approved the final version.

Conflicts of Interest

AC serves as an associate editor for the *Journal of Medical Internet Research*. The other authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Multimedia Appendix 1

Descriptive and comparative tables summarizing participant characteristics, technology proficiency, training coverage, and perceived expertise requirements across student groups.

[[DOCX File, 37 KB - nursing_v9i1e77051_app1.docx](#)]

Multimedia Appendix 2

Study questionnaire assessing nursing students' perceptions, experiences, and attitudes toward digital health technologies. [DOCX File, 57 KB - [nursing_v9i1e77051_app2.docx](#)]

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Abbreviations

- BAC:** baccalauréat
CASN: Canadian Association of Schools of Nursing
DEC-BAC: diplôme d'études collégiales–baccalauréat
DHT: digital health technology
EMR: electronic medical record

FSI: Faculty of Nursing

HIT: health information technology

OIIQ: Ordre des infirmières et infirmiers du Québec

UdeM: University of Montreal

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Barriers and Enablers for Sustaining Nurse-Led Use of Clinical Decision Support Tools for Antibiotic Stewardship: Qualitative Study

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Abstract

Background: Clinical decision support (CDS) tools embedded in electronic health records in the form of integrated clinical prediction rules provide a potentially effective intervention to reduce inappropriate antibiotic prescribing for acute respiratory infections. However, their effectiveness has been limited by workflow barriers and low adoption by health care providers. Nurses are well positioned to implement evidence-based protocols using CDS tools. In a multicenter randomized controlled trial, a nurse-led implementation strategy for acute respiratory infection integrated clinical prediction rules was evaluated for use in primary care and urgent care settings.

Objective: This study aimed to examine nurse and nurse leader perspectives on the sustainability of an electronic health record-integrated CDS tool for antibiotic stewardship and explored factors influencing its potential long-term integration into ambulatory nursing practice beyond the clinical trial.

Methods: We interviewed 22 nurses and nurse leaders from 37 clinics across 3 academic medical centers that participated in the clinical trial. Two semistructured interview guides, one for nurses and one for nursing leadership, were developed to understand the barriers and facilitators to implementing a decision aid tool for nurses and to elicit challenges specific to nursing interactions with the CDS tool. Interviews were recorded and transcribed. Using thematic content analysis and iterative coding, our team collaboratively identified emerging themes related to sustainability and refined the results with consensus.

Results: Five themes emerged: (1) importance of staffing stability and capacity, (2) impact of dedicated clinic resource availability, (3) variable nurse readiness with CDS-guided clinical care, (4) influence of openness to change and a nurse-supportive clinic culture, and (5) ongoing need for training and support. Specific recommendations for future actions were also noted.

Conclusions: Our findings revealed specific barriers and facilitators to the sustainability of a CDS tool from the nursing perspective that can inform further implementation of nurse-led delegation protocols in the ambulatory setting. Future solutions should consider mapping physical workflows, scheduling specific to nurse visits, continuing education, and treating cough and sore throat as 2 distinct processes.

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KEYWORDS

clinical decision support systems; electronic health records; nursing; antibiotic stewardship; ambulatory care facilities

Introduction

Antibiotic resistance is a growing global health concern, exacerbated by the overprescription of antibiotics for acute respiratory infections (ARIs) [1]. Despite available evidence-based guidelines and clinical decision support (CDS), physicians often prescribe antibiotics inappropriately due to

perceived patient expectations, time pressures, and cognitive fatigue [2]. To address this issue, clinical prediction rule (CPR) systems have been developed and integrated as integrated clinical prediction rules (iCPRs) into electronic health records (EHRs) as CDS to assist physicians in making informed antibiotic prescribing decisions [3,4]. However, their impact has been limited by low provider adoption rates [5,6]. Evidence

suggests that registered nurses (RNs) have the potential to implement evidence-based protocols [7,8], participate in antimicrobial stewardship [9], achieve high patient satisfaction and symptom resolution [7], and demonstrate higher adoption rates of CDS tools than physician-led initiatives [10].

Building on this potential, the multicenter, step-wedge, cluster randomized controlled trial (iCPR3 RCT) evaluated whether RNs could effectively use iCPR tools to guide evidence-based care for patients presenting with ARIs in ambulatory care settings [11,12].

An early implementation assessment identified several potential barriers and facilitators to adopting the nurse-driven CDS tools [10]. As the iCPR3 RCT concluded, we sought to understand whether nursing departments would consider continuing to use iCPR tools in clinical practice after research support was withdrawn. We also aimed to identify barriers that may hinder sustained use within ARI workflows beyond the study period. By examining these perspectives, our goal was to identify strategies to sustain nurse-led use of iCPR tools in clinical practice as a means to improve patient outcomes [13].

Methods

Research Design

We used semistructured interviews and thematic analysis to examine the perspectives of RNs and nurse leaders regarding the sustainability of the iCPR tools, including aspects of implementation, usability, and perceived impact. For the purposes of this study, we defined sustainability as the extent to which nurses would continue to use a tool as part of standard clinical workflows beyond the study period and without research personnel implementation support or incentives.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol and procedures were approved by the NYU Langone Health Institutional Review Board (NYULH study number i19-01222), which served as the study's single institutional review board. We received a waiver of written informed consent for this study. All study data reported in this manuscript are deidentified. Compensation was provided in accordance with institutional policies.

Nurse iCPR Intervention

The nurse intervention used a structured delegation protocol, wherein the specific clinical task of assessing the need for antibiotics in low-acuity ARI patients was transferred from a physician to an RN. Provider-to-nurse delegation is operationalized through protocol-driven authorization of nursing tasks by a licensed provider, with accountability retained by the delegating provider. In the iCPR3 RCT, the intervention consisted of triage followed by in-person CDS-guided RN visits for patients with low-acuity ARI symptoms. The EHR-integrated CDS included a triage note template to assess symptoms and acuity and 2 reason-for-visit-specific (ie, sore throat or cough) note templates with iCPRs that guide RNs to complete an evidence-based risk calculator as part of the visit [12]. The resulting risk score is linked to an order set for diagnostic testing, prescriptions, and patient instructions.

All tasks performed by RNs as part of the intervention—triage, symptom assessment, use of CDS tools, and execution of evidence-based care pathways—are well within the scope of nursing practice and align with their clinical training. The iCPRs used were previously found to be effective for reducing inappropriate antibiotic prescribing when used by physicians [2,4,11]. The intervention aimed to standardize care delivery and reduce unnecessary antibiotic use in outpatient settings.

The intervention was implemented as a pragmatic stepped-wedge cluster randomized trial across 43 primary and urgent care practices in 3 academic health systems affiliated with the University of Utah, the University of Wisconsin, and NYU Langone. To be eligible for participation, practices were required to have at least 1 RN full-time equivalent capable of performing triage within the EHR and conducting RN on-site visits. Nurses in the intervention group received 1 hour of online training prior to 1 hour of in-person training on how to use the iCPR tool, including background on the iCPRs, EHR-based walkthroughs of using the iCPR tool within the CDS, demonstration videos simulating the tool in a live clinical encounter, and clinical training for physical examinations [11]. Complete study procedures are reported elsewhere [12].

Study Design

We conducted remote video interviews (via Zoom and Webex) lasting approximately 30 minutes between September 2024 and January 2025. Each participant was interviewed by a trained research team member from the corresponding health system (NH, KM, AY, VT) using 1 of 2 semistructured interview guides. Our team developed these interview guides, 1 for RNs and 1 for leadership, based on a series of open-ended structured questions previously used in a validated survey to understand the barriers and facilitators to implementing a lupus decision aid tool for nurses [14]. We adapted the questions to explore relevant Consolidated Framework for Implementation Research (CFIR) constructs, as well as address conditions specific to the ambulatory care environment and the iCPR intervention; we retained all other aspects of the survey [15]. Interviews consisted of questions to understand barriers and facilitators related to tool use, clinical team interactions, what worked well, any competing priorities, strategies for mitigating issues, and future adoption sustainability (see Tables S1 and S2 in [Multimedia Appendix 1](#)). Probing questions were used to verify the interpretation of participant responses, and recommendations were solicited for continued use of the iCPR tool in clinical workflows.

Participants

We recruited a convenience sample of RNs and nurse leaders (did not have to be an RN) from primary care clinics and urgent care centers participating in iCPR3. Participants were considered eligible if they expressed familiarity with the iCPR tool and, if they were nurse participants, had completed a nurse visit using the tool. Participants were recruited via email by study personnel at each site. Recruitment procedures varied slightly by study site due to local policies and conditions. Specifically, given the proportionately large number of clinics at the University of Wisconsin (21 clinics vs 9 and 7 clinics at NYU and Utah, respectively) and with the objective of obtaining diverse

perspectives, participants were recruited as a stratified convenience sample from the top and bottom 5 performing clinics, based on the average number of nurse visits completed per week per clinic volume at randomization. In addition, University of Utah participants were offered a US \$25 gift card as an incentive, whereas other study sites did not provide financial incentives due to institutional policies around employee compensation. A member of the study team verbally reviewed the study information with each participant to ensure understanding; all participants then provided verbal agreement to participate.

Thematic Analysis Procedures

We conducted a thematic content analysis to identify themes related to sustainability by extracting high-level themes from the data while examining the frequency of concepts or keywords [16]. Each interview was audio-recorded and transcribed using an automated service (Landmark Associates). One team member (NH) reviewed each file for transcription accuracy prior to analysis. Transcripts were analyzed, and a codebook was developed using Dedoose [17].

We first conducted a joint analysis of 2 interviews to allow the study team members to become accustomed to the codebook, make updates to codes, and resolve conflicts. All study team members were trained in qualitative techniques. Next, 2 team members coded each transcript independently, and then all coders (VT, NG, MB, KM, AT) met as a team to compare and resolve disagreements. During this process, we reviewed for thematic saturation, ensuring the sample met this criterion based on the diminishing need to update code definitions. Our analysis focused on the barriers and facilitators to sustainability of iCPR tool use beyond the study end date. Once all transcripts were coded, we reviewed the data code by code to ensure definitions had remained consistent. All coders then reviewed each excerpt to collectively derive emerging themes related to barriers, facilitators, and recommendations for solutions. Emerging themes were grouped into high-level categories through consensus. This study adhered to the COREQ (Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research) guidelines for qualitative studies involving interviews and focus groups [18].

Results

Descriptive Results

We invited 56 eligible individuals to participate and conducted 22 individual interviews across the 3 sites, each lasting 15 to 45 minutes. Participants included 9 nurses (1 NYU, 8 Wisconsin) and 13 nurse leaders (4 NYU, 2 Utah, 7 Wisconsin); demographic information was not collected from either group. Due to limited tool use during the study, no nursing participants from the University of Utah elected to participate in the interviews.

Through thematic analysis, we identified 5 overarching themes related to nurses' and nurse leaders' perspectives on the implementation, effectiveness, and sustainability of the iCPR intervention as part of standard care processes. The 5 themes that emerged included: (1) importance of staffing stability and capacity; (2) impact of dedicated clinic resource availability;

(3) variable nurse readiness with CDS-guided clinical care; (4) influence of openness to change and a nurse-supportive clinic culture; and (5) ongoing need for training and support.

Importance of Staffing Stability and Capacity

One of the most prominent themes concerned the need to have sufficient trained RNs staffed and available in the clinic to support the time needed to triage patients and conduct nurse visits. In addition to nurse staffing, participants emphasized concerns related to physician and support staff levels. Contributing to these concerns, many participants (20, 91%) discussed issues related to staff turnover, including the challenges of retaining staff, training new staff, and implications for using the iCPR tool workflows.

When questioned about barriers to using the iCPR tool, one nurse stated:

We are staffed with only three nurses, which is not a lot... One of our nurses left in May of last year to work elsewhere. Then, we hired a new nurse. Our third nurse went on maternity leave. Then when she came back, the other nurse had to leave for other reasons too. We've kind of just been at this [struggle] of not being able to consistently have a good number of staffing. [N 3.18]

The shortage of nursing support staff often required nurses to cover multiple roles, making it challenging to prioritize tasks and manage workload effectively. One participant stated:

...some clinics can't handle it... they don't have enough people to even answer the phones. [N 3.3]

With full staffing, nurses expressed confidence in executing the iCPRs:

We are pretty much fully staffed... it has not been a burden to participate and be a part of this survey and process... it's certainly helped our patients. [N 3.3]

We could have two nurses and visits at the same time and patients aren't having to wait. [N 3.2]

Additionally, staff turnover was linked to challenges in familiarizing and educating new staff regarding the iCPRs due to limited training time. Increasing awareness among new nurses completing orientation who lacked exposure to the study was discussed. One nurse stated:

Now that I'm thinking about it, there's a whole bunch of nurses that started that they weren't probably there when it first started. They don't even know about it, and I don't know if it's part of their orientation packet. [N 1.7]

A key subtheme involved virtual triage coordination, where nurses working remotely were able to triage patients by phone and monitor clinic appointment availability. Approximately one-quarter of the participants (6, 27%) felt that this workflow disrupted nurse visit appointment availability.

It's a small nursing team so you have anywhere from two to three nurses working on a given day and then with the nurses that have the option to work remote now sometimes you only have one RN [registered

nurse] in clinic. That impacts availability for appointments, so I think that is always a challenge. [N 3.11]

Another participant expressed difficulties coordinating with colleagues not physically in the same place, since the phone triage nurse at Wisconsin and NYU sites was typically different from the nurse who conducts the in-person nurse visit, highlighting staffing coordination in a hybrid care setting.

Sometimes, if you're at home triaging the patient, and they could use a nurse visit, trying to coordinate that with colleagues can be hard if it's a busy day. You don't really know what's going on over there [in the clinic]... [N 3.15]

Impact of Dedicated Clinic Resource Availability

The impact of clinic resource availability, including physical space for nurse visits and scheduling accessibility, was identified as a barrier to uptake of the in-person nurse visit component of the iCPR workflow. The ability to manage the patient care continuum was disrupted when examination rooms were unavailable. One nurse stated:

...we don't necessarily have a place to go with our patients...again, sometimes we are just running around trying to find a location for the patient to be assessed in and to complete the visit in. [N 3.4]

Discussion of the physical clinic setup highlighted that the lack of available examination rooms posed challenges. One RN stated:

We've always had to kind of just find a room on the fly for any of our nurse visit types each day, whether they're iCPR or not. A day like today, all of our exam rooms are occupied by the providers that are here. Our plan is just when the patient comes, if there is an available room, just kind of quickly utilize that. [N 3.18]

Alternatively, when the clinic set aside dedicated rooms for nurse visits and triage, it reportedly streamlined workflows and supported iCPR tool uptake.

Structurally, we had a room all ready to do nurse visits that we do for other things. That was easy enough to adopt this [iCPR] into that. [N 3.3]

We have a designated room for nurse visits every day 'cause we have nurse visits every day, and it's an exam room at the front of the clinic, and we have everything that we need in there. [N 3.10]

Coupled with dedicated room space, time set aside for nursing appointments facilitated iCPR care workflows. One clinic workaround included having patients with sore throats or coughs come in at prescheduled time slots so that nurses and testing resources (such as throat swabs) were available. This allowed the clinic to structure the schedule in a way that allowed nurses to complete patient care activities.

I know that one of the things that we tried to focus on and try to do too, as far as our department, is we tried to make sure that we had like the 11:00 and 1:00 p.m.

slots available for the nursing and cough and sore throat visits... [N 3.4]

Variable Nurse Readiness With CDS-Guided Clinical Care

Among RNs who received training, there was variability in their comfort when providing clinical care guided by the iCPR tools. This was expressed as resistance to the delegation portion of the intervention regarding adherence to the iCPRs, staying within their scope of practice, and compatibility with their clinical skills.

Some nurses felt organizational resistance to operationalizing the delegation protocol, which required nurses to practice to the full extent of their qualifications. One nurse leader expressed that the intervention enables nurses to function within the bounds of what they are licensed to do, but existing clinic workflows may not be able to accommodate them.

It's asking our nurses to work at the top of our license. The problem is that it takes—the way that they've worked in urgent care for so many years, it causes a change in that workflow...Some of the leaders have been more willing to facilitate that process, and some have not. [L 2.14]

Nurses expressed discomfort and uncertainty when triaging patients with cough-related symptoms, particularly when required to perform comprehensive respiratory assessments such as auscultating lung sounds. This hesitation often stemmed from fear of missing critical findings and potentially causing harm, which made them reluctant to fully engage with the iCPRs designed for these cases.

...there's a lot of nurses who do not like the cough part. They don't like to listen to lungs, and the reason is they're afraid they're going to miss something and harm patients. [L 3.20]

Educating nurses was highlighted as a potential means of addressing these barriers. One nurse leader shared:

Training of new people training is huge, so I think and many people have to be hands on... mixture of hands-on CBT [Computer Based Training] all of that to reach the nurses...but I think training is key. [L 3.20]

Conversely, nurses reported a strong sense of satisfaction with the sore throat iCPR, noting its simplicity and efficiency, allowing patient assessments to be completed in as little as 15 minutes.

The sore throat one we'll use constantly. That is very much something that has been, in my opinion, and I think our providers, everybody really, has been very successful. [N 3.3]

Influence of Openness to Change and a Nurse-Supportive Clinic Culture

Nurse Factors

A supportive clinic culture, openness to change, and positivity toward nurse support influenced the use and sustainability of

the iCPR-guided nurse delegation workflow. Within clinic culture, the perceptions of support from providers and patients emerged as subthemes, and leadership support was seen as crucial in facilitating the usage of the iCPR tool. Participants reported that leaders who actively listen to nurses and maintain ongoing dialogue foster a supportive environment that encourages new practices. Nurse leaders agreed that supporting staff was a success factor.

I think just making sure that staff are feeling confident and comfortable with the process, hearing where there's issues...I think just hearing what the staff is experiencing, trying to support them through any issues that are coming up, and making sure that they're confident in their training to conduct the visits. [L 3.11]

Ongoing discussions with the nursing team to make sure that they feel supported. [L 3.1]

The overall clinic culture was perceived to be particularly critical. One nurse described the culture of being open to novel processes.

...I think that our culture, to use that term for sure, is exceptional in that way. As far as being open to adopting things. Moving forward with nursing skills and nursing involvement in clinic practice is certainly something we focus on as a group and with our leadership. [N 3.1]

Another participant reported the benefit of a shared value system within the clinic:

We have an excellent connection between each other. I think we all work for each other and with each other. There is a shared value system there that was very apparent and that is healthy in many ways... If my boss wasn't that interested in this, I think that we as a group would still be very interested together. We would have just done it by ourselves. [N 3.1]

Moreover, nurses expressed aspects of professional fulfillment due to spending more time with patients:

Talking to the patients is great. Sometimes it's nice, the ones that you talk to, then you get to do a nurse visit. [N 1.7]

Once again, I think it's great for us. It's great for the patient. I think being accessible and giving our patients what they need is—just been a really nice experience. [N 3.2]

Provider Factors

Factors related to providers were found to be an essential subtheme of the clinic culture. Overall, the provider's acceptability of the processes was viewed as necessary for the sustainability of the iCPR3 tool.

We'd have to get the... medical director on board to really get the providers engaged with this. I do feel like providers are one of the bigger barriers. The nursing teams can do this work, but unless we work

in collaboration, it'd be pretty hard to have it be sustainable. [L 2.14]

When medical directors showed interest in teaching and experimenting with new workflows that incurred time savings, the tool's adoption by RNs was supported.

If they perceive, or if it's a reality that this program takes visits away from them, rather than gives them more time to see other patients. Then that could be a deterrent and also just their own understanding of how nursing practice can be used. I think in ambulatory it's sometimes disinterested. [L 1.13]

When the doctors like to teach...then it's very helpful. Some doctors... don't even want to do the study...but the ones that want to teach then, that's very helpful. [N 1.7]

Engagement from a medical director through collaboration was deemed important for facilitating clinic change.

It's doable, it's just, again, it's change management. It's really having everybody on board. Probably something that would help it move along better would be all the leaders and medical director meeting and deciding this is the right process.... [L 2.14]

Patient Factors

Patient engagement varied by location and was viewed as tightly connected to the clinic culture. Some nurses reported challenges in communicating the iCPR outcome to patients, especially when the patient had certain expectations connected to receiving antibiotics as part of the visit.

We have a low compliance rate in our clinic. When they come to see us, sometimes even when you're like, "You're not gonna see a doctor. You're just gonna see a nurse." They just want to come in and get antibiotics... When they come in and see us, I'm really like, "You're not gonna [get antibiotics]," but sometimes does not go over well with our patient population. [N 3.10]

A number of issues also described a conflict between the delegation process and the patient's preference for provider type.

We do get some that are not interested in having the nurse visit type because they are looking to discuss other remedies or other treatment options, or their complexity medically is sometimes a barrier. [N 3.18]

I think our patient population is different than other clinics. I think that that has made it a little bit harder... We do get pushback from our patients. They're like, "Well, you're not a doctor"... [N 3.10]

However, some patients appreciated the extra access to appointments and were willing to have a nurse visit and were satisfied with the nurse visit.

I feel like patients are very agreeable and willing to come in to see a nurse, after we've explained exactly what's gonna happen... Patients have been really

appreciative. No cost, they get in the same day, which is really what they're looking for... [N 3.2]

Clinic Communication

General clinic communication was the final subtheme related to clinic culture. A nurse leader expressed interest in having more usage data about the study's progress to communicate with the staff for positive reinforcement.

...if people know the why we're doing it that helps...It really comes down to great patient care, antibiotic stewardship, how many visits we did. All of that. I think if we have that data, then as we train, we can bring that forward and show people why we're doing it. [L 3.20]

Nurse participants also reported satisfaction connected to the receipt of feedback on the iCPR use.

I think it's been very positive and we—you guys send out the statistics and it reinforces that we are doing a good job and that always obviously makes me feel good that you are making a difference and... because obviously it's helping everybody. It's helping our patients. It's helping us. [N 3.2]

Group communication and decision-making as a team were noted as key to the sustainability of clinic initiatives.

Again, it's about everyone deciding together that this is the right path and the way we want to go. Then moving it forward as a group so that it's not over here at this clinic but not at this clinic...It's just making sure you've got both nursing and operations, if we're going to really operationalize something and put it into permanent status. [L 2.14]

Another participant emphasized the importance of teamwork among colleagues, noting the ability to share experiences and seek advice from others to navigate challenges.

My co-workers, my colleagues, us working together was another really important piece... Have you done this? Did you run into that? [N 3.3]

In addition, communication tools were reported to provide support beyond programmatic issues and were seen as helpful in solving acute technology issues.

The Webex group was helpful troubleshooting technology issues. They were really good with the patient care part, but, if a technology issue came up, the Webex group was really helpful. [N 3.6]

Ongoing Need for Training and Support

Participants felt that additional training, specifically hands-on training, would enhance the program's sustainability.

... Can we retrain? Can we have champions at the site who can help? Training of new people training is huge, so I think and many people have to be hands-on. Is it a mixture of hands-on CBT [computer-based training]... I think training is key. [N 3.2]

Another participant reported that recurrent training would help with maintaining skills:

Offering skills' refreshers every once in a while if this is gonna be an ongoing thing would be helpful too. [N 3.15]

I think education and I think not just a one and done education...at the time of hire, at the time of roll out or sustainability, but then I almost think something yearly just for people to review, ask questions, do hands on skills again [L 3.20]

In the context of simulation training, a playground or safe, interactive environment was described to bridge this gap, providing a way for learners to practice skills without real-world consequences. One nurse leader was enthusiastic about ways to integrate hands-on training with the iCPR intervention.

I would say the hands-on training was fantastic for the nurses. They really appreciated it. It made them feel much more comfortable... in a setting where they can use the playground and practice the swabbing and stuff... making sure we can do a real-world, full-picture visit for practice would be really helpful. [L 3.6]

Both nurse and nurse leader participants considered nursing leadership support to be part of the sustainability of this program. One of the nurse leaders described their approach as:

Just making sure the nurses are comfortable and have the training and education that they need. If the cough part is a barrier, working to get them hands-on training, making sure they've got swabs that they need, stethoscopes that they need, and just being support for them. If they don't have a buddy in the clinic that day, maybe I step in and do it with them. [L 3.6]

Recommendations Based on Participant Feedback

Participants provided several recommendations to enhance the sustainability of the iCPR tool in nursing practice ([Table 1](#)).

Table . Recommendations.

Recommendation	Representative quote
Identify clinic champions	“have champions at the site.” “we’re going to need a provider champion.”
Educate patients	Educate the patients more on “This is what we’re doing.”
Organize frequent lunch and learns	“circling back to another ... skill driven practice type session might be helpful just to make sure ... we still feel confident that we can conduct it and not feel too flustered.”
Perform triage in advance	“When the first person that gets the [triage] call says, “Oh, they have a cough or a sore throat.” That’s very helpful because right away it’s identified ...”
Map physical workflows	“... in the future ... you can see the layout of how things are, then you can maybe give a suggestion or tell us something to make a different flow that works somewhere else.”
Incorporate into routine practice and policy	“... has to make it a delegation process ... more than anything.”

Discussion

Principal Findings

The examination of the perceptions of nurses and nurse leaders familiar with the implementation of a CDS-guided nurse intervention for ARIs revealed several barriers and facilitators to the sustainability of the tools’ use beyond the conclusion of the study. Factors perceived as contributing to sustainability emerged within 5 themes, including (1) the importance of staffing stability and capacity; (2) the impact of dedicated clinic resource availability; (3) variable nurse readiness with CDS-guided clinical care; (4) the influence of openness to change and a nurse-supportive clinic culture; and (5) the ongoing need for training and support. By touching on the characteristics of the intervention, clinic setting, and individuals, these themes highlight several CFIR domain constructs and strategies at the individual and organizational levels to be considered when seeking to develop a sustainable CDS-guided intervention [15,19]. The most pertinent constructs identified in this research are local attitudes and conditions, partnerships and connections, structural characteristics such as physical and work infrastructure, organizational culture, available resources and space, the roles of innovation deliverers (nurses) and recipients (patients), as well as strategies for tailoring and adapting the use of the iCPR tool.

Individual-Level Strategies

Our analysis highlighted that nurses expressed lower confidence when using the iCPR tool for conditions requiring more complex or subjective clinical assessments, such as listening to breath sounds, compared to workflows perceived as more straightforward, such as visual inspections for sore throat evaluations. Indeed, several participants indicated a preference for sustaining use of the sore throat iCPR workflow only. This gap in confidence suggests a need for targeted skill development. Simulation-based training offers a valuable strategy to build these skills in a realistic, low-risk environment. Regular simulations can help nurses practice nuanced assessments, receive real-time feedback, and strengthen clinical judgment. Incorporating iCPR-related scenarios into onboarding and ongoing education can reinforce competence and confidence. Fostering a culture of continuous learning, with structured

supervision and feedback, is essential for supporting effective and sustained implementation [20]. In alignment with CFIR individual constructs [15], the identification of subject matter experts could further assist and support access to information and knowledge.

Organizational-Level Strategies

As seen with many health care interventions, staffing levels were perceived as a key factor influencing long-term sustainability [21]. Inadequate ambulatory clinic nurse staffing impedes staff mastery of new procedures, restricts training time, and hinders comprehension of essential tools, such as EHR CDS modules [22]. Moreover, the increased complexity of ambulatory nursing requires nurse leaders to proactively adjust outpatient staffing models to meet evolving demands [23]. Staffing models were not adjusted to accommodate iCPR3; instead, participating units were only required to have at least one nurse. This model worked well for some clinics but not all. In settings with limited staffing, nurses may be forced to prioritize urgent clinical tasks over engaging with new initiatives, making it difficult to implement interventions effectively. Our findings suggest that a “one size fits all” approach may be inadequate. Instead, staffing models should be tailored to the needs of each clinic, particularly when new interventions are introduced. Due to national nursing shortages, calibrating nurse staffing is more important than ever before [24]. Adequate staffing enables nurses to focus on their patient care activities [24,25], allowing for better adherence to the CPRs. Study participants highlighted encountering challenges integrating new hires, resulting from turnover, and upskilling nurses who have transferred from other specialty areas. Prior to intervention implementation, analyses of turnover rates, percentage of new hires, and overall patient volume should be considered to ensure appropriate staffing availability, aligning with the CFIR construct of general staffing levels to support the functional performance of the inner setting [16]. Strategic planning should incorporate anticipated staffing fluctuations and allow flexibility in response to sudden staffing interruptions. The use of alternative staffing models, such as virtual nursing resources, needs to be considered. While an efficient use of nursing resources in some settings [26], hybrid work environments may contribute to barriers to care coordination and in-person visits.

Availability of clinic resources, especially physical space, was emphasized as a barrier more than expected. Success with the iCPR workflow hinged on ready access to supplies, designated rooms for nurse consultations, a supportive physical layout, and timely provider availability. Compared to inpatient hospital care, the outpatient environment is known to often lack infrastructure support [27]. When nurses had to search for appropriate locations to assess patients upon arrival, both efficiency and patient experience suffered. In contrast, clinics that reserved rooms specifically for nurse visits reported smoother workflows and better outcomes. As per the CFIR physical infrastructure construct, the impact of the layout and configuration of the space affects functional performance [15]. In nonambulatory clinics, similar issues have been previously observed, indicating that both ambulatory and nonambulatory settings face challenges related to resources. Despite progress in CDS tools, considerable barriers remain, especially regarding workflow integration and resource allocation [27]. Future implementations should therefore include a thorough assessment of space and workflow needs, ensuring that dedicated nurse-visit rooms and adaptable layouts are built into the design from the onset [28].

Clinics with positive experiences using the iCPR tools often reported a strong organizational culture characterized by teamwork, openness to change, and leadership that valued nurse autonomy, clinical expertise, and collaborative practice. Supportive leadership and a team-based approach further enabled the effective coordination between nurses and providers required to implement and sustain a new CDS intervention. As recognized by updated CFIR constructs, local attitudes and beliefs influence future use [15]. Participants also emphasized the importance of involving patients in shared decision-making, underscoring the need to respect patient preferences and set clear expectations during care encounters. This finding suggests that fostering a culture that empowers nurses, supports interdisciplinary collaboration, and centers patient engagement may be key elements to the successful nurse adoption of CDS tools in the ambulatory care setting [29].

Recognizing that the iCPR RCT took place in ambulatory settings connected to academic medical centers, there are insights that may translate to nonacademic centers. While community centers may be less resourced for experimentation and have underdeveloped nursing platforms, nurses in nonacademic settings often work at the top of their license out of necessity for patient throughput [30]. Prior to implementing the recommended strategies that connect to our findings, it will be important to compare workload patterns and assess the need

for delegation protocols prior to implementing a similar intervention.

Limitations

Several limitations should be noted. This study was conducted within academic medical centers, which are typically characterized by greater infrastructural resources and institutional support, potentially limiting the generalizability of findings for community or resource-constrained settings. Additionally, we did not account for the differences in institutional policies, patient populations, or resource constraints as part of our examination. While thematic saturation was achieved, the final sample size was relatively small, and the sample skewed toward nurses at one site and toward nurse leaders rather than frontline nursing staff, which may have introduced hierarchical bias in perceptions of implementation. However, given low intervention engagement during the RCT at the Utah and NYU sites and that Wisconsin had the most nurses using the tool, we believe the sample was a representative of the iCPR RCT site variability. Participant selection may have been subject to response bias, as we used a convenience sample and did not stratify responses based on participants' familiarity with technology, experience, or frequency of tool usage. Because use of the intervention tools was part of the inclusion criteria, we did not assess the perspectives of nurses who did not perform a nurse visit or who did not participate in the RCT. In addition, participants were recruited and interviewed by known study personnel at their corresponding sites, which may have led to social desirability bias and impacted candor in participant responses. Lastly, this analysis does not include an examination of tool utilization or patient-level outcomes and their influence on perceived sustainability.

Conclusion

This qualitative analysis underscores the multifaceted nature of sustaining a CDS-guided nurse iCPR intervention for ARIs in ambulatory care settings after a formal study period. The findings reveal that sustainability hinges not only on the design of the intervention but also on contextual factors such as staffing adequacy, resource availability, nurse confidence, organizational culture, and ongoing training. Importantly, variability in nurse comfort with CDS tools and differential success across clinic settings suggest that tailored implementation strategies are essential. Future efforts should prioritize clinic-specific readiness assessments, targeted skill development, and leadership engagement to enhance the long-term viability of nurse-led CDS interventions in clinical workflows.

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Data Availability

The datasets generated during this study are not publicly available due to privacy restrictions but may be made available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Authors' Contributions

Conceptualization: VLT, ADT, NH, MB, KM, LX, HB, AY, RH, DMM, DF, ERS
Data acquisition: VLT, ERS, NH, MB, KM, AY, ADT
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Methodology: VLT, ADT, NH, MB, KM, LX, HB, AY, RH, DMM, DF, ERS
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Writing – original draft: VLT, ADT, ERS
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Supervision: DM, DF, ERS, RH
Project administration: VLT, ERS
Funding acquisition: DM, DF, RH

Conflicts of Interest

None declared.

Multimedia Appendix 1

iCPR survey tool questions.

[\[DOCX File, 18 KB - nursing_v9i1e83567_app1.docx\]](#)

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Abbreviations

- ARI**: acute respiratory infection
- CDS**: clinical decision support
- CFIR**: Consolidated Framework for Implementation Research
- CPR**: clinical prediction rules
- EHR**: electronic health record
- iCPR**: integrated clinical prediction rules
- RCT**: randomized controlled trial
- RN**: Registered Nurse

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Nurses' Expectations of a Knowledge Management System in Nursing Practice: Qualitative Study

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Abstract

Background: Evidence-based practice is essential for delivering safe, high-quality nursing care; however, its implementation remains challenging due to barriers such as limited knowledge, a lack of supportive organizational culture, and insufficient access to relevant knowledge at the point of care. Knowledge management systems (KMSs) have the potential to bridge this gap by integrating evidence into the nursing process through technological support. Despite growing interest, the integration of KMS into daily nursing practice is still underexplored, especially from the perspective of frontline nurses.

Objective: The aim of this study was to explore nurses' perspectives on the requirements for a KMS that supports evidence-based practice at the point of care, with a focus on usability, process integration into the electronic nursing care plan and patient chart, and implementation challenges and benefits.

Methods: A qualitative study was conducted in a Swiss hospital using observations, focus groups, and individual interviews with 6 registered nurses, 9 advanced practice nurses, 2 nursing managers, and 1 head physician. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis.

Results: The analysis revealed four main categories and ten subcategories: (1) content of the KMS, (2) personal and structural factors of knowledge management, (3) technical conditions of the KMS, and (4) implementation of a KMS. Participants emphasized the need for an intuitively structured, process-integrated system that links evidence-based information directly to nursing interventions in the electronic nursing care plan and patient chart. Organizational support, interprofessional collaboration, and clear responsibilities were identified as critical for successful implementation.

Conclusions: There is a clear need for a KMS that is user-friendly, seamlessly integrated into clinical workflows, and supports quick, reliable access to evidence-based knowledge. A KMS could enhance nurses' access to reliable knowledge, promote evidence-based decision-making, and strengthen professional confidence at the point of care. By embedding evidence directly into the electronic nursing care plan and patient chart, such systems can streamline workflows, reduce time spent searching for information, and support more consistent application of best practices. These capabilities may improve information retrieval and contribute to a safer, more consistent nursing practice.

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KEYWORDS

evidence-based practice; knowledge management; knowledge management system; qualitative research; point of care; nursing

Introduction

Background

Delivering safe, high-quality patient care is a central goal of health care institutions [1] and evidence-based practice (EBP) plays a key role in achieving this [2]. Despite strong advocacy, the integration of scientific evidence into everyday nursing practice remains inconsistent [3]. Studies report that barriers such as insufficient EBP knowledge and skills, lack of mentors

and facilitators, perceptions that EBP takes too much time, unsupportive organizational cultures, and environments hinder nurses from using evidence at the point of care [2,3]. At the same time, there is an exponential growth in the body of evidence-based knowledge, which needs to be accessed and integrated into daily nursing practices in a timely and contextually relevant manner [4].

To address these challenges, the concept of knowledge management, widely used in other industries, is gaining traction

in health care settings [5]. Knowledge management refers to programs or systems to create, capture, store, organize, and share knowledge and information effectively within organizations [6]. In health care settings, knowledge management has the potential to strengthen nursing performance [7] by facilitating access to both scientific knowledge and the expertise or practice knowledge of team members [5]. However, effective knowledge management in nursing practice requires more than just access; it requires integration into clinical workflows, supportive leadership, and a culture of continuous learning [6,8].

Knowledge management systems (KMSs), as a technological solution, offer a way to embed both evidence-based and practice-based knowledge directly into the nursing process [4]. KMSs are designed to support and enhance organizational processes for creating, storing, retrieving, transmitting, and applying knowledge [9]. When effectively designed and implemented, KMSs can support nurses in making informed decisions, promote EBP, and improve the quality of nursing care [9,10]. Despite this potential, research shows that such systems are rarely used in health care, especially in nursing contexts. To date, there are few descriptions of the development, implementation, and evaluation of KMSs in nursing practice [4]. There is a need to investigate factors on the adoption of a KMSs that are integrated into the nursing process in hospitals from different perspectives [11].

Prior Work and Research Gap

In a prior study, Ranegger et al [12] demonstrated the theoretical feasibility of linking evidence-based knowledge to standardized nursing interventions through a mapping project. While this work provided an essential foundation for embedding evidence in structured nursing documentation, it did not explore how such a system could meet the practical and contextual needs of nurses in clinical settings. Consequently, little is known about what nurses expect from a KMS, how they envision it supporting their workflow, and which organizational factors are required for successful implementation [12].

Aim of This Study

Building on this gap, our study focuses on advancing current research on KMSs in the health care sector by adding a user-centered perspective to support nurses at the point of care.

Therefore, the aim of this study was to qualitatively explore nurses' perspectives on the requirements for a KMS that supports EBP at the point of care, with a focus on usability, process integration into the electronic nursing care plan and patient chart, and implementation challenges and benefits. By identifying these requirements, this study contributes to the development of a KMS that is not only theoretically feasible but also contextually relevant, usable, and sustainable in clinical practice.

Methods

Study Design

An exploratory qualitative study design based on inductive thematic analysis was conducted to gain an in-depth

understanding of nurses' perspectives, expectations, and experiences related to the development and implementation of a KMS to support EBP at the point of care. The study followed the COREQ (Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research) guidelines to ensure methodological rigor and transparency [13]. The study was underpinned by a pragmatic theoretical orientation, which assumes that knowledge is constructed through experience and that research should focus on understanding real-world problems and generating practical solutions. This framework guided the exploration of nurses' expectations of a KMS, emphasizing the practical relevance of the findings for system design and implementation.

Researchers' Characteristics

Two researchers collected the data. The first researcher was a female research associate with expertise and training in nursing and health sciences. She holds a master's degree in public health, is specialized in EBP, and has worked as a nurse previously. The second researcher was a male research associate with a master's degree in information systems with research experience in digital health. The researchers were not known to the participants before the study. Participants were informed about the researchers' professional backgrounds, institutional affiliations, and the aim of the study. They also knew about the researchers' roles within the project and that participation was voluntary and anonymous. The researchers were aware that their professional backgrounds could influence how they collected and analyzed data. They therefore reflected these potential biases throughout the analysis to support a balanced understanding of the data.

Participants and Setting

The study was conducted in a hospital in Switzerland that is part of a private hospital group comprising 3 hospitals. The hospital group employs approximately 2500 staff and treats over 140,000 patients annually, including around 27,000 inpatients. At the time of the study, a new intranet was planned to centralize knowledge resources and improve search capabilities.

The study focused on nurses with diverse work experience and role profiles because the KMS was intended primarily for nursing practice. Additionally, 1 physician was included to provide an interprofessional perspective, as physicians are involved in the current system. Only 1 physician was included because the study primarily focused on nursing workflows and physician involvement in the planned KMS was limited during the recruitment period. A purposive sampling strategy was applied via the head of the nursing development department to recruit participants for observations, individual interviews, and focus group interviews. All participants were directly or indirectly involved in nursing-related knowledge management, either as users of or contributors to knowledge sources. Eligibility criteria included active involvement in nursing care or related managerial or educational functions within the hospital. The initial plan was to invite 15 to 20 participants, which was achieved, with 18 individuals confirming attendance.

Data Collection

Prior to data collection, an observation guide and a semistructured interview guide were developed based on a literature review. The researchers first conducted independently 4 hours of open, participatory observation on a ward in November 2023, focusing on the activities of 3 registered nurses during their shifts on a surgical and internal medicine ward and took field notes according to the observation guide. These 3 nurses were not further part of the interviews.

Subsequently, all interviews were conducted using the semistructured interview guide, which was adapted after the observations. The 2 authors held 2 face-to-face focus group interviews in the hospital, with participants grouped by

professional hierarchy to encourage open discussion. The first focus group involved 9 advanced nurse practitioners (ANPs) with master's degrees from different wards in the participating hospital (92 min). The second focus group comprised 3 registered nurses with a diploma degree from the surgical ward to capture another perspective (50 min). Three additional online interviews using Microsoft Teams (30 min each) were held with a head physician, a division manager in nursing care, and a co-nursing manager to include different viewpoints. Sociodemographic data from all participants were collected verbally (Table 1). All interviews were conducted between November 2023 and January 2024 and were audio-recorded. Field notes were taken during the interviews. No repeated interviews were carried out.

Table 1. Sociodemographic characteristics (N=18).

Sociodemographic characteristics	Value
Sex, female, n (%)	18 (100)
Role, n (%)	
Advanced practice nurse	9 (50)
Registered nurse	6 (33.4)
Nursing management	2 (11.1)
Physician	1 (5.5)
Field of work, n (%)	
Surgical	8 (44.4)
Internal medicine	5 (27.8)
Other (eg, orthopedics and oncology)	3 (16.7)
Expert in a field (eg, delirium and breast care)	2 (11.1)
Years of working experience, n (%)	
<5	1 (5.5)
5-10	7 (38.9)
10-15	5 (27.8)
>15	5 (27.8)

Observation notes were translated, summarized, and thematically clustered. The single and focus group interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed by hand. Data analysis took place in parallel with data collection. Data saturation was considered achieved after the third online interview. Consistency between the 2 data collectors was ensured through continuous discussion during data collection and analysis to align interpretation and maintain reflexivity.

Data Management and Analysis

Thematic analysis was conducted following the 6-phase approach described by Braun and Clarke [14]. In addition to the categories already formed a priori through a literature review and by developing the semistructured interview guide, 1 author performed the initial coding of all transcripts using MAXQDA 2022 [15]. Coding decisions and theme development were subsequently discussed with 2 additional authors to ensure analytic consistency and to confirm the relevance of identified categories. Disagreements were resolved through discussion

until consensus was achieved. The analysis resulted in main categories and subcategories, which were then translated from German to English.

Ethical Considerations

All participants were informed verbally about the purpose and procedures of the study, data confidentiality, and voluntary participation. Informed consent was obtained before participation, and withdrawal of consent was permitted at any stage, including after data collection. Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim, anonymized to remove any potentially identifiable information, and assigned participant codes before recordings were subsequently deleted. All data were stored securely on password-protected institutional servers in accordance with data protection regulations. No participants withdrew consent for the use of their data in this study. According to Swiss legislation, this study did not require approval by a cantonal ethics committee. In accordance with the Swiss Human Research Act (Humanforschungsgesetz, HFG),

ethical approval is mandatory only for research involving human participants where health-related personal data are collected or where interventions are performed [16]. The present study focused exclusively on healthcare professionals' perspectives on KMSs. No patients were involved, no health-related personal data were collected, and no interventions were performed. Therefore, the study does not fall within the scope of the Swiss Human Research Act and did not require formal ethical approval by a Swiss ethics committee.

However, the study was followed in accordance with the World Medical Association's Declaration of Helsinki.

Table . Main categories and subcategories of the thematic analysis.

Main categories	Subcategories
Content of KMS ^a	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information sources • Format of information
Personal and structural factors of knowledge management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information retrieval skills • Time pressure and efficiency
Technical conditions of KMS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integration into workflow • Knowledge access and architecture
Implementation of a KMS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Barriers • Facilitators • Expected benefits • Potential quality indicators

^aKMS: knowledge management system.

Content of KMS

Information Sources

Participants described a clear distinction in information sources used by different roles. At the point of care, registered nurses primarily relied on in-house nursing instructions and team members, which was also observed.

In contrast, ANPs accessed a wider range of formal evidence sources, including databases, guidelines, professional networks, and conferences, which they used to update or develop new nursing instructions. Although digital advancements were mentioned, none of the participants reported using artificial intelligence (AI) tools in their knowledge work. Instead, maintaining clear, up-to-date, and evidence-based nursing instructions was viewed as a central way to ensure consistent practice. Most ANPs and nurses from focus groups would support the inclusion of brief synopses of studies explaining changes and evidence updates in the in-house nursing instructions. These would offer nurses an optional, deeper insight into the rationale behind changes. However, some ANPs and the co-nursing manager were critical of this and questioned whether nurses at the point of care would be using this due to the high workload and limited skills in scientific working.

Format of Information

Participants acknowledged that the current nursing instructions were logically structured and helpful, often featuring tables of

Results

Sociodemographic Characteristics

All 18 participants were nurses with different degrees and roles, except 1 was a head physician. The participants from the observations and interviews had at least 1 year of professional experience and worked in different roles and fields in the hospital (Table 1).

Categories

The thematic analysis resulted in 4 main categories with 10 subcategories, each of which will be discussed in the following sections (Table 2).

contents and uniform formatting. Nurses were instructed to use nursing standards as the main source of information in nursing practice. At the time point of the interviews and observations, it was therefore important that the nursing standards were written in simple language and regularly updated according to the latest evidence.

Registered nurses and ANPs from both focus groups and observations expressed a need for varied formats as a source of information, such as checklists, videos, and schematics, as long as the content remained concise and practice-oriented. The information in the KMS should not be overloaded and it should summarize the most important information as briefly as possible, as an ANP said:

I think you have to be careful not to overload nurses with information, to be honest. You have to focus on what you really need in practice. The more it is broken down to the practical situation, the more the knowledge is used. [P1]

Personal and Structural Factors of Knowledge Management

Information Retrieval Skills

Participants reported that while they were able to locate nursing instructions within their own specialty, accessing materials outside of their immediate practice area was often time-consuming and frustrating. Nurses, particularly those who

were new, part-time, or less experienced, struggled to find information when documents were not intuitively filed or when search paths were long and complex. A nurse confirmed this during the observation. Many participants noted that there was no systematic onboarding to teach information-seeking or navigation strategies. Although some suggested additional training, they emphasized that intuitive structure and powerful search functions were more impactful than teaching workarounds. An ANP summarized it as follows:

If the search function is poor, it doesn't matter how well you know the system. You still can't find what you need. [P2]

Time Pressure and Efficiency

Time constraints were a significant concern in information use and acquisition across all participants. Nurses commonly relied on team members and ANPs to obtain information quickly, particularly during high workload periods. In the observations, the nurses asked more experienced nurses or a physician in some cases before searching available documents. All participants would find it helpful to have faster access to information sources at the point of care. These sources should be process integrated, which means embedded in the electronic nursing care plan and patient chart. An ANP said:

I often hear that nurses know that a certain nursing instruction exists. They still ask me as an ANP if I can't just tell them the answer quickly so that they do not have to search for the document. [P1]

Technical Conditions of KMS

Integration Into Workflow

Participants envisioned a KMS integrated into every phase of the nursing process, from patient admission and assessment to diagnosis, intervention, and evaluation. They found it important that the information would be available and could be retrieved exactly when they needed it. The nurses from the focus groups saw the greatest benefit in linking information to nursing interventions, for example, to check how a central venous catheter needs to be connected. The head physician also recognized potential in areas like diagnosis support and medication information:

For example, if I select permanent catheters in the nursing care plan, the relevant nursing instruction should be stored there. If access to the information is clearly visible in the nursing care plan, my attention would be drawn to it and I can just click on it. And then the information just comes up. Because if it is not obvious and I don't see it, I won't click on it and won't get to the information. It has to be obvious to me. [P5]

Knowledge Access and Architecture

All participants criticized the current dual document storage system, which resulted from an ongoing transition to a new intranet. Most participants found the folder structure confusing and the search function ineffective due to a lack of semantic

features. Old or irrelevant documents still appeared in search results, adding to the inefficiency. An ANP mentioned:

With the folder system, for example, there are folders from the pharmacy, where I think there is a great need for training. Because sometimes you go to an instruction but do not realize that there is also something about [eg,] potassium substitution. And there would be very helpful practical [nursing] instructions. But [most nurses] do not know that they exist. [P2]

Suggestions from the participants were to install links in the electronic nursing care plan and patient chart with direct access to information. Two ANPs had the idea to create question mark buttons or to provide the information when clicking on nursing interventions or diagnoses of the electronic nursing care plan and patient chart (eg, dressing a wound, assessing the risk of malnutrition, and administering a medication), which was supported by the other ANPs. Links to documents should always point to the latest version, avoiding discrepancies between sources. An additional idea from the interviewed head physician was to link medication prescriptions directly to the electronic nursing care plan and patient chart with instructions for administration. Additionally, powerful search functions and filter options to quickly find relevant information would be helpful for nurses. The goal from the interviewed division manager in nursing care would be a single-source approach where updated instructions were universally accessible. The division maker in nursing care, therefore, said:

It must be ensured that the latest version of the nursing instruction is available via the KMS. For example, if you open a link to the nursing instruction from the electronic nursing care plan, the revisions made should also be changed in this document [...]. And if something is changed there, I always have the latest version, no matter where I access the document from. [P7]

Implementation of a KMS

Barriers

Time, money, and personnel constraints were mentioned as the main barriers to the development and implementation of a KMS. The co-nursing manager stressed that the decision-maker of the hospital needs to be convinced of the KMS, as it requires financial investment. The head nurse emphasized that time and financial resources of the hospital must be used sparingly and that the benefits need to outweigh the costs. Additionally, the lack of clarity around responsibilities for integrating KMS content into hospital IT systems was problematic from the head nurses' perspective.

Facilitators

The ANPs saw themselves as responsible for content conceptualization within the KMS. They proposed that IT staff and KMS providers manage the structural and technical implementation. Strong interprofessional collaboration, clear role descriptions, and leadership support were emphasized as important, as an ANP said:

The conceptual aspect is for sure with us ANPs. Anything else would be inefficient. But we would not be unhappy if someone else takes care of linking the documents between KMS and the hospital information system. [P8]

Expected Benefits

Participants believed the KMS would facilitate faster information retrieval, better alignment with current standards, and improved interdisciplinary collaboration. From the head nurse's point of view, this meant that knowledge in nursing could be better preserved and shared. The nurses were convinced that documents were more likely to be used if they were integrated into the nursing process and could be accessed quickly. This could also increase the nurses' sense of safety, as they would always use the correct and updated documents. Moreover, the responsibility for finding the right document would no longer lie with the nurses themselves, as a registered nurse said:

And I think it would be of particular benefit to patients, and that is an interprofessional interest. If the nursing staff can stand up afterwards and say, these are our instructions, we have to implement them. The better you know the content of the nursing instructions and the faster you find them, the better you can argue. [P9]

Potential Quality Indicators

Participants proposed a range of indicators on how to measure the effectiveness of the KMS. The ANPs mentioned direct KMS-related indicators such as time to retrieve information (eg, reduced time to find nursing instructions), task-completion rate (eg, conducting a nursing intervention), need for help in terms of knowledge retrieval (eg, contacting ANP), and user satisfaction with the system. Indirect quality indicators could be downstream outcomes such as quality of care and patient safety. The nurses from the second focus group mentioned the nurses' subjective sense of security when performing nursing interventions as an additional indicator. The head physician and co-nursing manager particularly mentioned the quality of the intra- and interdisciplinary communication, including the perceived ease and frequency of collaboration as further quality indicators. The co-nursing manager said:

For me, relevant indicators are the satisfaction and nurses' sense of security in their daily work. The nurses need the information to provide the patient with adequate care. [P6]

The participants emphasized that an effective KMS should directly support clinical decision-making and increase confidence during care delivery. Nurses frequently linked quick access to correct information with improved performance, lower stress levels, and better patient outcomes. The ANPs and registered nurses believed that evaluating the system's impact should go beyond technical metrics and include experiential factors, such as how secure, informed, and supported they felt while using the system. Furthermore, participants stressed that if a KMS was truly helpful, it would minimize the need for ad hoc knowledge-seeking from team members, reduce errors, and

encourage standardized practice across wards. An ANP mentioned:

If the information is easy to access whenever they need it, the more they use this information. This, I guess, brings satisfaction because nurses do not have to search a long time for the information and this also indicates a higher sense of security because they know, where they find the information and are well informed. [P3]

Discussion

Main Results

This study explored nurses' expectations and needs for a KMS integrated into the electronic nursing care plan and patient chart. Participants found the existing hospital information system fragmented and time-consuming. In-house nursing instructions were well-structured but difficult to access due to a confusing filing system and poor search functionality. Nurses often relied on colleagues or ANPs for quick answers, especially under time pressure. Nurses expressed a strong need for a KMS that was integrated into the electronic nursing care plan and patient chart. They envisioned context-sensitive information access, such as clickable links or icons, at each step of the nursing process, from assessment through intervention to evaluation. The system should offer a simplified structure, powerful search functions, and information presented in practical, user-friendly formats like checklists, videos, or brief summaries. To support safe and efficient care, nurses emphasized that information must be both easily retrievable and always up to date. They saw clarity about responsibilities for maintaining the system as essential. Ultimately, they imagined that a well-designed KMS would enhance care quality, streamline workflows, and strengthen nurses' professional confidence at the point of care.

Integrating Knowledge Into Clinical Workflow

Our results show that the current system does not adequately support quick and reliable access to nursing-relevant information at the point of care. Nurses reported relying on team members or navigating complex document systems, often under time pressure. This aligns with findings that emphasize the importance of integrating knowledge tools directly into clinical workflows to reduce search time and cognitive load [4]. Existing help buttons and intranet instructions were appreciated; however, they were not sufficient for efficient knowledge access during daily work. This underscores the importance of embedding knowledge directly into digital workflows. Chorney et al [9] recommended this because they found that integrating KMS into clinical systems significantly improved access and usage. Knowledge embedded in systems not only reduces variation of information and nursing interventions but also supports EBP, given that the content is reliable and up to date [17]. This resonates with the Technology Acceptance Model, which emphasizes perceived usefulness and ease of use as key predictors of usage [18]. The desire for an intuitively designed, workflow-integrated KMS illustrates that these dimensions are central to successful use and implementation.

Information Literacy and the Role of Training

Nurses described variability in their ability to retrieve and apply information, especially among new staff, part-time workers, or those returning from leave. This reflects a broader challenge of information and digital literacy in nursing practice. Training was seen as critical to ensuring consistent access to and use of available knowledge resources. These findings are consistent with earlier studies that show age and experience influence confidence with electronic clinical systems [10] and that tailored onboarding and continued training support more effective system use [17]. Moreover, nurses' literacy influences their attitudes towards and intentions to use KMS [19]. While technical solutions are necessary, they must be accompanied by accessible training formats and support structures to ensure equitable use across roles and experience levels [17].

Evidence Flow and the Role of ANPs

Our study revealed a distinct division of tasks around knowledge sources: while nurses primarily relied on in-house nursing instructions and team members, ANPs engaged with external evidence sources. This distinction reflects the layered process of knowledge use, translation, and transfer outlined by Shahmoradi et al [4]. ANPs acted as translators, adapting external evidence to the hospital's context, while nurses at the point of care used this adapted knowledge. In addition to the application of nursing instructions, information was also transferred via other communication channels such as direct exchange, emails, or newsletters. This confirms findings from Al-Busaidi [20], who emphasized that knowledge transfer in health care often depends on informal systems that are neither systematic nor easily evaluated.

KMS Quality, Functionality, and Usability

A consistent theme in the interviews was the desire for a system that was intuitive, accessible, and available throughout the nursing process. This aligns with previous findings that ease of access and integration into clinical routines are critical success factors for KMS adoption [9]. Participants suggested that its functionalities should include a logical filing system, powerful search capabilities, and support for multiple content formats. This reflects a need for information to be both concise and adaptable to diverse learning preferences [9].

The absence of AI use among participants in the period before and during data collection in 2023 and 2024 also reflects broader hesitations in clinical environments. While AI integration was not expected by participants, its future role in enhancing clinical KMS remains a promising area for development [4]. Regardless of the technology used, the success of the KMS depends on its ability to fit seamlessly into the existing workflow and meet users' needs for quick and trustworthy information [20].

Evaluation and Trust in the System

Participants proposed a range of indicators to evaluate a future KMS, including efficiency gains, time savings, and perceived improvements in quality of care. These are consistent with indicators described by Al-Busaidi [20], who emphasized both organizational and individual-level outcomes such as improved learning, collaboration, and job satisfaction. Nurses in the interviews also framed evaluation in terms of emotional and

ethical relief, particularly the idea that linked and validated instructions could reduce their burden of manually searching the "right" document. This does not imply a reduction in professional responsibility but highlights how a well-maintained KMS can support nurses in fulfilling their responsibilities more safely and confidently. This emotional dimension adds a new perspective in understanding trust in digital systems. Trust is shaped not only by technical reliability but also by how systems redistribute responsibility and reduce the risk of error [11]. When knowledge is institutionalized within a centrally maintained KMS, nurses can rely on the organization rather than the individual for ensuring accuracy. This shift reflects a rebalancing of cognitive and ethical responsibility, which can enhance professional confidence and perceived safety in clinical decision-making [21,22].

Organizational Conditions for Success

From the point of view of the head physician, division manager in nursing care, and co-nursing manager interviewed, organizational support emerged as an important factor for KMS success. They highlighted the need for leadership support, funding, and clear roles. These themes are confirmed across multiple studies, which identify infrastructure, staffing, policy support, and leadership engagement as critical to implementation success [1,20]. The findings also align with the Normalization Process Theory, which highlights the processes through which new interventions become embedded in everyday practice [23]. The constructs of shared understanding, cognitive participation, and practical integration are evident in participants' emphasis on collaboration and institutional backing. Organizational culture also plays a key role, as collaborative and open cultures have been found to facilitate KMS adoption more effectively than hierarchical, profit-driven environments [11]. Interviewed ANPs acknowledged the potential value of a KMS, particularly in terms of reducing redundant work and saving time. These findings support the statement from Chorney et al [9], that the success of a KMS is not only a technical or clinical matter, but also a strategic one. For sustainable implementation, the system must align with institutional priorities, demonstrate clear value, and receive long-term support from decision-makers in the setting [20].

Limitations

The main strength of the study was the inclusion of nurses with different levels of work experience and role profiles. This approach allowed for the consideration of multiple perspectives in the implementation of a KMS that was grounded in practical nursing requirements. The interdisciplinary research team balanced clinical and technical expertise but acknowledged that professional backgrounds might have influenced interpretation. Reflexivity was maintained through ongoing discussion to ensure balanced representation of participants' views. Conducting the study in a single hospital allowed for detailed observation of local workflows and knowledge management practices but limits the transferability of findings to other settings with different structures or digital maturity. Another limitation concerns the conceptual nature of the topic, as the study explored expectations for a KMS that has not yet been developed. Finally, the data were collected in German and then

translated into English. These translations were rigorously checked by authors fluent in both languages.

Implications for Nursing Practice and Research

Our findings underscore the importance of designing a KMS that supports nurses' real-time information needs at the point of care. Seamless integration into the electronic nursing care plan and patient chart, intuitive navigation, and access to up-to-date, evidence-based instructions in various formats were seen as essential. Nurse managers should prioritize training, onboarding processes, and continuous support, especially for new, part-time, or returning staff.

There is a need for further research on the design and usability of KMS tools, especially those that leverage emerging technologies such as AI for knowledge synthesis and decision support. Future studies should also explore the implementation

and effects of KMS at the point of care. Further investigation into the quality indicators identified by nurses for measuring KMS impact could support the development of validated evaluation frameworks. Future projects from the authors focus on developing and piloting an AI-supported KMS. It aims to provide personalized, evidence-based recommendations tailored to nurses' skill levels and workflows, thereby enhancing safety, quality, and efficiency at the point of care.

Conclusions

Participants expressed a clear need for a KMS that is user-friendly, seamlessly integrated into clinical workflows, and supports quick, reliable access to evidence-based knowledge. A well-designed KMS may have the potential to not only improve care quality and efficiency but also to enhance nurses' confidence and sense of safety in their daily work.

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Authors' Contributions

Conceptualization: RR, JV (equal), SZ (supporting)

Data curation: MV, JV (equal)

Formal analysis: MV

Funding acquisition: RR, JV (equal)

Methodology: MV, SM, GW-J, RR, JV (equal)

Project administration: JV

Writing – original draft: MV

Writing – review & editing: SM, GW-J, RR, SZ, JV (equal)

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no competing interests. LEP provides health care intervention classifications but no knowledge management system and therefore has no competing interests in this study.

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Abbreviations

- AI:** artificial intelligence
- ANP:** advanced nurse practitioner
- COREQ:** Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research
- EBP:** evidence-based practice
- KMS:** knowledge management system

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Perception of AI Symptom Models in Oncology Nursing: Mixed Methods Evaluation Study

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Abstract

Background: Patients undergoing cancer treatment experience a significant symptom burden. The standard process of symptom management includes patient reporting and clinical response following symptom escalation. Emerging predictive symptom models use artificial intelligence (AI) components of machine learning and deep learning to identify the risk of symptom deterioration, facilitating earlier intervention to prevent downstream effects. However, integrating predictive symptom models into clinical practice will require oncology nurses to adopt innovative approaches.

Objective: This study aims to explore oncology nurses' perceptions of the use of predictive symptom models in cancer care and the factors influencing the adoption of this symptom care innovation.

Methods: The evaluation was guided by the Rogers Diffusion of Innovation Theory, which describes the process of how individuals adopt new technologies. The investigators developed an interview guide that asked oncology nurses to rate their perceptions of AI symptom models on a Likert scale. Participants were also asked to provide qualitative comments to support their ratings for each question, in order to better understand the key factors that would influence AI predictive model adoption. Investigators analyzed demographic data and Likert ratings with descriptive statistics. Qualitative analysis of participant comments included content analysis and inductive coding to identify themes. Nurses' perception of factors that would influence the adoption of AI symptom models, based on the Rogers theory, included relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability, and observability.

Results: Responses of 15 oncology nurses with more than 1 year of experience in oncology were analyzed. There was high agreement among nurse participants that an AI model could improve symptom management for patients with cancer (n=10, 67%) and increase early intervention to prevent the escalation of symptoms (n=12, 86%). All participants (N=15) agreed that receiving symptom information would be helpful. Nearly three-quarters of participants (n=11, 73%) endorsed that the information would save time. Most (n=12, 80%) recommended that clinicians receive information about the predicted symptom deterioration of their patients. Among open-ended responses, key themes were consistent with factors identified in the Diffusion of Innovation theory including: (1) perceptions related to the AI model (compatibility or complexity), (2) nurses' perception of patients' benefit (observability), (3) improved clinical processes (relative advantage or observability), (4) apprehension over model accuracy and impact (compatibility or trialability or observability), and (5) implementation or adoption (trialability or complexity or observability).

Conclusions: Oncology nurses agree that predictive symptom models could help improve symptom management for patients undergoing cancer treatment. However, nurses noted that transparency in the factors included in the AI model was essential, that nurses should be involved in the development and testing of models, and that the observability of the benefit in symptom care would need to be evident for ultimate adoption.

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KEYWORDS

artificial intelligence; AI; oncology; nursing; symptom management; implementation

Introduction

Patients undergoing cancer treatment experience a wide range of symptoms that impact functional status, quality of life, and health care use [1-3]. Currently, symptom reporting is a reactive process based on patient reporting, followed by a response for poorly controlled symptoms. Oncology nurses have historically screened patients both at clinical visits and via phone triage when patients report increasing symptom burden [3]. Increasingly, but slowly, clinical workflows are implementing symptom monitoring with electronic patient-reported outcome (ePRO) systems, which enable patients to report symptoms electronically and allow oncology clinicians to respond accordingly [4]. However, the ePRO-based symptom management decreases care escalations, which is notable given that worsening of symptoms is a primary driver of health care use among patients with cancer [3]. However, oncology symptoms can change rapidly, and some, such as fever, require prompt evaluation and clinical action [5,6]. While responsive ePRO reporting systems have improved patient symptom burden, high levels of symptoms and health care use persist. ePRO symptom models remain reactive, with detection following a patient reporting a change and lacking the ability to anticipate symptom escalations.

One application of artificial intelligence (AI) is the use of computer-based models to analyze large quantities of data, in this case, symptom data. Predictive symptom models attempt to evaluate data and detect a change prior to patient symptom escalation. AI models are being tested using retrospective and prospective data [7]. AI models, paired with ePRO collection, are being developed to enable predictive and anticipatory warnings that may help categorize patients at an increased risk of symptom escalation [8]. AI models use patient-generated data to predict the likelihood of a specific outcome or a set of outcomes [8]. Models to diagnose both diseases and symptoms, as well as health care use, are being integrated into oncology use cases [7,9]. Predictive symptom models, which inform the identification of symptom patterns, show promise as a mechanism to enhance the accuracy of symptom detection before escalation [7,10]. AI-derived alerting models, using machine learning (ML) or deep learning methods, have the potential to predict emerging symptom escalations. These models seek to prioritize patients at increased risk for changes before symptom escalation. Detecting symptoms, such as an impending fever, before the patient experiences it can facilitate earlier intervention and better outcomes [11]. Alternative predictive approaches are necessary to detect dynamic symptom changes while reducing the burden of symptom reporting.

Transitioning to proactive care models requires a complete shift, both cognitively and operationally, for both patients and clinicians. Moving from a reactive reporting structure to a predictive symptom management model requires adoption by the oncology team. Notably, the implementation of this shift will require the engagement of oncology nurses, who will be the clinicians responsible for responding to AI-based alerts.

Few studies have examined nurses' perceptions of implementing AI-based symptom models [12]. A recent study that assessed

nurse perspectives on ML-based clinical decision support systems broadly found that previous experience with technology and nurse perceived engagement in the development process, among other factors, influenced perceived use of ML clinical decision support systems [13]. The use of AI in the clinical setting is expanding, and a key theme consistently identified by nurses, nurse informaticists, and nurse leaders regarding the development, implementation, and adoption of AI-based tools is the importance of engaging nurse end-users at the beginning of the development process [14-16]. Thus, the purpose of this evaluation was to examine nurses' willingness to adopt AI-derived alert notifications about impending symptom escalations. In anticipation of implementing these AI-based symptom management systems, this exploration addresses an existing gap in the literature regarding oncology nurses' perceptions, including usefulness and anticipated efficiency, of AI-derived symptom prediction models for cancer symptom management.

The Rogers Diffusion of Innovation Theory describes the process of how users decide to participate in the adoption of new technologies [17] and framed our work to nurses' consideration to adopt AI. Using AI-based models in clinical practice will require a significant transition from current symptom evaluation processes, and oncology nurses, who are largely responsible for symptom triage, will need to adopt and use this innovation in care management workflows. Perception of the innovation, rather than the innovation itself, is key to adoption. The Diffusion of Innovation theory identifies 5 perceived attributes that influence adoption, including relative advantage, for this study whether the AI predictive models are perceived as improving current symptom monitoring and would benefit patients; compatibility—whether the AI predictive models are consistent with symptom treatment values, past experiences, and the needs of nurses providing symptom care; complexity—whether AI predictive models are seen as easy to understand and use; trialability—whether the AI predictive models can be piloted and tried out; and observability—whether the symptom management benefits of the AI predictive models can be seen by the nurses. According to the theory, adoption occurs at varying speeds based on individual characteristics and perceptions, such that a small percentage of the population will be innovators and early adopters, and others are more likely to adopt later after others have accepted the innovation. The focus of this study is on these factors and how they may influence nurses' perceptions and decision-making about the adoption of AI predictive symptom models.

Methods

Design, Setting, and Participants

We conducted a mixed methods exploration of oncology nurses' perspectives regarding the use of AI-based symptom predictive models to detect symptom changes in patients with cancer. The use of both structured questionnaire (eg, Likert-scale questions) and interview questions allowed for a more in-depth analysis of perspectives regarding the adoption of AI predictive symptom models and is well-suited for implementation research [18]. Specifically, we conducted interviews with participants using

both structured, Likert-scale-based questions and open-ended questions.

A convenience sample of registered nurses with at least 1 year of experience in oncology from across the United States was recruited to participate in this project. Participants were excluded if they lacked fluency in spoken or written English, lacked access to Zoom (Zoom Communications, Inc) web-conferencing technology or were unable to meet in person, or if they had less than 1 year of experience as a nurse in oncology. Recruitment methods included direct professional referrals, social media (such as LinkedIn and Facebook), and snowball sampling. Investigators contacted participants via email to schedule interviews. Interviews, the duration of which ranged from 20 to 30 minutes, were conducted in December 2024 and January 2025 via web teleconferencing platform (Zoom) and in-person by 2 investigators (BN and EAS). Interviews were not recorded or transcribed, though detailed notes were kept by the investigators who conducted the interviews and included capturing verbatim quotes from participants.

Individual Interviews

The team developed the interview guide ([Multimedia Appendix 1](#)) to gather information on the acceptability of implementing AI predictive symptom monitoring and management. The interview guide was initially drafted by 2 investigators (BN and EAS) and feedback was obtained from other members of the team before being finalized ([Multimedia Appendix 1](#)). Before starting the interview, as outlined in the interview guide, the concept of an AI-based symptom model was presented to the participants. The description was broad in that it included general model types but emphasized the predictive capability of AI algorithms in the identification of symptom deterioration. In addition to demographic questions, the final interview guide consisted of 6 total Likert-scale questions, in which participants responded to statements about the hypothetical clinical usefulness and efficiency of a symptom prediction model, indicating their agreement or disagreement using the Likert scale (1="Strongly Disagree" to 5="Strongly Agree"). Following each Likert-scale question, participants were asked to provide open-ended comments in response to the Likert-scale question that they had previously answered. Three additional open-ended questions were meant to elicit additional information, for example, "If you received a notification that your patient is at high risk for experiencing worsening symptoms in the next 24 hours, what would you do?"

Saturation was assessed on an ongoing basis. No new information was elicited, and subsequently, no new codes were identified over the final 5 interviews, indicating that we achieved content-level saturation.

Data Analysis

Quantitative Analysis

Descriptive analyses, including means and SDs, were calculated using demographic data to describe the sample. Due to the small sample size, we rounded frequencies (percentages) to the whole number. Additionally, investigators evaluated the frequency of Likert ratings by participants through descriptive statistics. The Likert-scale ratings were on a 1 to 5 rating with responses

initially coded based on a 1 to 5 rating (1="Strongly disagree," 2="Disagree," 3="Neutral," 4="Agree," and 5="Strongly agree"). However, in further analyses, we combined ratings of 1 to 2 and 3 to 5 to create categorical ratings of "Disagree," "Neutral," and "Agree." Methodologically, this approach is used to improve interpretability in smaller sample sizes, which have limited responses in multiple categories [19]. Our quantitative analysis of Likert-scale responses ultimately provided a clearer picture of the reportable trends within the sample.

Qualitative Analysis

For qualitative analysis, the team members (BN and EAS) used open coding and initially coded qualitative responses independently. After resolving disagreements and reaching consensus on codes, the investigators recoded each qualitative interview. Data were then analyzed using thematic analysis which involved several steps: data familiarization, keyword selection, identification of initial themes, and comparison of the investigators' initial themes.

Triangulation

In keeping with a mixed methods approach, the investigators synthesized quantitative and qualitative data and identified findings that converged, complemented, or diverged across data modalities [20,21]. Quantitative data from Likert-scale responses were triangulated concurrently with qualitative, open-ended responses to the questions and/or follow-up prompts. Finally, the investigators compared the codes for the factors within the Diffusion of Innovation Model. Participant quotes were used to represent themes. We used the GRAMMS (Good Reporting of a Mixed Methods Study) guidelines to aid clarity of reporting ([Checklist 1](#)) [22].

Ethical Considerations

The University of Utah Institutional Review Board reviewed the project protocol and deemed it a quality improvement project and not human participants research (00166873). Each participant was informed of the purpose of the project, including that participation was and could be discontinued at any time for any reason. Verbal consent was obtained prior to proceeding with the interview. No compensation was provided to the participants. In accordance with the rigor of human participants research, the study team followed procedures to protect the participants' privacy and confidentiality, including deidentifying participant data, not sharing data outside of the study team, and storing data securely on password-encrypted computers.

Results

User Statistics

Sample characteristics are summarized in [Table 1](#). The sample included 15 nurses who self-identified as working in oncology for more than 1 year. Participants were all female (15/15, 100%) with a mean age of 44.6 (SD 11.44) years. The cohort consisted of an experienced group of nurses, with an average of 18.33 (SD 9.82) years of nursing experience. Most of this experience (mean 14.10, SD 9.92 y) was in oncology. Participants reported working in diverse oncology settings, including inpatient

oncology and outpatient infusion, as well as in roles related to quality improvement and patient navigation (Table 1).

Furthermore, the sample was highly educated, with 8 out of 15 (53%) having completed a master's degree (Table 1).

Table . Participant demographics (N=15).

Characteristics	Participants
Age (y), mean (SD)	44.6 (11.44)
Years of experience, mean (SD)	18.33 (9.82)
Years of experience in oncology	14.10 (9.92)
Highest level of education, n (%)	
Diploma	1 (7)
Bachelor's degree	4 (27)
Master's degree	8 (53)
Doctoral	2 (13)
Practice environment, n (%)	
Inpatient oncology	4 (26)
Outpatient oncology	8 (53)
Quality	1 (7)
Navigation	2 (13)

Quantitative Evaluation

Results are presented in categorical (agree or disagree) percentages for the 6 Likert-scale questions (Table 2). All nurse participants overwhelmingly agreed that receiving the symptom information would be helpful, signaling compatibility with existing values. Furthermore, 12 out of 15 (86%) nurses believed that an AI model would enable early intervention to prevent the escalation of symptoms, aligning with this view. Most nurses (12/15, 86%) also thought that an AI model would allow the relative advantage of early intervention to prevent the escalation of symptoms. A smaller majority, or 10 out of 15 (67%) nurses, agreed that an AI model could improve symptom management

for patients with cancer. The remaining one-third or 5 out of 15 (33%) participants were neutral about whether the symptom prediction model could help improve symptom management related to the disease. There was similar agreement on the expectation that a symptom prediction model would enhance a patient's quality of life, with 10 out of 15 (67%) nurses agreeing. From an efficiency perspective, 11 out of 15 (73%) nurses felt that the information may save time. Despite nurses obtaining significant volumes of clinical information during a clinical day, 12 out of 15 (80%) nurses recommended that clinicians receive information about the predicted deterioration of their patients.

Table . Perceptions of artificial intelligence (AI) predictive ratings' value in oncology symptom management (N=15).

Topic	Disagree, n (%)	Neutral, n (%)	Agree, n (%)
Knowing that a patient is at risk of symptom deterioration earlier is helpful information for me to have as an oncology clinician	0 (0)	0 (0)	15 (100)
I expect that information from an AI model would allow me to intervene earlier, preventing an escalation of patient symptoms.	0 (0)	2 (13)	12 (86)
I would recommend oncology clinicians receive information about predicted deterioration from an AI algorithm when caring for patients with cancer.	1 (7)	2 (13)	12 (80)
Having this information might save me time and/or help improve my efficiency in helping my patients reduce their symptom burden	1 (7)	3 (20)	11 (73)
I expect information from an AI model would add to reducing symptom burden and improve my patients' quality of life.	2 (13)	3 (20)	10 (67)
I expect information from an AI model would help me better manage symptoms related to cancer treatment or disease.	0 (0)	5 (33)	10 (67)

Only 1 out of 15 (7%) respondents indicated that they believed AI-based symptom models would not improve efficiency or would not recommend that oncology clinicians receive information regarding patient deterioration from an AI symptom model. A small number, 2 out of 15 (13%) nurses indicated that AI-based symptom models would not reduce symptom burden or improve quality of life. These concerns reflect fears of complexity, given the complete shift in operational paradigm. A higher percentage of respondents, ranging from 13% to 33%, were neutral in their responses, indicating that they were still considering the information on the innovation.

Qualitative Evaluation

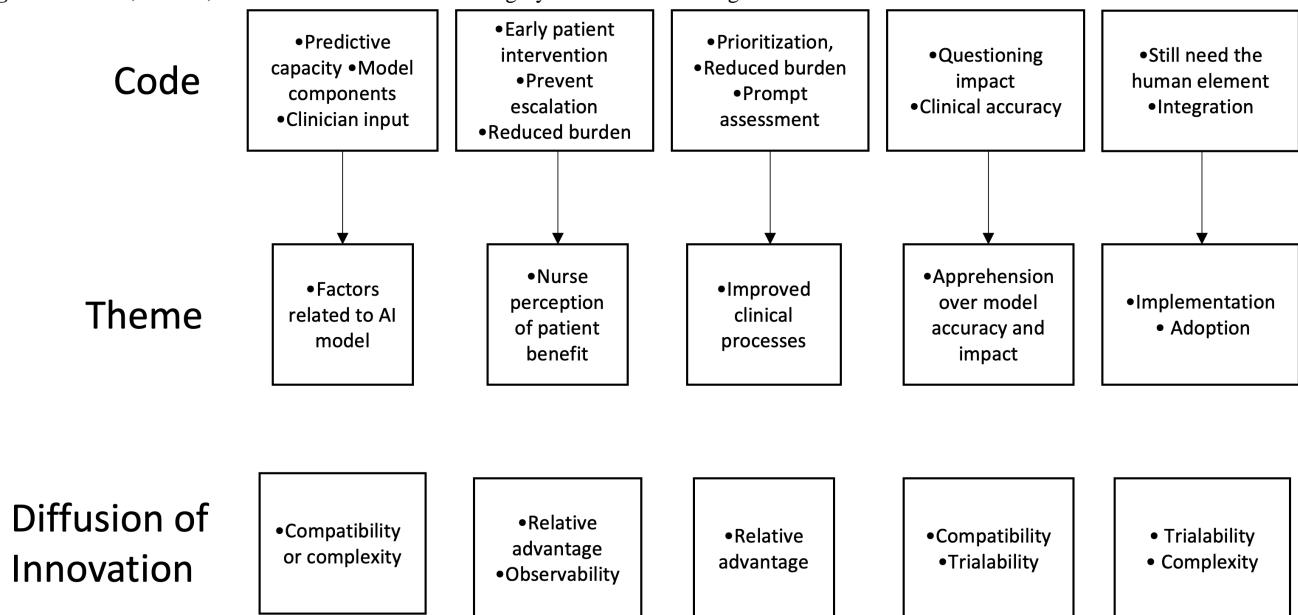
Themes

Participants' comments further explained their perceptions about the development of symptom prediction models, including: (1) factors related to the AI model (compatibility or complexity), (2) nurse perception of patient benefit (relative advantage or observability), (3) improved clinical processes (relative advantage), (4) apprehension over model accuracy and impact (compatibility or trialability), and (5) implementation or adoption (trialability or complexity). [Table 3](#) displays the identified themes, perceptions influencing adoption, and select quotes. [Figure 1](#) highlights the development of themes from codes and the attributes of the Diffusion of Innovation Theory.

Table . Themes, codes, participant number, and quotes.

Themes	Perception attributes	Codes	Exemplar quote(s)
Factors related to the AI ^a model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compatibility • Complexity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Predictive capacity • Model components • Clinician input 	<p><i>I think it might help if the algorithm says the patient is likely to develop a fever. What would I do with that information if there were no infectious symptoms? It might be helpful if managing a lot of patients helps someone to rise to the top for check-ins. [Participant 11]</i></p> <p><i>Depends on where they get their data from. We already know when chemotherapy induced nausea will occur... so if AI is using appropriate standardized resources, I would be fine with that. [Participant 8]</i></p>
Nurse perception of patient benefit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relative advantage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early patient intervention • Prevent escalation • Reduced burden 	<p><i>...a lot of time patients wait until symptoms are worse to call. We can intervene sooner. [Participant 14]</i></p> <p><i>Oncology patients can deteriorate quickly, this could help get symptoms before out of control to avoid ER/ hospital visit. [Participant 1]</i></p> <p><i>If a [model] did exist I would highly recommend [it] to prevent or mitigate life events to help prevent life or death. [Participant 6]</i></p>
Improved clinical processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relative advantage 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritization • Reduced burden • Prompt assessment 	<p><i>Prioritization should occur digitally, rather than me doing it, adding more to my work burden. [Participant 12]</i></p> <p><i>Delays in care, due [to patient] burden of calling in. The RN reaching out directly could increase patient satisfaction and response. [Participant 12]</i></p>
Apprehension over model accuracy and impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compatibility • Trialability • Observability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questioning impact • Clinical accuracy 	<p><i>Based on clinical practice, you can usually pinpoint those patients anyway. [Participant 12]</i></p> <p><i>I don't really know if I would fully trust every time until it proves itself. [Participant 3]</i></p>
Implementation or adoption	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complexity • Trialability • Observability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Still need the human element • Integration • Workflow • Communication of model output (eg, notifications, text) • Ease of use • Alert fatigue 	<p><i>AI can't supersede one-on-one contact. [Participant 10]</i></p> <p><i>[I] would want notifications if they are interruptions... I would want [them] to be relevant. [Participant 12]</i></p>

^aAI: artificial intelligence.

Figure 1. Codes, themes, and diffusion of innovation category. AI: artificial intelligence.

Factors in the AI Model

Themes focused heavily on nurses' ability to understand the factors within the model and test it to assess its predictive capacity, components, and provide input into its development. Predictive capacity refers to the model's ability to make accurate assessments of future behavior. For example, participants emphasized the importance of the model being accurate and relevant to the patient's clinical presentation, reflecting the need for compatibility with existing systems. For example, one participant stated:

[I would want to know] ... what led to notification, reason behind alert... what was their trend before... algorithm that shows patients who exhibit X also show Y, in the context of what's going on with the specific patient. [Participant 15]

Participants also commented on specific factors necessary as model components, such as temperature and respiration. Nurses strongly emphasized the importance of involving oncology clinicians in the development of the AI model, highlighting their need to understand its compatibility with current systems.

Patient Benefit

Another theme identified was the benefits to patients, which included codes for early patient intervention, prevention of escalation, and reduced patient burden, all of which are compatible with current systems. Early patient intervention, as noted by many participants, was identified as a benefit of AI-based symptom management and is defined as having contact with the patient in a manner that occurs earlier than standard care as a relative advantage. For example, participants noted that a model could allow them "to intervene earlier before symptoms progress into dangerous situations" (Participant 2) or "prevent hospitalization and improve quality of life by managing symptoms at home" (Participant 8). Early intervention is the mechanism by which ePRO alerting systems have effectively decreased escalations of care from a current setting to a higher level of care, such as an emergency room. Other

participants disagreed that patients would benefit more than they already do, with one participant stating:

I don't think the AI model will provide much additional information...Nurses already watch for specific symptoms. [Participant 13]

Nurse participants also focused heavily on reducing the burden of cancer care delivery on patients. They highlighted the fact that the combination of early intervention, for example, early symptom detection, can prevent later-stage symptoms and care escalations, thereby improving the experience of cancer care, which aligns with the goals of current systems, but may also represent perceived advantages over the current system.

Enhanced Clinical Processes

Participants could envision that an AI-based symptom model may enhance the process of clinical care by improving prioritization and response times, thereby facilitating the prompt assessment of clinically significant changes in a manner superior to current systems. Additionally, participants felt that the process of care could decrease clinical burden, for example, stating "being able to streamline information would be helpful" (Participant 7). Nurses also reported wanting to reduce the patient's need for reporting and the burden of care escalations to clinicians. However, some participants also expressed concerns that the model could increase clinical burden and highlighted concerns about complexity, noting:

The nurse will have to contact the patient. Just because they have an alert doesn't mean they will have the symptoms. [Participant 10]

Model Accuracy

Participants also reported it would be imperative to test the model to verify its accuracy, noting that nurses would be more likely to use a model they could participate in testing. Participants cautioned that patient engagement may influence the clinical accuracy of the tool. Many nurses have progressed beyond the initial knowledge stage and are now considering not

only whether, but also how, systems should adopt AI symptom models. Nurses have experience in integrating new technologies into clinical practice; as such, they understand the importance of accepting innovation to facilitate its diffusion and optimal use. Nurse participants also reported some apprehension about the use of AI models. Specifically, participants voiced concerns about the effectiveness and clinical use. Participants noted that training the model with the correct inputs would be crucial in confirming the model's accuracy.

Implementation Processes

Nurses' comments emphasized that decision-making also depends on the practical implementation of AI-based models. Evaluation and trialability of escalation alerts would be necessary for both initial and long-term adoption. Participants reported that AI-based predictive alerts for symptom management will not replace human nurse assessment and response. Participants also noted that the integration into the workflow needs to be seamless. There were many comments related to the importance of ensuring that communication of model output to nurses and other clinical staff does not increase the time burden, though many thought it would. For example, one participant noted, "I don't know it will save time, [it] may add time, but that is the sacrifice to catch something early" (Participant 12). Furthermore, most participants expressed a firm belief that a model could be easy to use and would not contribute to alert fatigue.

Discussion

Principal Findings

The majority of our sample of nurses agree with statements that support the use of AI-based symptom models, reflecting nurses' belief that these models may represent a relative advantage to current practice. The themes that nurse participants identified as essential to the adoption of AI symptom models aligned with the Diffusion of Innovation Theory. Nurses have recognized that the compatibility of AI-based symptom models holds promise for predicting, detecting, and enabling a response to changes in patient symptoms. Nurses' strong agreement to receive symptom information via new models revealed an overall favorable view of this type of model and alignment with existing values. These models align with nurses' strong commitment to providing patients with the best possible care, and by fostering the potential for AI-based symptom management models to improve patient care. Specific benefits identified by participants include improving clinician response by increasing the information clinicians receive and reducing patient burden through the elimination of unnecessary reporting or care escalations. This type of agreement indicates that nurses have progressed beyond the knowledge stage in the innovation process, toward identifying the necessary information to adopt the use of models. Overall, oncology nurses have positive views regarding the perceived advantages for patients and the compatibility with current care. This study demonstrates that many nurses have positive perceptions of the advantages and usability of AI-based symptom models and are now considering the implementation and use beyond the potential value.

Despite support for adoption, nurses urged caution in the development and implementation of these models. In particular, nurses emphasized the importance of involving end-users in the development, pilot testing, and implementation of these models, as this will help determine their value and appropriate integration into clinical workflow, thereby facilitating their adoption. Nurses have experience in integrating new technologies into clinical practice; as such, they understand the importance of accepting innovation to facilitate its diffusion and optimal use. This aligns with a framework developed for designing and implementing AI models from a systematic review, which recommends the inclusion of health care providers in development and implementation [8].

Nurse participants recognized the importance of trialability through accurately training and testing models, as well as ensuring that the data sources used are adequate to positively impact patient outcomes. Nurses strongly felt that model development requires the careful selection of clinically appropriate inputs, such as the inclusion of temperature and laboratory values, to support clinically accurate results. Confirming models that are appropriate for the input data and the desired outcomes is necessary for accuracy. As frontline users, nurses who currently assess patient symptoms should be included in model factor selection and testing. Often, these models are developed in collaboration with other clinical providers, and yet nurses will be the ones to receive the alerts and need to triage them. Trialability and observability for nurses, not just physicians, are keys to adoption. These themes are consistent with the recommendations for transparency in the development of AI-based clinical models, ensuring that both clinicians and patients understand and agree on the inputs to the model [23]. Creating transparent and explainable models is a step toward combating the perpetuation of healthcare bias in AI models and will facilitate long-term adoption [24,25].

While participants identified the need to understand model inputs and testing, they also reported a need to see the model's impact on outcome to feel confident in making clinical decisions based on the model, again underscoring the importance of observability. Model outcome achievement depends on the implementation of models as designed. For this to occur, there must be transparency and trialability of both inputs and clinical outcomes. For example, our early work developing a predictive model demonstrated the ability to predict symptom escalation more accurately in short intervals than at longer intervals [10]. Transparency will enable clinical teams to implement models for the purpose they were developed, thereby supporting accuracy. Efforts to transform and train models for additional uses will need to follow proper rigor to ensure the models are adapted and updated effectively. Transparency and inclusion in development will enable oncology nurses to effectively use AI-based models.

Experienced oncology nurses in our sample reported both a strong interest in using and some reluctance to immediately trust AI-based symptom models. While involving nurses in the development and implementation will facilitate trust, oncology nurses may lack the education and training to understand how these models work. An extensive national survey of nurses revealed that only 30% of nurses are aware of how AI is used

in nursing practice [26]. Although information regarding the use and daily applications has increased in the last several years, this highlights the need to provide AI education to both students and to disseminate it to nurses at the point of care delivery. Future work should specifically evaluate the education needs of oncology nurses regarding AI-based symptom models.

With many clinical symptom escalation models still in development, gaining a clear understanding of nurse perceptions regarding the use, decision to adopt, and maintenance of these models is essential. Our examination revealed that oncology nurses share similar concerns to those documented in the literature regarding the use of clinical predictive models, including alert fatigue and increased time burden, which represent a source of complexity [27]. Additional barriers to adoption of AI technology in healthcare include ethics, technological considerations such as data access and infrastructure, and liability and regulatory issues [28]. However, as evidenced in our results, nurses also hold favorable perceptions that these models have advantages and align with current treatment values, prioritizing the reduction of cancer symptom burden. Implementation strategies that could be used to overcome adoption barriers include, but are not limited to, identifying implementation champions as well as ensuring adequate interpretability of the model [29,30]. AI-based symptom models have the potential to improve patient outcomes and enhance clinical processes when implemented thoughtfully into the clinical workflow. As the end users of AI-based symptom management models, nurses should be involved as content experts, beginning with model development and continuing through the design, integration, and evaluation of the model into workflows, to maximize both short-term implementation and long-term adoption. However, additional research is needed to identify which implementation strategies are effective at promoting the adoption and sustained use of AI-based symptom management models.

Limitations

We sought to elicit oncology nurses' initial thoughts on AI-based symptom prediction models. We should continue to inductively evaluate nurses' adoption of AI. Our exploration was limited

by a small sample size and a homogenous population that was skewed by age (older) and education levels (high) that impacts the generalizability of our findings. This may be attributable to our convenience sampling approach and the fact that participants recommended other individuals who were recruited to participate, possibly introducing selection bias. Both the sample skew and homogeneity may have influenced the overall positive perceptions of an AI model for use in symptom management. Additionally, the use of unrecorded and note-based qualitative data analysis may have limited our ability to accurately assess content-level saturation; however, we believe that the detailed notes taken by interviewers permitted accurate assessment of content-level saturation. Finally, while we used the Rogers Diffusion Theory of Innovation to improve the descriptive analysis of the qualitative themes, it may limit our understanding of the responses and future work. Further work should survey a larger sample of nurses to understand oncology nurses' perceptions of AI symptom models and consider the impact of education levels on their views regarding AI. Additionally, future work should highlight the gaps in nurses' understanding of the application of AI in clinical care. The inclusion of end users in the design and testing of AI-based models facilitates adoption, and additional work should concentrate on and focus on implementation processes, which include user-centered design testing of best practices, such as alerting, alert visualization, and responses to care.

Conclusions

Overall, nurses showed a positive attitude toward the adoption of AI-based symptom models, particularly highlighting the perceived advantages of such models and their compatibility with nurses' goals of enhancing the patient experience. Proper use of AI symptom prediction models creates the opportunity to decrease the burden of patient reporting of cancer symptoms, improve clinician responsiveness, and enable prompt intervention to reduce unnecessary care and escalations. To facilitate the seamless integration of AI-based symptom models, thoughtful inclusive design strategies must include end users to test and modify transparent clinical models for long-term adoption.

Acknowledgments

There was no use of artificial intelligence, including generative artificial intelligence, in the development of the study or in the generation of text, tables, figures, or informational content of this manuscript.

Data Availability

The datasets generated or analyzed during this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Authors' Contributions

Conceptualization: BN, EAS, AS, JF, KM

Data curation: BN, EAS

Formal analysis: BN, EAS

Methodology: BN, EAS

Software: BN, EAS

Validation: AS, JF, KM

Visualization: EAS

Writing—original draft: BN, EAS, KM

Writing—review and editing: BN, EAS, AS, JF, KM

Bridget Nicholson is a consultant for Daymark Health. All other authors have nothing to disclose.

Conflicts of Interest

None declared.

Multimedia Appendix 1

Symptom Care at Home (SCH) artificial intelligence (AI) model interview script.

[[DOCX File, 33 KB - nursing_v9i1e82283_app1.docx](#)]

Checklist 1

GRAMMS Checklist.

[[DOCX File, 8 KB - nursing_v9i1e82283_app2.docx](#)]

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Abbreviations

AI: artificial intelligence

ePRO: electronic patient-reported outcome

GRAMMS: Good Reporting of a Mixed Methods Study

ML: machine learning

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Developing a Cross-Device Platform for Robotic Systems in Nursing Care: Mixed Methods Feasibility Study

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Abstract

Background: Aging populations and rising chronic illness prevalences are increasing demands for nursing care, while staff shortages threaten care quality. Robotics offer potential support, yet usability, workflow integration, and user acceptance remain major barriers.

Objective: This study aims to develop and evaluate the feasibility, usability, and acceptance of a cross-device platform for controlling robotics in nursing using a participatory, user-centered approach.

Methods: A convergent mixed methods feasibility study was conducted across 4 iterative workshops with 13 nurses from 2 German health care facilities. Quantitative measures included the System Usability Scale (SUS), Technology Usage Inventory (TUI), and Technology-based Experience of Need Satisfaction (TENS-Interface). Qualitative data were collected via think-aloud protocols and focus groups. Data integration supported iterative platform refinement and assessment of usability, acceptance, and satisfaction of psychological needs.

Results: Participants exhibited high curiosity, perceived usefulness, and strong intention to use robotics, with low skepticism. SUS scores indicated acceptable usability. TENS-Interface scores showed increased autonomy and competence following workflow simplification and stepwise interaction logic. Qualitative findings emphasized intuitive control, personalized interventions, centralized management of multiple technologies, integration with documentation systems, and structured training. Triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data confirmed that iterative, user-centered refinements enhanced usability, acceptance, and platform effectiveness.

Conclusions: Cross-device platforms integrating robotics can be successfully developed through participatory, user-centered methods. Technical usability, personalization, workflow integration, and structured training are key for adoption. The study demonstrates that technological barriers, rather than human resistance, are primary constraints to integrating robotics into nursing practice and can be mitigated through iterative co-creation aligned with real-world care contexts.

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KEYWORDS

digital assistive technologies; digital transformation; human–technology interaction; customization; user-centered design; cocreation; intention to use; health care; long-term care; feasibility study

Introduction

Background

Worldwide demographic shifts, including population aging and the increasing prevalence of chronic illness, are driving a growing demand for nursing care, while persistent shortages of qualified nursing professionals threaten the quality and availability of services [1-4]. Robotic systems have therefore

been proposed as a promising strategy to support nursing care; however, their implementation in routine practice remains challenging [5]. According to International Organization for Standardization (ISO) 8373:2021 [6], a robotic system is defined as a programmable, actuated mechanism capable of performing physical tasks autonomously or semi-autonomously under the control of a control system. Through the integration of sensors, actuators, and control components, robotic systems can interact

with their environment and execute predefined or adaptive actions. This broad definition includes service and assistive robots used in health care settings, such as telepresence robots and mobile manipulators.

In nursing contexts, robotic systems have been shown to support psychosocial and rehabilitative processes, with reported benefits for emotional well-being, cognition, social interaction, and quality of life among older adults [7]. Robots are also used in rehabilitation and physical therapy as well as in psychosocial interventions [8]. Beyond direct patient care, robotic technologies can support organizational processes, including telepresence, virtual consultations, and the training of nursing staff, and can assist with logistical tasks such as transporting medication and materials, disinfection, and procedural support [9]. Despite these potential benefits, most robotic systems remain at early stages of development or testing, and only a limited number have been implemented in routine care settings [10,11]. Moreover, the high financial investment required for acquisition and maintenance continues to be a major barrier to widespread adoption [11].

Previous research indicates that the successful implementation and integration of robotic systems in nursing care depends not only on technical performance but also on user acceptance, contextual implementation processes, and the systematic involvement of end users throughout development and evaluation phases. International reviews and empirical studies consistently demonstrate that sociocultural, organizational, and user-centered factors play a decisive role in facilitating practical adoption, beyond the technical design of robotic systems alone [10,12,13].

Nursing staff generally report a willingness to engage with robotic technologies, driven by perceived benefits such as workload reduction, increased efficiency, and improvements in care quality [14,15]. However, many existing robotic systems do not adequately meet users' needs with regard to usability, adaptability to individual patient requirements, and integration into established care workflows [7,8,11]. In particular, a lack of intuitive interaction concepts and standardized, cross-device solutions often results in complex and inconsistent operation [8,16,17]. Furthermore, the absence of common standards for the external control of robotic systems remains an unresolved challenge [16,18]. Participatory development approaches, such as cocreation [19] and design-based research [20], have been shown to address these challenges by actively involving end users throughout the design process. Early and continuous stakeholder involvement not only improves system usability and acceptance but may also positively influence care processes and outcomes by aligning technological solutions with user needs and care contexts [21-24]. Nevertheless, robotic systems that provide simple, cross-device, and adaptable interaction concepts and that are co-designed directly with nursing staff remain scarce [24].

Objective

Robotic systems have the potential to support nursing practice; however, their uptake is limited by insufficient usability and limited adaptability to individual care needs. The Educational Exploration Robot Application Platform (EduXBot) project

addresses this gap by developing a simplified and unified interface that enables nursing staff to operate existing robotic systems. The accompanying mixed methods feasibility study pursued two objectives: (1) primary objective: to assess the usability, technology acceptance, and user experience of the EduXBot platform among nursing staff within the framework of an iterative, user-centered design process and (2) secondary objective: to develop a multilevel benefit concept for the platform through an in-depth qualitative evaluation using think-aloud and focus group methods to identify perceived value and areas for further improvement.

Together, these objectives aimed to evaluate the platform's effectiveness and its potential to support the sustainable integration of robotic systems into nursing practice.

Methods

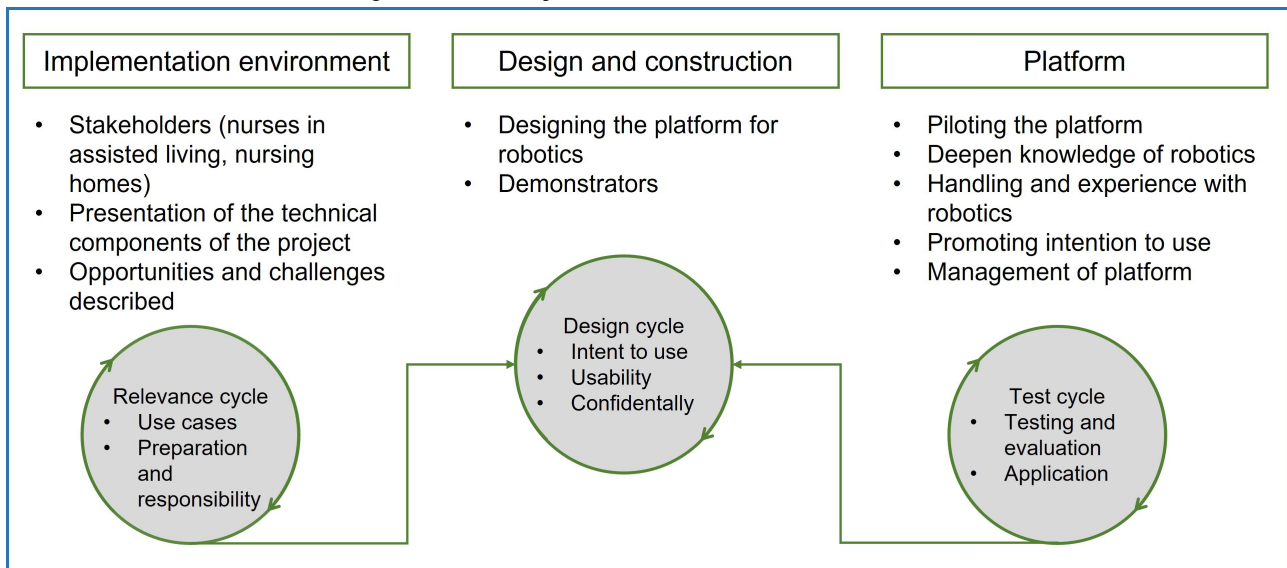
Conceptual Framework

The EduXBot project aims to develop an interaction and control platform that simplifies the use of robotic systems in nursing care. The development process follows a participatory and user-centered approach, explicitly incorporating the expectations, experiences, and practical requirements of end users throughout all phases of the project. This process fosters the development of innovative, practical, and user-centered solutions that are more likely to be adopted in everyday practice [25].

The development process was grounded in user-centered and cocreative principles that combine iterative engagement with end users and structured design cycles. Although Farao et al [26] described a user-centered framework that integrates iterative design and stakeholder engagement, our approach emphasizes active collaboration with end users throughout iterative prototyping, evaluation, and refinement phases consistent with cocreative design practices in participatory technology development.

This methodological approach supports the development of a tailored end product based on nurses' domain expertise while systematically considering potential implementation consequences [26-28]. Previous research has shown that cocreative and user-centered approaches can improve relevant outcomes and increase the usability and acceptance of technological systems in health care settings [29,30].

Figure 1 illustrates the integration of relevance, rigor, and design cycles to align nursing practice requirements, scientific evidence, and iterative platform development: the relevance cycle, which captures the realities and needs of end users; the rigor cycle, which draws on the existing scientific knowledge base; and the design cycle, which translates these inputs into the iterative development of the technical product [31-33]. Through this framework, requirements for the robotic systems addressed in the study can be systematically identified and practically operationalized. The close collaboration between researchers and end users further enables active user involvement in product evaluation, thereby supporting the functionality, usability, and overall success of the platform.

Figure 1. User-centered and cocreative design framework (adapted from Farao et al [26]).

Within this collaborative framework, EduXBot does not seek to develop new robotic hardware. Instead, it focuses on providing an extensible interaction and control platform for existing robotic systems. The platform is designed as a flexible and open system architecture that integrates diverse robotic, sensor, and interaction technologies into a unified interface. Its modular design allows nursing staff with varying levels of technological expertise to configure and use the system, thereby supporting a layperson-oriented approach to human-technology interaction. This design was developed in close collaboration with end users to ensure relevance and usability in nursing practice.

Study Design

An iterative feasibility study accompanied the development of the EduXBot platform. The study was conducted as a convergent mixed methods design in accordance with Creswell and Plano Clark [34], with quantitative and qualitative data collected in parallel and analyzed independently. Quantitative data were used to assess usability, technology acceptance, and the fulfillment of psychological needs, while qualitative data captured nursing staff's experiences, perceptions, and interaction processes. Following separate analyses, both data strands were integrated to enable a comprehensive interpretation of the findings and to inform the iterative development of the platform. This mixed methods approach aligns with a pragmatic research paradigm, in which methodological choices are driven by the research questions and support a triangulated understanding of the research problem.

Two health care facilities in Germany served as practice partners. Facility 1 was a long-term inpatient care facility. Facility 2 was a regional health center providing acute inpatient care, outpatient services, and long-term inpatient care. Both institutions had previously participated in technology-related research projects and agreed to collaborate in this study. Facility managers were informed about the project and asked to encourage nursing staff to participate.

Participants were recruited using purposive sampling with the aim of maximizing variation in age, gender, and professional

experience, thereby capturing a broad range of perspectives relevant to the research topic [35]. The inclusion of nurses from diverse backgrounds enhanced the heterogeneity and informational value of the study sample. Participation was voluntary, and scheduling constraints or other commitments could limit participation or lead to withdrawal during the study.

Instruments

Quantitative Instruments

Surveys were administered at 4 measurement time points (T0-T3) during each development iteration and included the Technology Usage Inventory (TUI), System Usability Scale (SUS), and Technology-based Experience of Need Satisfaction (TENS-Interface). All instruments were administered as self-report questionnaires completed individually by each participant.

The TUI [36] assessed participants' intention to use robotic systems by measuring technology-related and psychological factors. For this study, the TUI was adapted to address robotic systems in general and was administered once per measurement point. We analyzed 7 subscales: curiosity, fear of technology, interest, skepticism, accessibility, usability, and usefulness. Higher scores indicate stronger expression of the corresponding construct, while lower scores indicate weaker expression. Scale sum scores were converted into stanine values ranging from 1 (well below average) to 9 (well above average).

The SUS [37] measured the usability of each technology integrated into the EduXBot platform. Collecting SUS scores for individual technologies allowed the identification of technology-specific usability issues, providing targeted feedback for iterative development. Medians and IQRs were aggregated to provide a generalizable estimate of the platform's overall usability, aligning the technology-level measurements with the study's primary focus on platform-level usability. Scores ≥ 68 were considered indicative of acceptable usability, supported by adjective-based interpretations from "outstanding" to "very poor."

The TENS-Interface [38] is a standardized questionnaire that assesses the extent to which a technology interface meets users' psychological needs (autonomy, competence, relatedness) in human-technology interaction. It was administered from T1 onward, when a prototype was available, and focused specifically on the interaction platform interface.

Qualitative Methods

Qualitative data were collected through think-aloud sessions and focus groups. During think-aloud sessions, participants performed predefined tasks for each technology, verbalizing their thoughts and experiences while interacting with the platform [39]. Standardized instructions ensured consistency, enabling systematic observation of interface interaction and usability. Sessions were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis.

Focus groups were conducted after each workshop [40,41] to refine the platform iteratively. Participants discussed their experiences with the current prototype; evaluated its compatibility with daily care workflows; and identified unmet needs, usability barriers, and desired functionalities. Focus groups were guided by predefined questions, audio-recorded, and transcribed verbatim. Findings were systematically fed back

into the design process and informed subsequent platform refinements.

Data Collection

Prior to the initial measurement (T0), a needs assessment workshop (Table 1) was conducted involving nurses, nursing scientists, and developers. Participants were introduced to existing robotic technologies and collaboratively generated potential application scenarios. Based on practical relevance and technical feasibility, 4 use cases were selected to guide the development of EduXBot prototypes:

1. Conversational partner: implemented via the Double3 telepresence robot, which recognizes residents by voice or face and can respond to personal preferences and topics
2. Telepresence: also using the Double3, enabling remote participants to communicate and engage in activities on site
3. Safe walking partner: implemented via the Go1 4-legged bionic robot, providing monitoring during walks and reporting falls
4. Record/playback of personal events: implemented using the PICO 4 virtual reality (VR) headset, allowing the recording and immersive playback of events such as family birthdays or facility celebrations, to support biographical work

Table 1. Overview of the 4 iterative workshops at the 4 measurement time points (T0-T3).

Measurement time point	Thematic focus	Use cases	Technologies	Instruments
T0	Define requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conversational partner • Telepresence • Record/playback of personal events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Double3 • PICO 4 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TUI^a original questionnaire (pre-post version) • SUS^b • Think-aloud • Focus group
T1	Explore concept framework and interaction design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conversational partner • Telepresence • Record/playback of personal events • Safe walking partner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Double3 • PICO 4 • Go1 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TUI II parallel questionnaire (complete version) • SUS • TENS-Interface^c • Think-aloud • Focus group
T2	Testing the prototype for interaction design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conversational partner • Telepresence • Record/playback of personal events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Double3 • PICO 4 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TUI II parallel questionnaire (complete version) • SUS • TENS-Interface • Think-aloud
T3	Test simplified step-by-step processes and integrated control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conversational partner • Record/playback of personal events • Safe walking partner 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Double3 • PICO 4 • Go1 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TUI II parallel questionnaire (complete version) • SUS • TENS-Interface • Think-aloud • Focus group

^aTechnology Usage Inventory.

^bSystem Usability Scale.

^cTechnology-based Experience of Need Satisfaction.

Data were collected at 4 time points (T0-T3), each corresponding to one iterative development cycle. Workshops followed a standardized structure and integrated evaluation of both the interaction platform and selected technologies. Depending on the development stage, not all technologies nor use cases were presented at every workshop. [Table 1](#) summarizes the technologies and use cases tested at each workshop, along with the applied quantitative and qualitative instruments and thematic focus.

A prototype, defined as a preliminary version of a product or system used to evaluate and refine its key characteristics, design, and functionality prior to final implementation, was used throughout the study [42,43]. Participants interacted in small groups (up to 3 individuals) at station-based setups, rotating between stations to test the prototype and technologies available for that workshop. Usability was assessed at the individual level using the SUS immediately after task completion at each station, ensuring that responses reflected individual perceptions rather than group-based consensus.

After station-based testing, participants completed the TUI and TENS-Interface questionnaires independently and individually, capturing overall intention to use and psychological need satisfaction related to the platform. To minimize potential social influence, participants were instructed to complete all questionnaires independently, and no collective rating nor group agreement was requested at any point during data collection.

Each workshop concluded with a focus group discussion in which participants collectively reflected on experiences, workflow compatibility, usability barriers, and suggested refinements. Insights from think-aloud sessions and focus groups were systematically fed back into the iterative development process and informed subsequent platform and technology adaptations.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS version 28 (IBM Corp) [44]. Continuous variables are reported as medians and IQRs, and categorical variables are reported as absolute and relative frequencies. Missing data were handled using pairwise deletion.

Group differences in cumulative SUS and TUI scores at T3 were examined using 1-way ANOVA considering factors such as gender, qualification, and facility. Assumptions of normality and homogeneity of variances were tested, with the Welch correction applied if homogeneity was violated. Post hoc Bonferroni tests were planned but not conducted due to nonsignificant effects. Pearson correlations were calculated to examine relationships between usability (SUS), intention to use (TUI subscales), and psychological need satisfaction (TENS-Interface) at T3. Hierarchical regression analyses assessed predictors of intention to use, with SUS, TENS-Interface, and TUI subscales entered in blocks. Model assumptions (linearity, independence of residuals, homoscedasticity, multicollinearity) were checked prior to interpretation.

Qualitative data were analyzed using inductive content analysis following the method by Kuckartz and Rädiker [45] with

MAXQDA version 24.10.0 (VERBI Software) [46]. Transcripts from think-aloud sessions and focus groups were initially coded independently by two researchers (PM, RV). Both methods addressed the same overarching research question—platform design and adaptation of use cases. Coding of the two data sources was therefore integrated in a single schema, enabling triangulation, consistent identification of emerging themes, and comprehensive interpretation across data sources.

Codes were iteratively grouped into subcategories and overarching categories through discussion until consensus was reached. The coding process included systematic comparison across iterations to capture the evolution of requirements, usability challenges, and user perceptions. Intercoder reliability was assessed using Cohen kappa coefficient.

Qualitative data collection was structured according to predefined iterative development cycles rather than aiming for theoretical saturation. The number and timing of think-aloud sessions and focus groups were determined by the 4 development iterations, with each workshop representing 1 iteration of platform refinement. Data collection concluded upon completion of the final iteration, ensuring that all planned prototypes had been systematically evaluated. Emerging themes and usability issues were continuously reviewed after each iteration and directly informed subsequent platform adaptations. This approach was chosen because the study's objective was to iteratively refine the platform in close collaboration with end users, rather than to achieve saturation of qualitative data.

Mixed methods integration followed a convergent design [34], incorporating both formative and summative integration of quantitative and qualitative data. Formatively, findings from think-aloud sessions and focus groups were continuously fed back into the iterative development process to refine the platform. Summatively, quantitative and qualitative results were triangulated, comparing and integrating findings across data sources to provide a comprehensive understanding of platform usability, technology acceptance, and practical value in nursing workflows. This triangulation allowed complementary perspectives, convergence, and divergence to be identified and interpreted in context.

Ethical Considerations

The study received ethics approval from the ethics committee of the Medical Faculty of Martin Luther University Halle-Wittenberg (approval 2023 - 190, August 31, 2023) and was registered at the German Clinical Trials Register (DRKS00034195). Written informed consent was obtained from all participants, and no financial compensation was provided. Data were collected anonymously to ensure participant privacy and confidentiality.

The methodological rigor of the study was ensured by adhering to the Good Reporting of a Mixed Methods Study (GRAMMS) checklist [47] and the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) [48]. The comprehensive study protocol has been published elsewhere [49].

Results

Participants

Between February 2024 and May 2025, 13 nurses from 2 health care facilities participated in the study. Some nurses participated in multiple iterations, yielding a total of 33 participation units across the 4 development iterations. Participants could not be clearly categorized into core or ad hoc groups due to variable attendance; however, each nurse participated in at least 2 iterations.

Participants' age, gender, professional qualifications, and experience are summarized in [Table 2](#). Age and professional experience were calculated at the time of each participant's first iteration to account for staggered entry. Professional experience was defined as years since completion of formal nursing education or training. Median age was 46 (IQR 10.5) years, and the median length of professional experience was 15 (IQR 13.5) years. Most participants held managerial nursing roles, supplemented by support staff and occupational therapists, providing diverse perspectives for assessing the integration of the platform into daily care routines.

Table . Demographic characteristics of participating caregivers at the 4 measurement time points (T0-T3).

Characteristics	T0 (n=8)	T1 (n=9)	T2 (n=8)	T3 (n=8)
Age (years), mean (SD)	45.6 (9.1)	47.8 (9.3)	50.1 (7.8)	48.3 (9.5)
Gender, n (%)				
Male	1 (12.5)	1 (11)	1 (12.5)	1 (12.5)
Female	7 (87.5)	8 (89)	7 (87.5)	7 (87.5)
Qualification, n (%)				
3-year duration of training	1 (12.5)	1 (11)	0 (0)	1 (12.5)
3-year duration with professional training	2 (25)	1 (11)	1 (12.5)	1 (12.5)
Nursing service management	3 (37.5)	3 (33)	3 (37.5)	3 (37.5)
Studies	1 (12.5)	2 (22)	2 (25)	1 (12.5)
Other qualification	1 (12.5)	2 (22)	2 (25)	2 (25)
Professional experience (years), mean (SD)	13.5 (9)	16.3 (10.8)	16.9 (10.8)	18 (10.5)
Facility, n (%)				
Facility 1	6 (75)	7 (78)	7 (87.5)	6 (75)
Facility 2	2 (25)	2 (22)	1 (12.5)	2 (25)

Quantitative Evaluation

Participants exhibited higher openness to robotics than the general population, as indicated by above-average TUI stanine scores relative to the normed reference population [36]. [Table 3](#) presents TUI subscale scores including curiosity, fear of technology, interest, usability, usefulness, skepticism, and accessibility. Scores are reported as medians and IQR, with

stanine values indicating relative positioning versus the normed reference population. Median intention to use at T0 was 255 out of 300 and remained stable across iterations. High scores were observed for curiosity (median 23 from a possible total of 28) and perceived usefulness (median 22 from a possible total of 28), whereas skepticism was low (median 9 from a possible total of 28). These results indicate general interest in and acceptance of robotics.

Table . Technology Usage Inventory (TUI) subscale scores at the 4 measurement time points (T0-T3).

TUI subscale	Max score	T0 score		T1 score		T2 score		T3 score	
		Median (IQR)	Stanine	Median (IQR)	Stanine	Median (IQR)	Stanine	Median (IQR)	Stanine
Curiosity	28	22 (6.5)	7	22 (9.75)	7	20 (7.5)	7	23 (9.25)	8
Fear of technology	28	9 (13.5)	5	7 (11)	4	7 (3.75)	4	10 (7.5)	5
Interest	28	18 (12)	6	23 (2)	7	24 (5.5)	7	24 (6.75)	7
Usability	23	18 (4.75)	6	14 (5.5)	4	14 (2.75)	4	17 (5.5)	6
Usefulness	28	22 (4.5)	9	24 (3.5)	9	24 (9)	9	22 (5.5)	9
Skepticism	28	7 (5.75)	2	9 (7.5)	3	10 (4.5)	4	9 (5.75)	3
Accessibility	23	11 (9)	6	11 (4)	6	11 (3.75)	6	11 (3.75)	6
Intention to use	300	255 (69.5)	8	246 (58.5)	7	254 (40.25)	8	262 (46.5)	8

SUS scores were assessed per technology and aggregated to evaluate overall platform usability (Table 4). Median and IQR are reported. Overall usability decreased slightly from “excellent” at T0 to “good” at T3 but remained within the

acceptable range. Double3 usability improved over time, whereas Go1 and PICO 4 showed declines, with Go1 falling below the usability threshold at T3. SUS data for Go1 were not available at all measurement points, limiting trend interpretation.

Table . System Usability Scale (SUS) scores per technology and overall at the 4 measurement time points (T0-T3).

Technology	T0 score, median (IQR)	T1 score, median (IQR)	T2 score, median (IQR)	T3 score, median (IQR)
Double3	68 (22.5)	71 (19.25)	80 (12.5)	75 (— ^a)
PICO 4	85 (12)	85 (30)	69 (15)	70 (27.5)
Go1	—	70 (10)	—	64 (34.38)
Overall	74 (15.7)	75 (18.25)	74 (12.5)	72 (27.81)

^aNot applicable.

Table 5 shows caregivers’ perceived satisfaction with autonomy, competence, and relatedness while interacting with the platform. Data were collected using the TENS-Interface from T1 onward. Autonomy and competence increased across iterations,

indicating growing confidence and mastery, while relatedness showed minor fluctuations. Overall, the platform interface effectively supported caregivers’ needs, particularly autonomy and competence.

Table . Technology-based Experience of Need Satisfaction (TENS)-Interface subscale scores at 3 of the 4 measurement time points (T1-T3).

TENS-Interface	T1 score, median (IQR)	T2 score, median (IQR)	T3 score, median (IQR)
Autonomy	18 (3.5)	19 (3.75)	22 (5)
Competence	20 (3.5)	20 (3.5)	23 (3)
Relatedness	16 (5)	18 (1.75)	17 (3.75)

The 1-way ANOVA revealed no significant differences in cumulative SUS nor TUI scores at T3 based on gender, qualification, or facility. Pearson correlations indicated strong associations between SUS and TUI usability ($r=0.809$), usefulness ($r=0.773$), and intention to use ($r=0.751$). Intention to use was highly correlated with perceived usefulness ($r=0.926$). Higher skepticism correlated with lower usability ($r=-0.856$) and usefulness ($r=-0.736$). Greater technology interest correlated with higher curiosity ($r=0.861$). Higher qualification levels were associated with lower technology fear ($r=-0.800$), and more professional experience was associated with lower interest in technology ($r=-0.766$). Competence in handling the interface correlated strongly with autonomy ($r=0.912$) and positively with technology interest ($r=0.716$).

Hierarchical regression analyses indicated that perceived usefulness ($\beta=0.908$, $P<0.001$) and fear of technology ($\beta=0.102$, $P=0.04$) were significant predictors of intention to use robotics ($F_{1,6}=1557.926$; $P<0.001$; $R^2=0.998$; adjusted $R^2=0.997$). Multimedia Appendix 1 provides the complete results of the ANOVA, correlation matrices, and regression models.

Qualitative Evaluation

The qualitative evaluation comprised 7 think-aloud protocols and 3 focus group discussions conducted across 4 iterative workshops. The analysis yielded 36 codes, which were condensed into 13 subcategories and grouped into 4 overarching categories reflecting platform requirements: usability and interaction (category 1), intervention design and implementation

(category 2), training and skill development (category 3), and structural prerequisites (category 4). The full coding framework is provided in [Multimedia Appendix 2](#).

Category 1 encompasses user-friendliness and interaction with the platform. Participants emphasized the need for simple and familiar operating concepts, such as gesture- and voice-based input, as well as a streamlined selection process with options for customization. As one caregiver put it, “What’s important is that it’s simple, easy to use, and works in just a few steps” (T1, Nurse 3). The platform should also enable centralized management of multiple technologies and provide interfaces to existing systems.

Category 2 focuses on intervention design and implementation. It emphasizes technological autonomy, flexible planning and booking systems, and coordination by nursing staff. Personalization emerged as a central requirement, necessitating adaptation of content to the biographies, mobility levels, and cognitive limitations of care recipients. Participants also highlighted the value of user-specific profiles to support personalization and efficiency: “You would need to create a profile so you can tap on the user who is supposed to use it, and everything that was previously stored for that person is already there” (T1, Nurse 3). Interventions were expected to be meaningful and to provide recognizable benefits, thereby supporting individualized care.

The platform was also expected to support training and skill development among care professionals (category 3). This included the provision of structured content, manuals, and step-by-step guides to facilitate independent learning, regardless of prior digital skills. As one participant noted, “If we were to work with it now, we would first need a written, step-by-step guide telling us exactly what we have to do” (T1, Nurse 2). In addition, participants emphasized the need for information on care processes and for safe practice environments in which new technologies could be tested.

Structural prerequisites (category 4) describe the framework conditions required for successful implementation. These included stable internet infrastructure, access to technical support, and compliance with privacy and data protection

regulations. Financial considerations were also emphasized: “Usability and cost have to match. You need something that really makes sense” (T1, Nurse 13). Available resources and the cost-effectiveness of the technology were perceived as decisive factors influencing the platform’s long-term adoption.

Initial intercoder agreement was low (16.28%, $\kappa=0.16$), likely due to inconsistent segment boundaries. After refining the coding procedures, including the use of sentence-bounded segments and consolidation of enumerations, agreement increased to 82.19% ($\kappa=0.81$), indicating reliable coding for analysis.

Iterative Development and Final Operating Concept

The platform was refined through 4 iterative workshops, during which qualitative findings were continuously triangulated with quantitative measures (SUS, TUI, and TENS-Interface). This iterative process enabled the identification and resolution of usability and workflow-related issues across successive development stages.

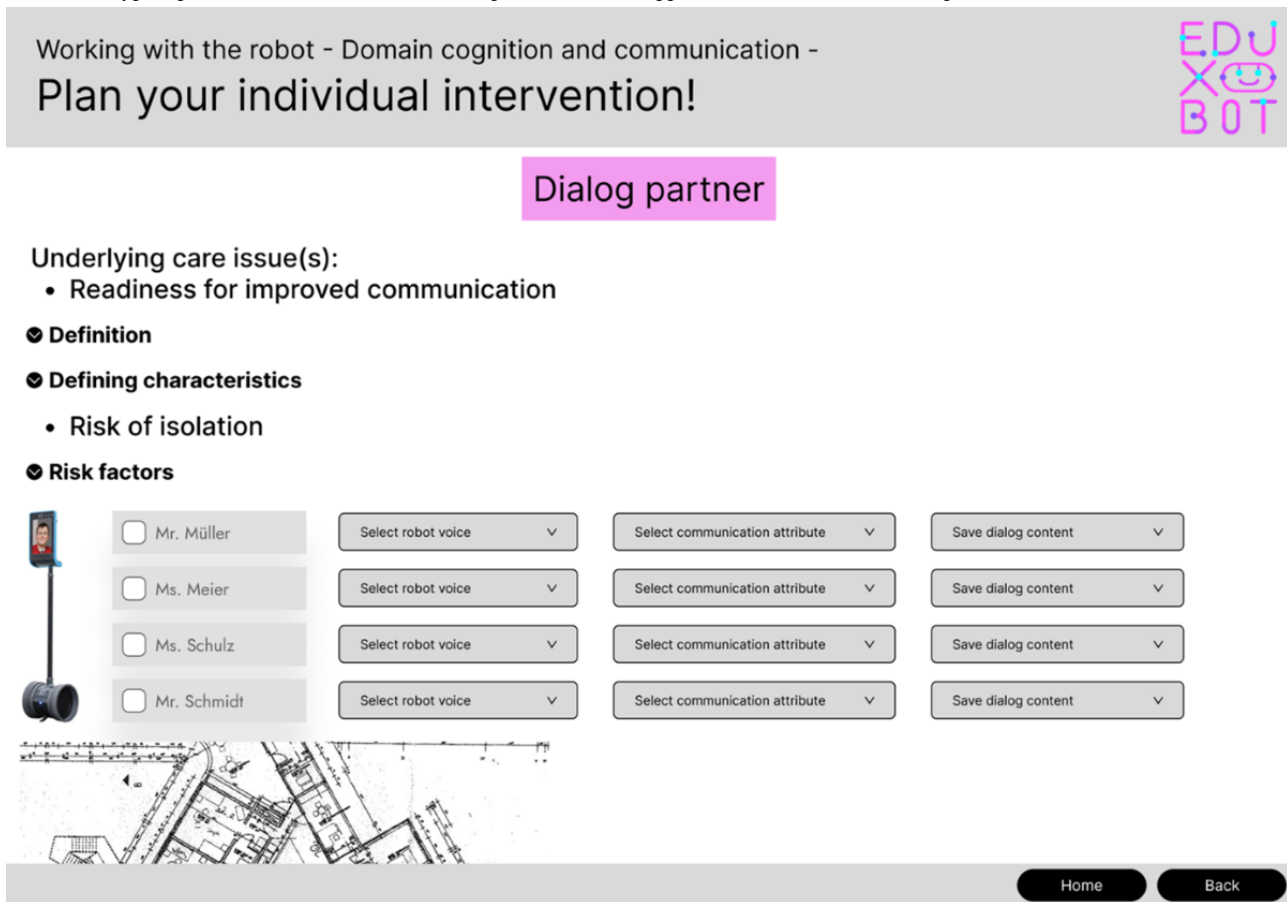
Iteration 1: Initial Requirements

In the first iteration, participants defined core requirements for the platform. A tablet-based interface using familiar gestures (eg, tap, swipe, pinch-to-zoom) and voice input was preferred, enabling centralized control of multiple technologies. Integration with existing documentation systems was considered essential to avoid additional workload. Participants also favored concise, context-sensitive guidance: “Sure, absolutely. A brief description. So that the employee knows that I can use it for that purpose” (T0, Nurse 1). Quantitative baseline data indicated acceptable usability and a moderate intention to use robotics.

Iteration 2: Conceptual Prototype

The second iteration translated these requirements into a visual prototype. The prototype displayed all workflow steps on a single screen, including process information (care problem definitions, risk factors) presented in expandable drop-down menus, personalization options for technological interventions, and information on technology availability and location. [Figure 2](#) shows the platform prototype.

Figure 2. Prototype representation of the Educational Exploration Robot Application Platform (EduXBot) platform (iteration 2).



Although participants valued the transparency of having all information readily accessible, extensive vertical scrolling was perceived as inefficient and contrary to the goal of minimizing interaction steps: “So it’s important that it’s simple, easy to use, and can be done in just a few steps” (T1, Nurse 3). The introduction of user profiles reflecting mobility, cognitive abilities, and biographical background to support personalization was positively received. Participants consistently emphasized that interventions should provide a discernible benefit and enable caregivers to actively support residents’ experiences: “What’s the goal? What’s the benefit?” (T1, Nurse 7).

At the same time, participants reiterated the need for written instructions (“So if we were to work with it now, we would first have to get it in writing, know step by step what we have to do” [T1, Nurse 2]) and brief training (“You have to practice a little bit, the handling, it takes some getting used to” [T1, Nurse 2]), particularly for more complex technologies.

Quantitative measures indicated stable usability and intention to use. The TENS-Interface showed moderate satisfaction with autonomy, competence, and relatedness. These metrics substantiate the qualitative findings, indicating that usability and acceptance were generally adequate but could benefit from workflow simplification and clearer guidance.

Iteration 3: Functional Prototype

In the third iteration, development shifted toward technical implementation. Full functional integration was available only for the PICO 4, while other technologies were simulated. This

partial implementation revealed new usability challenges related to system feedback and transparency.

The management of VR content involved storing videos in a backend system, requiring several preparatory steps prior to use. System states were represented graphically using checkmark symbols: A single gray checkmark indicated assignment to a resident, two gray checkmarks indicated availability on the tablet, and two blue checkmarks indicated availability on the VR headset. Participants perceived this symbolic logic as lacking intuitive clarity: “Dots and hooks in blue, gray, and so on. It’s not intuitive” (T2, Nurse 7).

Additional confusion arose from synchronization issues between the tablet and the VR headset. Synchronization had to be actively initiated via an eye icon within the video control bar. Participants instead tapped the video preview on the tablet, expecting the VR headset to mirror the same content. Although participants relied on a paper-based manual containing step-by-step instructions, several emphasized that intuitive design should ultimately reduce reliance on such materials.

The absence of explicit safety alerts was identified as a critical shortcoming. During simulated testing of the walking partner use case, participants stressed the need for clear error or event notifications, particularly in the case of falls: “It runs in a specific area, detects falls, and alerts nursing staff via the nurse call system” (T2, Nurse 10).

SUS scores for the PICO 4 decreased slightly, indicating usability challenges during partial implementation. In contrast,

TENS-Interface scores showed modest improvements in competence and autonomy. This suggests that participants recognized the platform's potential despite ongoing functional limitations.

Iteration 4: Final Operating Concept

The fourth iteration resulted in a guided, step-by-step workflow aligned with nursing reasoning: (1) contextual information on the care problem clarifying the intended nursing objective of

the intervention (Figure 3); (2) selection of the appropriate technology, including system feedback on availability, current usage, and battery status (Figure 4); (3) assignment of the intervention to one or more care recipients (Figure 5); (4) individualization of intervention parameters and scheduling via a booking system (Figure 6); and (5) a final overview summarizing all selected settings with an explicit confirmation step (Figure 7). These figures present the final operating concept.

Figure 3. Contextual information on the care problem.

Select a problem	Select information	Definition
List Item	List Item	Limited or lack of ability to spend the time remaining after deducting the time experienced by the person concerned as compulsory on freely chosen activities for individual meaning-making, identity formation and social experiences.
List Item	List Item	
List Item	List Item	
List Item	List Item	
List Item	List Item	
List Item	List Item	
List Item	List Item	
List Item	List Item	

Figure 4. Selection of the appropriate technology.

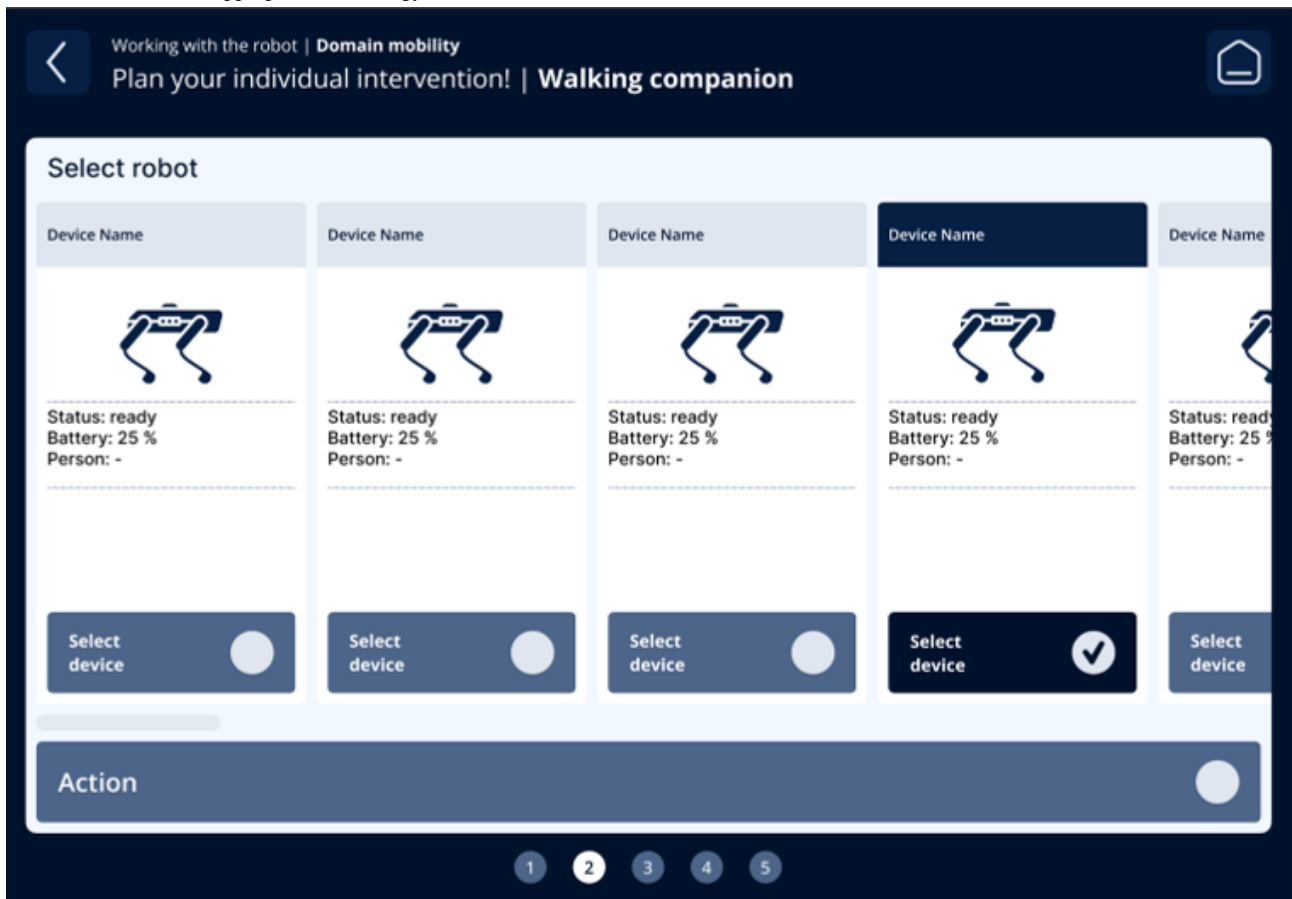


Figure 5. Assignment of the intervention.

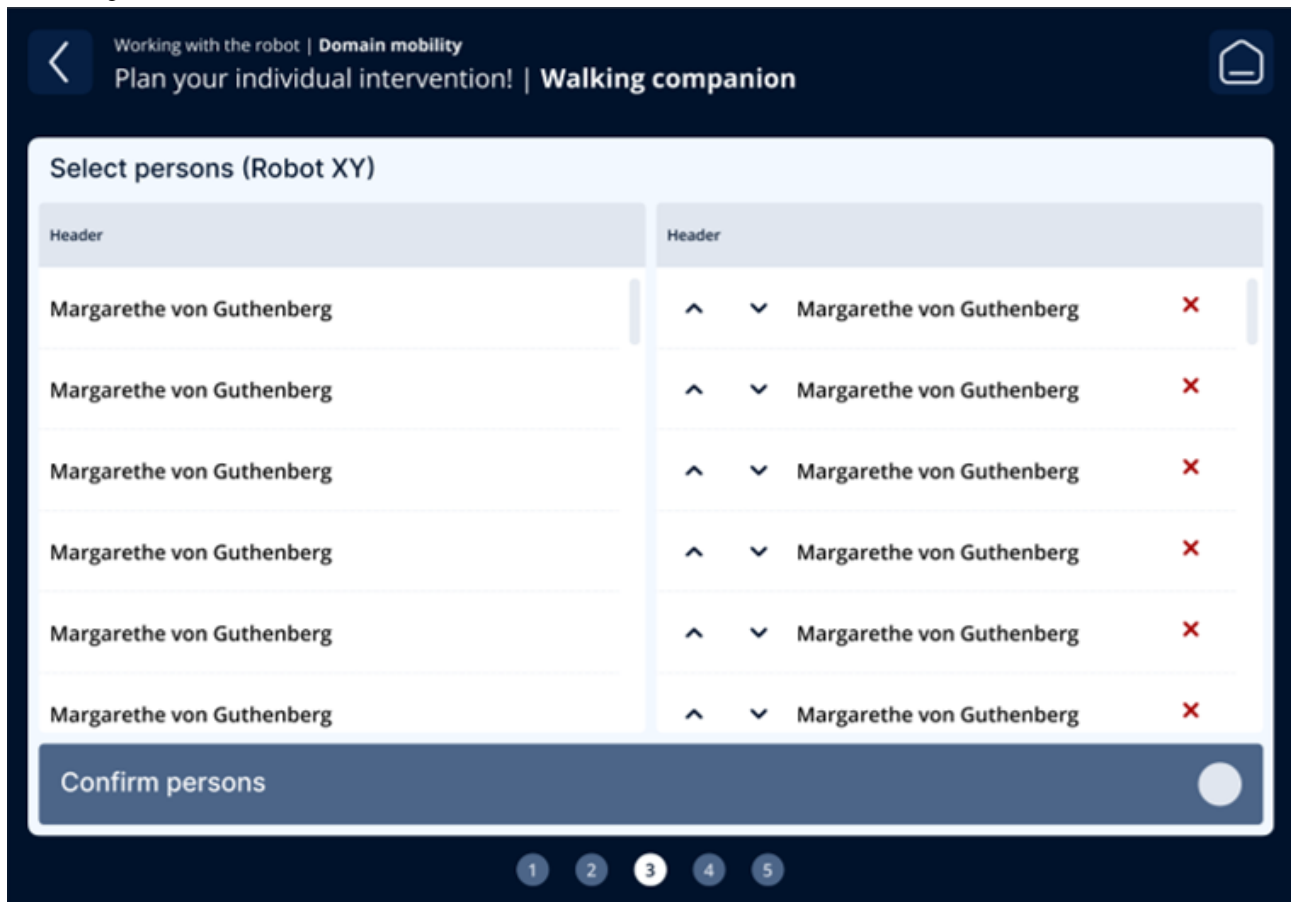


Figure 6. Individualization of intervention parameters and scheduling.

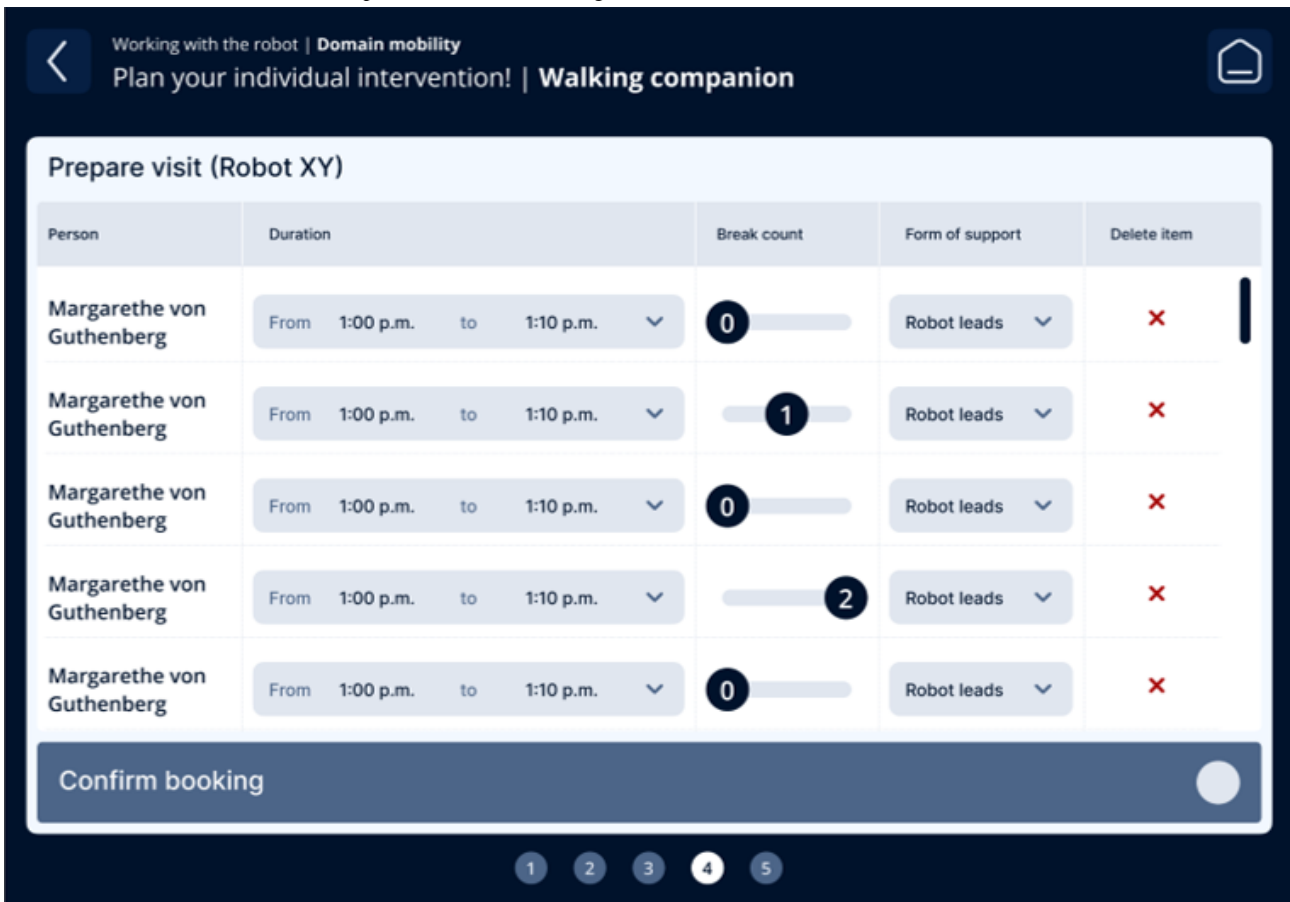


Figure 7. Final overview summarizing all selected settings.

Person	Duration	Break count	Form of support	Ongoing booking
Margarethe von Guthenberg	From 1:00 p.m. to 1:10 p.m.	0	Robot leads	Completed
Margarethe von Guthenberg	From 1:00 p.m. to 1:10 p.m.	1	Robot leads	Future
Margarethe von Guthenberg	From 1:00 p.m. to 1:10 p.m.	2	Robot leads	Future
Margarethe von Guthenberg	From 1:00 p.m. to 1:10 p.m.	3	Robot leads	Future
Margarethe von Guthenberg	From 1:00 p.m. to 1:10 p.m.	1	Robot leads	Future

The execution and monitoring of interventions were also revised. Care professionals retained the ability to enter an ongoing intervention at any time. Preparatory steps, such as file transfers to the tablet or synchronization with the PICO 4, were executed automatically and presented to users via a unified loading indicator. Safety-related events (eg, falls) were implemented as high-priority alerts using prominent pop-up notifications combined with audible warning signals. In addition, a conceptual interface to existing documentation systems was introduced to support routine care documentation, using standardized text modules to demonstrate the transfer of intervention-related information.

Quantitative data indicated stable or improved usability, a high intention to use, and increased satisfaction with autonomy and competence, suggesting that the revised workflow successfully addressed previously identified barriers.

Discussion

Integrative Overview

This study examined the feasibility, acceptance, and usage requirements of a cross-device interaction platform for controlling robotic systems in nursing care. Quantitative measures (SUS, TUI, TENS-Interface) and qualitative methods (think-aloud sessions and focus groups) were first analyzed separately and subsequently integrated in a mixed methods approach. The primary research question regarding overall platform feasibility was addressed through usability and interaction measures, while secondary questions concerning

workflow integration and personalization were examined through combined TENS-Interface and qualitative feedback. The data were integrated both formatively, to inform iterative platform refinement, and summatively, to evaluate the platform's overall feasibility and value. This comprehensive approach allowed convergent and divergent findings to be interpreted in context.

Usability and Interaction

Caregivers demonstrated high levels of curiosity, perceived usefulness, and intention to use robotic technologies, accompanied by low levels of skepticism. Perceived usefulness emerged as the strongest predictor of intention to use robotic systems. These findings indicate that resistance among nursing staff is not the primary barrier to technology adoption. Rather, successful integration depends on whether technological solutions adequately address users' practical needs.

Although SUS scores revealed usability challenges—particularly for the Go1 robot and the PICO 4 headset—these issues largely reflect the constraints of iterative prototype development rather than fundamental rejection by users. These findings align with the qualitative findings. Early usability challenges were primarily related to complex interaction sequences, unclear system feedback, and inconsistent symbolic representations. Participants emphasized the need for intuitive, gesture- and voice-based input, streamlined workflows, and consistent symbolic representations. Iterative refinements, such as simplified step-by-step procedures and automated preparatory steps, directly addressed these usability challenges. Notably,

acceptance and intention to use remained high even when usability temporarily declined.

The triangulated evidence demonstrates that high perceived usability and meaningful interaction design are critical enablers of platform adoption, supporting the primary research question regarding overall platform feasibility. This pattern is consistent with the Technology Acceptance Model, which emphasizes perceived usefulness as a stronger determinant of adoption than ease of use alone [50].

Personalization and Workflow Integration

Participants consistently emphasized the importance of tangible benefits, including automation of routine processes, integration into existing documentation systems, and the ability to tailor interventions to individual care recipients. Technology skepticism was mitigated when systems were intuitive, workflows were transparent, and benefits were clearly recognizable. These findings align with previous research demonstrating that technologies lacking practical relevance or workflow integration are unlikely to be adopted in nursing care [7,8,11]. The strong emphasis on personalization further supports existing evidence that user-centered and cocreative design approaches enhance acceptance, satisfaction, and care-related outcomes [21-24].

Training and Implementation Support

Training and implementation support were identified as critical enablers of successful adoption. Participants' feedback on instructional materials, step-by-step guidance, and protected environments for testing technologies was reflected in increasing TENS-Interface competence scores. Nursing staff reported growing confidence in their ability to use the platform safely and independently. These findings are consistent with Basic Psychological Need Theory, which posits that satisfaction with competence and autonomy fosters motivation and engagement [51]. In line with the Motivation, Engagement, and Thriving in User Experience model, improvements in autonomy and competence were associated with greater willingness to engage with robotic systems [38].

Structural Preconditions and Organizational Perspective

Although quantitative analyses did not directly capture organizational factors, qualitative findings underscored critical preconditions for successful implementation: stable technical infrastructure, access to technical support, compliance with privacy and data protection regulations, and cost-effectiveness. Participants with managerial responsibilities provided insights into resource allocation and long-term sustainability, emphasizing that organizational and structural factors must be addressed alongside usability and personalization to ensure successful adoption.

Limitations and Strengths

A major strength of this study is its iterative, user-centered development process, which systematically involved nursing staff through cocreative workshops and repeated prototype evaluations. The integration of qualitative and quantitative data enhanced the depth, credibility, and interpretability of the

findings. Adherence to established methodological standards (GRAMMS, MMAT) and formal ethical approval further strengthen the study's rigor.

Several limitations must be acknowledged. The small and relatively homogeneous sample of 13 participants—many of whom held managerial roles and reported positive attitudes toward technology—limits generalizability and may reflect selection bias. Continuous involvement across multiple iterations may have influenced participants' evaluations, as familiarity with successive prototypes could lead to more favorable perceptions of improvement. Social interaction with the research team may also have increased the likelihood of socially desirable responses.

The absence of a control group restricts the ability to obtain independent, neutral assessments of usability and perceived benefit. In addition, participation was limited to two facilities with prior experience in research projects, potentially underrepresenting settings or individuals who are more skeptical of or burdened by technology. Finally, evaluations were conducted in simulated environments rather than routine clinical practice, limiting conclusions about long-term usability, scalability, and impact on care outcomes. The study also focused on a limited set of technologies and did not include perspectives of care recipients. Accordingly, the findings should be interpreted as exploratory rather than confirmatory.

Implications for Practice and Future Research

This study demonstrates that a unified, cross-device platform for robotic systems can be successfully developed through sustained end user involvement. Although the platform was initially designed to operate robotic technologies, needs articulated during the early requirements assessment led to the integration of VR content via the PICO 4 headset. This development illustrates the platform's extensibility beyond robotics to other digital assistive technologies. Such flexibility is essential for future-oriented nursing environments, as it enables the centralized control of multiple technologies through a single interface while preserving usability and opportunities for personalization.

Nursing staff expressed willingness and motivation to use robotic technologies; however, successful implementation depends on intuitive usability, meaningful personalization, seamless workflow integration, and structured training. Quantitative improvements in autonomy and competence were reflected in design features that support familiar interaction patterns, centralized control of multiple technologies, and adaptation to individual care needs. Qualitative findings further emphasized the importance of personalization, transparent workflows, and integration with existing documentation systems for both acceptance and actual use. Collectively, these results suggest that technological rather than human factors represent the primary barriers to the integration of robotics into nursing care. Such barriers can be mitigated through collaborative design, iterative refinement, and close alignment with everyday care practices.

Future research should complement participatory development approaches with evaluations conducted by independent user

groups who were not involved in the design process. This would allow assessment from a more neutral perspective and reduce potential biases associated with repeated exposure or social desirability. Expanding participant diversity, including staff with lower digital affinity, will further strengthen generalizability. Testing the platform in real-world care settings

with larger and more heterogeneous samples and incorporating the perspectives of care recipients will be essential to evaluate long-term acceptance, effectiveness, and impact. Given its open architecture, the platform provides a promising foundation for integrating additional assistive technologies and supporting broader digital transformation in nursing care.

Acknowledgments

The authors declare the use of generative artificial intelligence (GAI) in the manuscript preparation process. In accordance with the GAIDeT taxonomy [52], the following task was delegated to a GAI tool under full human supervision: translation. The GAI tool used was DeepL. Full responsibility for the content of the manuscript rests with the authors. GAI tools are not listed as authors and do not bear responsibility for the final manuscript or its conclusions.

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Data Availability

The datasets generated or analyzed during this study are available from the corresponding author on request.

Conflicts of Interest

None declared.

Multimedia Appendix 1

Statistical analysis.

[[XLSX File, 22 KB - nursing_v9i1e84118_app1.xlsx](#)]

Multimedia Appendix 2

Qualitative evaluation.

[[XLSX File, 15 KB - nursing_v9i1e84118_app2.xlsx](#)]

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Abbreviations

- EduXBot**: Educational Exploration Robot Application Platform
GRAMMS: Good Reporting of a Mixed Methods Study checklist
ISO: International Organization for Standardization
MMAT: Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool
SUS: System Usability Scale
TENS: Technology-based Experience of Need Satisfaction
TUI: Technology Usage Inventory
VR: virtual reality

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Virtual Nursing Pilot in the Inpatient Setting: Qualitative Evaluation

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Abstract

Background: Global nursing shortages require innovative care delivery models. Virtual nursing is a cutting-edge model being explored.

Objective: This study aimed to examine the perspectives of clinical and administrative staff involved in a virtual nursing pilot on a medical-surgical unit and to identify best practices for future adoption.

Methods: We conducted a qualitative evaluation using individual semistructured interviews with virtual and bedside nurses, nurse executives, and IT project managers implementing a virtual nursing pilot program at a medical-surgical unit with 35 private and semiprivate beds at the Mount Sinai Hospital, a 1110-bed acute care hospital in New York, NY. Interviews took place in the spring of 2024 and were completed via phone or Zoom, audio recorded, and professionally transcribed. Participants were selected using purposive sampling. The authors applied an iterative thematic analysis to transcripts using Dedoose. Claude.ai was used to generate code summaries for select codes.

Results: Of 33 individuals approached, 16 (48.5%) consented to participate. Nine participants were clinical staff (virtual and bedside nurses and nurse managers), and 7 were executive leaders or managers in nursing and informatics. Our analysis identified the following themes: (1) staff attitudes toward virtual nursing shifted from resistance to acceptance over time, (2) direct communication channels between virtual and bedside nurses were critical for efficient care coordination and model adoption, (3) admission and discharge processes evolved throughout the pilot implementation, and (4) adaptable staffing allocations were necessary to accommodate fluctuating patient census and unit demands.

Conclusions: The main beneficiaries of this intervention, bedside nurses, found their virtual counterparts helpful following a few adjustments. Participants reported a perceived reduction in administrative burden, uninterrupted completion of clinical tasks, and they felt their overtime was reduced, which all increased their buy-in for this care model. There are several opportunities for improvement, such as real-time communication, unit-specific virtual nurse training, and flexible staffing for high-volume units. Our findings suggest that virtual nursing can address staffing challenges. Calculating the true return on investment for virtual nursing programs will require comprehensive mixed methods evaluations of such outcomes as care team and patient satisfaction, length of stay, readmission prevention, completion of nursing tasks, and reduction in overtime.

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KEYWORDS

virtual nursing; evaluation; qualitative; systems integration; change management; digital transformation; care delivery model; care coordination; staff satisfaction

Introduction

Technological advancements, staffing challenges, and evolving patient expectations are driving a digital transformation that is rewriting how we deliver health care. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of electronic communication platforms to help reduce the spread of the deadly virus. A workforce crisis has emerged globally with the United States facing a shortage of between 1.8 and 3 million nurses according to different projections [1,2]. The excessive workload placed on existing health care personnel has resulted in heightened stress, burnout, psychosomatic disorders, anger, and anxiety [1]. To address this challenge, health care leaders are exploring a variety of digital health tools and integrated care models. The use of telehealth for outpatient visits increased 38 times in the first 2 years of the pandemic [3]. The use of digital tools also increased in the inpatient setting [4]. The majority of these interventions have involved a physician connecting with a patient or bedside staff (a nurse) in a patient's home or a clinical setting [5,6].

The pandemic's toll on the health care workforce, nurses in particular, has put new pressure on hospitals to identify nursing tasks that could be completed remotely. Among these are administrative tasks such as admissions and discharges [7], patient education [8], and 1:1 sitting [9]. Of these, virtual sitting for fall prevention has the most evidence, with 12 studies conducted between 2009 and 2021 [9]. Using virtual nurses for admissions and discharges is more recent, with only three virtual nursing pilots on the topic published to date [7,8,10]. Other formats of virtual nursing have also been explored. For example, colleagues from the Mayo Clinic reported on an inpatient virtual registered nurse (RN) program, in which experienced nurses (often retired or nearing retirement) provided guidance to bedside RNs and proactively monitored patients, with no difference in patient safety and care outcomes [11,12].

In a collaborative effort to address staffing challenges and improve patient care, the Mount Sinai Hospital (MSH) partnered with Banyan Medical Solutions, a third-party vendor, to implement a virtual nursing platform on a selected inpatient unit. The implementation process involved installing compatible large-screen smart TVs, wall-mounted cameras, and pillow speakers, enabling virtual nurses to perform critical roles such as patient education, admissions, and discharges. This qualitative research study aimed to examine partner perspectives on this virtual nursing pilot at MSH with a focus on operational implementation and to identify best practices and recommendations for further refinement.

Methods

Setting

In January 2024, a virtual nursing pilot was initiated at a 35-bed medical-surgical unit at MSH. The fast-paced unit with high daily discharges accepts various postoperative patients. Virtual nurses, credentialed by the state but working remotely from a command center, have full access to the hospital's electronic health records. These nurses joined the company in 2021-2022, are relatively junior with experience in other settings, and chose virtual work for personal reasons. Privacy protocols included

"virtual knock" protocol, verbal consent requirements, and headphone availability for patients in semiprivate rooms.

Study Design and Sampling

We conducted a qualitative study using semistructured interviews to examine staff and leaders' perspectives and experiences related to the virtual nursing pilot program. We used purposive sampling to recruit participants from diverse professional backgrounds, aiming to gain a comprehensive understanding of the program from the frontline to leadership viewpoints.

Recruitment and Participants

Between February and June 2024, we invited 33 individuals to participate through email outreach, in-person shadowing, distributing flyers in common areas, and collaborating with hospital leadership. Data saturation was reached after completing about two-thirds of the nurse interviews, when new interviews yielded little additional information, following accepted standards in qualitative research [13]. We continued to recruit nonclinical personnel to ensure diverse perspectives.

Data Collection

Semistructured interviews were conducted via Zoom using a MSH account, lasting about 30 minutes each. Topics included patient and staff safety, privacy, technology reliability, program acceptability and usefulness, and improvement opportunities. The interview guide was developed based on research team discussions, particularly input from nursing leaders attuned to staff hopes and expectations. Our interview guide did not specifically explore formal clinical governance structures, focusing instead on operational implementation experiences. Using an interview guide helped ensure consistency and reliability of collected data across participants [14]. Interviewers (JR, MB, KG) used probes for clarification and conducted clinical shadowing (JR, MB) with field notes.

Data Analysis and the Use of Artificial Intelligence

Interview data were professionally transcribed and analyzed using iterative thematic analysis [15]. The team used Dedoose [16] for data analysis and management, and Claude.ai [17] to generate drafts of data summaries for selected codes. Three researchers (KG, MB, JR) read and coded the transcripts manually, using both deductive and inductive codes, refining codes through weekly discussion. Two coders applied the final codebook to each transcript in Dedoose. Major codes included care coordination, impact on workload, opportunities for improvement, and inclusion in decision-making. Minor codes included staff satisfaction, timing, best practices, and limitations of virtual nursing. After coding, the team identified key themes, downloaded relevant excerpts, and used AI to generate comparative summaries for each subtheme. Three analysts (KG, JR, MB) combined, iterated, and edited these summaries to create drafts of Results sections for further team refinement.

Ethical Considerations

The study was determined to be exempt by the Program for Protection of Human Subjects at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai on January 17, 2024 (STUDY-23-01378). Informed consent was obtained after the nature and possible

consequences of the study were explained. The study adhered to local, national, regional, and international law and regulations regarding protection of personal information, privacy, and human rights. The study was deemed exempt by MSH's Human Subjects Protection Program, with all participants consenting to be interviewed and recorded, and receiving a US \$25 gift card as compensation.

Results

Participants

Of the 33 individuals invited, 16 (48.5%) staff members consented and completed interviews (Table 1). The participants

Table 1. Participant characteristics and professional background (N=16).

Participant	Count, n
Professional background	
Registered nurse, including virtual nurses and executives with nursing background	12
Information technology or managers	3
Executives, including MSHS ^a executives and Banyan	2
Professional role	
Registered nurses at bedside	7
Virtual nurses	3
Information Technology	2
Operations personnel	2
Executives, including MSHS executives and Banyan	2
Gender	
Female	14
Male	2

^aMSHS: Mount Sinai Health System.

Theme 1: Implementation Process: Staff Perspectives Adapt From Resistance to Acceptance

The implementation of virtual nursing revealed a clear evolution in staff attitudes, moving from initial skepticism to overall acceptance. Some of it had to do with the timing and depth of staff involvement in virtual nursing implementation decisions. Staff accounts indicate early concerns about role displacement and workflow disruption (Table 2, example 1a), which were exacerbated by the fact that early-stage participation was limited and staff were brought in late in the planning process. Staff

included 9 clinical staff (RNs, nurse managers, and virtual nurses) and 7 nonclinical personnel (executives in nursing and informatics, and IT managers). Based on the analysis of the data, we identified the following 4 major themes: (1) staff attitudes toward virtual nursing shifted from resistance to acceptance over time; (2) direct communication channels between virtual and bedside nurses were critical for efficient care coordination and model adoption; (3) admission and discharge processes evolved throughout the pilot implementation; and (4) adaptable staffing allocations were necessary to accommodate fluctuating patient census and unit demands.

identified missed opportunities for leadership to proactively engage frontline workers: "I would have loved to have had that interaction with Banyan earlier, because we had a bunch of questions that our people didn't have answers to" (Bedside RN, CL01; Table 2, example 1b). This delayed engagement led to accumulated questions and uncertainty among staff, though many issues were eventually resolved through concentrated information sessions. Nurse participants also reported that once the training was complete, they were relieved and realized that virtual nurses could be helpful (Table 2, example 1c).

Table . Key themes and representative quotes from participant interviews. Theme 1: Implementation process.

Example No.	Subtheme	Quote and participant role, ID
1a	Initial fears	"So there was a lot of trepidation. what is this actually going to look like. like physically how are they going to do this? And they'd be like, oh, we'll get back to you." (Bedside RN, CL01)
1b	Staff involvement	"if the leadership is like. we'd like to go talk to the staff before we officially decide this so that we can let them know exactly how this works, maybe they'll be a little bit more comfortable with it" (Bedside RN, CL02, Table 2, 1b).
1c	Relief	"We were thinking it was going to be a thing that we would have to worry about. But once you know all you have to do is a few clicks in the Banyan board, then I think that is definitely really helpful." (Bedside RN, CL03)
1d	Decisions made at leadership level	"Because we are a union hospital, we did have to be very specific. That came from the CNO and the union." (Nursing executive, NCL06)
1e	Leadership and change management	"It requires multiple conversations and sessions in advance of the model being implemented for people to first understand why we're doing this. It's not for the heck of it. It's to help you" (Nursing executive, NCL07)
1f	Peer-to-peer learning	"I think if also there was an opportunity for people from [our unit] to go talk to the other units about it and how it worked, like to hear from peer-to-peer, that would be really helpful" (Bedside RN, CL03).

Several bedside nurses noted they wanted to be involved in technology evaluation and workflow decisions. This, however, was not always possible, as we learned from the interviews with nursing executives and nurse managers. One consideration was that the union leaders' agreement on what tasks would be delegated to virtual nurses. Union considerations shaped decision-making authority, with decisions made at the leadership level ([Table 2](#), examples 1c and 1d).

Our analysis also demonstrated real-world challenges in achieving meaningful staff participation while maintaining unit operations. Leaders described efforts to include staff while acknowledging limitations: "We do pull nursing staff off the floor to assist with any projects to get their insight, but we often know that they're not able to stay every time for the whole hour, if at all" (Executive leader, NCL06). This resulted in a selective approach to staff involvement, with few staff members being able to go onsite to another hospital to observe Banyan operations.

During interviews, leaders emphasized their commitment to address staff concerns and support adoption of the new system. As one operations leader explained, "I would do anything I could to get leadership to the unit, to recognize that we appreciate you... we're doing this as a resource for you" (Executive leader, NCL04). The implementation process required careful messaging and consistent support ([Table 2](#), example 1e).

Finally, peer influence played a crucial role in shifting perceptions, particularly as floating nurses shared positive

experiences across units: "When we get nurses from other units that float to us, they're like oh my god, this is amazing. They all love it" (Bedside RN, CL06). Initial resistance transformed through hands-on experience and peer testimonials, with staff gradually recognizing virtual nursing as supportive rather than replacement technology ([Table 2](#), example 1f).

Theme 2: Optimizing Technology Integration: Opportunities and Best Practices

System reliability and integration emerged as critical factors in implementing a virtual nursing platform. Here we describe *several operational opportunities for improvement* that can be used to establish best practices for implementation. These included technical integration to eliminate delays in communication, resolving audio quality issues, remote printing capability for virtual nurses, and volume control in shared rooms. These technical challenges collectively highlight the importance of robust infrastructure and seamless integration between systems for optimal integration into operational workflows.

Integration with existing hospital systems presented ongoing challenges. Multiple nurses noted issues with electronic health record connectivity and documentation access. These integration issues required bedside staff to navigate between multiple platforms, creating workflow inefficiencies ([Table 3](#), example 2a). Bedside nurses desired a more nuanced communication tool with their virtual nurse partners in which they could specify discharge timing, for example, when transportation for the patient was already prearranged, and a direct communication

line between virtual nurses and providers. This highlighted the need for systems that could accommodate real-time coordination between virtual and bedside teams.

Table . Key themes and representative quotes from participant interviews. Theme 2: Optimizing technology integration.

Example No.	Subtheme	Quote and participant role, ID
2a	Systems integration	"Opening a separate screen, it sounds crazy, but it's often a pain... We basically have to open up a separate page. We have to go out of our Epic and open up a separate page to move Banyan." (Bedside RN, CL04)
2b	Audio quality	"It's loud... depending on the age group, depending on how sedated the patient is... Some of it is a [local] issue, that some of the TVs aren't coming through the call bell." (Bedside RN, CL04)
2c	Printing connectivity	"...if [virtual nurses] have completed all the discharge... it's just... one extra button to print it. Whereas if we have to print it, we have to go in, we have to look at all the things, then print it, and then gather it again. So it just saves a couple extra minutes with it being like oh, you're already in that section, you press the button." (Bedside RN, CL02)
2d	Patients with special accommodations	"So at that point I would probably do the interpretive services myself in person because on top of it that there's a new barrier of virtual, we have to then find an interpreter, and then we have the technology issues of whether the phone in the room is actually working... But even when it is working, I've seen that admission, instead of taking probably like a half an hour, it takes like over an hour." (Bedside RN, CL05)
2e	Workarounds	"And they themselves, taxi services, most of the time they're rude... they're like no, if they're not here in the next two minutes I have to leave and pick up the next person. They don't care. And then we're like let's just do the discharge ourselves and let's just... like let's not even wait for transport, let's just roll the patient down in the wheelchair on our own before they lose their taxi." (Bedside RN, CL05)

The interoperability challenges between the virtual nursing platform and the hospital's EHR system affected *care plan documentation and continuity*. Virtual nurses documented within both the Banyan system and Epic, but the lack of seamless integration meant that care plan updates were not always immediately visible to bedside staff without actively switching between systems. When virtual nurses completed admission assessments or discharge education, bedside nurses reported needing to actively seek out these updates rather than receiving automatic notifications of completed tasks. Remote printing connectivity for virtual nurses represented another technical hurdle. Bedside nurses explained that efficiency could be gained through improved printing functionality (Table 3, example 2c). According to one nurse, "it just saves a couple extra minutes... [if] you're already in that section, you press the button" (Bedside RN, CL02). While virtual nurses tried to send paperwork to print locally on the unit, this functionality did not work at the time of the interviews, making bedside nurses sign into the electronic medical record each time for the (virtually) discharged patient, find all the information, and send it to the printer again.

Audio quality issues particularly affected patients' willingness to accept a virtual nurse and staff efficiency, with problems being more pronounced during night shifts. Volume control concerns in shared rooms further complicated the situation, creating potential privacy issues and patient dissatisfaction, highlighting the need for better audio privacy solutions such as mandatory headphone use or room-specific volume controls (Table 3, example 2b).

While adaptations in the virtual nursing program showed promise for standard patient interactions, additional complexities arose with specific patient populations. Extended processing times for patients requiring interpreter services emerged as a particular challenge. Our bedside nurse participants reported foregoing virtual support altogether to save time and ensure effective communication with patients who needed interpreter services (Table 3, example 2d).

In response to these challenges, staff developed various *workarounds* to maintain efficient patient care. For example, bedside nurses described how transportation constraints sometimes necessitated bypassing virtual nursing protocols.

One nurse explained that taxi drivers often gave ultimatums about immediate departure, stating they would leave if patients weren't ready. This led staff to expedite discharges independently rather than risk patients losing their transportation (Table 3, example 2e). This adaptive approach allowed staff to balance the benefits of virtual nursing with practical operational needs. Another workaround—the implementation of Epic's secure chat functionality—marked a significant improvement in real-time coordination, with staff reporting it helped them coordinate plans with their virtual counterparts. Developing clear communication protocols, particularly for urgent situations, proved essential for maintaining seamless patient care across virtual and bedside teams.

IT specialists in our study highlighted the importance of technical considerations, such as future *interoperability*, beyond the immediate virtual nursing pilot. One IT leader pointed out that it is important to consider the use/reuse of technology components, such as smart TVs, for new nursing workflows that could be covered remotely: “how do we utilize a single or a smaller set of devices?” (NCL03). This perspective underscores the importance of strategic planning for technology integration that considers both current needs and future applications.

Theme 3: Care Coordination: Benefits of Virtual Nursing on Teamwork

The implementation of virtual nursing transformed admission and discharge processes, creating new team dynamics between bedside and virtual nurses. This theme explores how these workflows evolved and the benefits that emerged from this collaborative approach.

Transformation of the Discharge Process

Before the virtual nursing pilot, discharges required bedside nurses to manage multiple competing priorities simultaneously. One nurse described the traditional discharge process prior to the virtual nursing pilot implementation that involved educating patients, who were often frightened, about their discharge, trying to be supportive, “all while maybe a call bell's ringing, you're trying to get somebody their meds, you're hopefully not getting an admission because your workload is full” (Bedside RN, CL04; Table 4, example 3a). With the introduction of virtual nursing, the process became more streamlined. The same nurse explained that now they just switch a certain setting and “Banyan will often just start doing the discharges” (Bedside RN, CL04), freeing bedside staff to perform other tasks.

Table . Key themes and representative quotes from participant interviews. Theme 3: Care coordination.

Example No.	Subtheme	Quote and participant role, ID
3a	Old workflows (previrtual nursing)	"...prior to Banyan, you waited for a discharge order... You printed out your paper and we went to the bedside... we're a postsurgical unit, many people are absolutely frightened about going home with a new hip... and you would spend a tremendous amount of time educating, and teaching, and explaining their discharge. Then we wait for transport. And this is all while maybe a call bell's ringing, you're trying to get somebody their meds, you're hopefully not getting an admission because your workload is full." (Bedside RN, CL04)
3b	Good catch	"The only time I remember that it didn't go well is we had a patient who needed... [Lovenox] education... And the only way I was able to figure that out is because he was leaving and then his wife came up to me and she was like we never got the Lovenox education... So I think the nurse should have picked it up, like oh, you're going home on Lovenox injection, do you know how to administer it?... He could have just walked out, went home, and not know how to do it. Good thing his wife [asked]... And I was like oh, okay, let's go back into the room and we will go through the steps on how to administer the Lovenox injection." (Bedside RN, CL06)
3c	Division of patient education responsibilities	"Especially with our ortho patients, they are usually prescribed a certain blood thinner so that they don't develop any clots, and if they're already taking blood thinners at home, and there's an issue with the medication or any interaction, they could definitely help somebody, you know, prevent them from having an adverse reaction..." (Bedside RN, CL05) "The hands-on teaching, plus the discharge, can take a long time. So for the discharge paperwork to be reviewed, and then I come in and just have to do Foley teaching, for example, with the leg bag, that just takes a lot of time off of my plate for me to focus on other things." (Bedside RN, CL03)
3d	No direct communication with providers	"[Virtual nurses] are not able to communicate with the frontline providers, and if... the patient has any questions, and they can't answer, and then they'll message us, and then I have to message the doctor, and then I have to relay that information to the virtual nurse... So, you know what I mean, so she still has to go through me..." (Bedside RN, CL06)

The discharge process transformation remains a work in progress, particularly regarding the division of educational responsibilities between virtual and bedside nurses. This was evident when a patient nearly left without critical Lovenox self-injection education, discovered only when his wife proactively inquired as they were leaving (Table 4, example 3B). Following this learning opportunity, the nurse implemented a new protocol of personally reviewing the After Visit Summary before handoff, proactively identifying teaching responsibilities that fall within the bedside nurse's scope rather than the virtual nurse's capabilities, thus ensuring patients receive all necessary education before discharge.

Emerging Communication Patterns and Task Coordination

As the unit grew more comfortable with virtual nursing, new communication patterns emerged between bedside and virtual nurses. Bedside nurses noticed that virtual nurses began to proactively update them on task completion. Virtual nurses reported developing strategies for prioritization through communication with bedside staff. As one virtual nurse explained: "Communication is key. You just let the bedside nurse know what's going on... could you please... let us know the order that you want us to prioritize the patients, whose transportation is coming first... It makes all the difference in

care” (Virtual RN, CL08). Virtual nurses reported initial lack of clarity about their role among patients, with one participant noticing an improvement in that respect: “the patients [are] just being educated more... regarding our services” (Virtual RN, CL07).

The division of educational responsibilities between virtual and bedside teams emerged as a key strength of the program. The system proved particularly valuable for complex cases, including newly diagnosed patients requiring extended education sessions. One bedside nurse highlighted the importance of virtual nurses’ role in patient education, particularly for high-risk patients. She explained how orthopedic patients on blood thinners need to have their medications at home reviewed in case they were already taking blood thinners to prevent any interactions or adverse reactions (Table 4, example 3c).

A gap that remained unresolved at the time of the interviews had to do with virtual nurses’ inability to message providers. For example, if a patient had a question during discharge that the virtual nurse could not answer, they had to message a bedside nurse who would then message a provider and report back to the virtual nurse who would relay it to the patient (Table 4, example 3d). Being unable to communicate directly with providers made this process unnecessarily involved and inefficient.

Time Efficiency and Focus on Direct Patient Care

A significant benefit reported by bedside nurses was how virtual nursing saved them time and allowed them to focus on hands-on teaching and direct patient care. One bedside nurse mentioned that discharges traditionally could take up to an hour and were now taken care of by their virtual counterparts (Table 4, example 3c). Another nurse echoed: “We’re not stuck in a room for an hour doing admission questions and then having four other patients call on the Vocera and then get interrupted, going back and forth. That’s what was happening before” (Bedside RN, CL06).

The ability to handle multiple tasks simultaneously was particularly valuable during busy periods. As one nurse explained: “Because if you’re getting two admissions and you have a discharge, it’s just a lot... So it’s really helpful because

then you’re able to actually focus on hands-on patient care as opposed to...the paperwork aspect of it” (Bedside RN, CL03).

Improved Nursing Satisfaction and Work-Life Balance

The collaboration between virtual and bedside nursing staff resulted in positive outcomes for staff satisfaction and work-life balance. One nurse remarked, “It’s nice to just like have that thought taken off your plate, as well as the admissions, just not having to stay late to do an admission when they come at... poor timing.” (Bedside RN, CL02). Overall, the evolution of teamwork between virtual and bedside nurses created a more efficient workflow for admissions and discharges, allowing nurses to dedicate more time to direct patient care while ensuring comprehensive education and documentation.

Theme 4: Timing Is Key: Staffing Capacity and Patient Flow

Workflow integration and staffing alignment emerged as critical factors in the uptake and efficiency of virtual nursing, revealing the importance of proper coordination between virtual and bedside teams in managing patient flow.

Managing High-Volume Patient Movement

The partnership between virtual and bedside teams impacted patient workflow management, particularly during high-volume periods. One bedside nurse explained that their unit had “a colossal amount of movement... [with] 14 to 20 [daily] discharges and admissions” (CL04). Effective workforce distribution proved essential for managing such volume, as staff needed to adapt to fluctuating demands throughout the day. As another bedside nurse explained: “Sometimes they could say 10 [discharges], so they have, let’s say, 5 [virtual] nurses on board, but then as the day goes on, the discharges do happen, so instead of having 10 we’ll have 18” (Bedside nurse, CL06). This unpredictability highlighted the ongoing need to develop flexible staffing management strategies that could respond to rapidly changing conditions. Ascertaining the right staffing levels for virtual took some tweaking, as is evidenced by one bedside nurse report about initial challenges during the overnight shift, when there was only one virtual nurse available (Table 5, example 4A).

Table . Key themes and representative quotes from participant interviews. Theme 4: Timing is key.

Example No.	Subtheme	Quote and participant role, ID
4a	Initial insufficient staffing	"...it also comes down to how many people, how many nurses is Banyan hiring for our unit per shift... Because the thing is, [my supervisor] said oh, we noticed that things are running slow. [The virtual nurse said] I'm sorry, I apologize, it's just [I am] the only nurse with them at that shift... That was when Banyan was first implemented... I actually think Banyan can work in a fast-paced, but if there's enough staff, virtual nurse staff, and also to make things run faster." (Bedside RN, CL05)
4b	Impact on hospital throughput	"Once we discharge this patient we can pull more patients coming from the PACU and from the ED, so it helps them, like don't hold the OR schedule nor have a critical diversion in the ED" (Bedside RN, NCL05).
4c	Nurses more readily accept admissions at end of shift	"I think now that we have the Banyan nurses, nurses are not... reluctant on taking the admission from PACU. They'll just pick up because they know that when they come onto the floor that they don't have to deal with these admission questions, that they're going to be taken care of" (Bedside RN, CL06).

Impact on Hospital-Wide Operations

The virtual nursing system's impact extended beyond individual patient care to affect broader hospital operations. The most positive impact of the pilot, as perceived by our participants, was what they described as improved patient throughput. During peak periods, virtual nurses supported bedside teams, creating capacity to process patient admissions and discharges simultaneously. High volume peaks required different coordination compared to slower-paced environments, while night shift operations needed special adaptations to maintain patient comfort and prevent disruption during quiet hours. According to one nurse, by facilitating more efficient discharges, the system improved patient throughput across multiple departments (Table 5, example 4b).

This improvement in patient flow was also reflected in staff attitudes toward accepting new admissions. Nurses used to be reluctant to accept an admission from PACU, for example, if it meant they would have to stay longer after the end of their shift to complete it. According to several participants, this was no longer the case (Table 5, example 4c).

Time Investment in Patient Education

Virtual nurses reported dedicating significant time to patient education, highlighting the value of this investment despite its potential impact on short-term throughput. One virtual nurse reflected on the depth of engagement required: "I would say I think I'm long with discharges personally... I take a while. They have so many questions... The family's in there, the mom, the dad. So yeah, I feel like my discharges are long, like an hour... I feel bad. Some of them are newly diagnosed, so that's even longer, like an hour and a half" (Virtual RN, CL09). This time investment, while potentially extending the discharge process itself, ultimately supported more comprehensive patient

education and potentially better postdischarge outcomes, demonstrating that flexibility in staffing and timing considerations needs to balance efficiency with quality of care.

Discussion

Principal Findings

This is the first qualitative evaluation of a virtual nursing pilot on an inpatient unit. Our findings demonstrate that virtual nursing implementation requires careful attention to technological infrastructure, operational readiness, and change management. We identified four major themes that characterized the virtual nursing implementation in our pilot: (1) achieving staff buy-in takes time and can benefit from earlier engagement strategies; (2) seamless technology integration, especially direct communication channels, is critical for smooth operation; (3) recognition of virtual nurses as integral team members, rather than auxiliary support, enhances collaborative care delivery; and (4) virtual nursing coverage must meet the demand to maintain relevance within the organizational or unit context.

Our study offers insights into implementing virtual nursing on inpatient units, which other hospitals can use when considering similar models. The unique unit or patient population characteristics—high volume, fast pace, surgical patients with diverse diagnoses—fit well with the virtual nursing pilot seeing benefits in admission or discharge support and patient education. If virtual support was unavailable or inefficient, the bedside nurses reverted to their traditional workflows. With the exception of some initial issues, the vendor was able to meet the challenge and provide sufficient support. Virtual nursing implementation on slower-paced units might prioritize functions like virtual sitters, which could be particularly useful on observation units.

Our findings highlight the critical importance of seamless EHR integration for virtual nursing models. The fragmented documentation workflow we observed, where staff navigated between multiple systems, created inefficiencies that could impact care continuity. The care plan coordination issues, exemplified by the Lovenox education incident, demonstrate how documentation gaps can directly affect patient safety. Virtual nursing programs must establish clear protocols for documenting care plan handoffs, particularly for complex patients requiring both virtual and bedside interventions and prioritize robust interoperability that allows direct documentation within the primary care record.

Technical and system reliability directly impacted operation readiness. The integration between EHR and the virtual nursing platform, audio quality, and physical environment considerations influenced staff adoption and clinical workflows. Virtual nursing adoption hinges on infrastructure investment that could be a barrier for smaller hospitals.

The pilot used out-of-state junior RNs. Other staffing models could be considered, such as floating bedside nurses as virtual for a fraction of their time. Implementers should weigh the efforts needed to educate new virtual staff vis-à-vis managing virtual nursing in-house.

Flexible staffing in response to patient flow emerged as one of the most critical factors for optimal operation. Implementation followed an overall positive trend—initial increases in workload during rollout, followed by productivity improvements once frontline staff adapted to their new workflow. Participants reported positive downstream effects such as reducing operating room holds and emergency department diversions through improved time to discharge and bed turnover.

This pilot aligns well with the cutting-edge innovations in health care operations. Our findings demonstrate that implementation depends on structured approaches to change management [18] while minimizing disruption to care delivery. Key insights from our analysis—albeit not new [19]—reveal the importance of early staff involvement in the decision-making process.

Staff adoption of the virtual nursing platform followed a progression from initial skepticism to approval. Clinical champions were powerful influencers of technology acceptance. Clear role separation created effective partnerships, particularly in educational delivery. Virtual nursing could leverage experienced nurses' expertise post COVID-19 pandemic, like programs at other institutions have shown [11,12].

Limitations and Strengths

Our study has the following limitations. We interviewed hospital personnel but not patients or caregivers. Understanding how both patients and caregivers view this intervention is essential for improving it further. Researchers need to examine not just how the interactions between patients and virtual nurses are designed to work, but also how patients and caregivers actually experience and respond to these interactions. It is a single-center pilot study in an academic medical center; our findings might not apply to a different health care setting or patient population. With about a 50% response rate, a nonrespondent bias is possible. Our study did not include quantitative data on reduced

overtime, improved throughput, or quality indicators such as patient satisfaction, medication errors, or readmission rates. All comments related to these important metrics were based on the impressions of bedside and virtual staff and executive leaders. We also did not systematically examine formal clinical governance models or committee structures that may have guided the implementation process, nor did we evaluate preimplementation preparation or formal support models during rollout. However, this is the first published qualitative study of virtual nursing programs to our knowledge, capturing valuable nurse and leadership perspectives through its qualitative approach.

Recommendations for Planning Virtual Nursing Implementation

Based on our findings, implementation of virtual nursing requires attention across several domains. Organizations considering adoption should prioritize early infrastructure investment, unit-specific workflow design, clear governance structures, and intentional patient-facing communication. The following checklist sums up key considerations to guide planning and implementation.

- Technical infrastructure
- Invest in technical and communication infrastructure upfront to ensure seamless system integration between virtual and bedside nurses and between virtual nurses and providers
- Develop or adopt AI tools to support automatic patient prioritization for admission and discharge
- Workflow
- Implement dynamic staffing allocations responsive to patient volume fluctuations
- Adapt and optimize workflows to reflect specific demands of each unit
- Develop clear standard operating procedures for communication between virtual and bedside staff
- Conduct regular review of staffing allocations based on utilization patterns
- Clinical governance
- Establish formal governance structures with designated clinical champions
- Patient-facing communication
- Use nurses' insights to create standard messaging on introducing the virtual nursing program to patients and setting expectations
- Develop privacy standard operating procedures for shared rooms, including headphone distribution and consent procedures for virtual interactions

Conclusions

Virtual nursing is a cutting-edge care delivery innovation that goes beyond adoption of new technology. This virtual team model enhances care coordination, patient throughput, and staffing while keeping care patient-focused. Program success requires resources, technical infrastructure, and clear, unit-specific communication. Health care should see it as bedside care extension, with careful planning and ongoing adjustments based on data and feedback.

This study provides valuable insights for hospital leadership and management to understand the impact on clinical workload, staff acceptability and satisfaction, and patient care quality to support informed implementation decisions. Future research should explore several questions that emerged during this implementation: (1) How do virtual nursing models impact nurse retention and recruitment in a high turnover environment?

(2) How might AI integration enhance the efficiency of virtual nursing documentation and communication? (3) How do patients perceive virtual nursing and how can their experience be improved? (4) What does virtual nursing affect quality and safety outcomes such as patient satisfaction, readmissions, and medication errors? Addressing these questions will further develop the evidence for this emerging care delivery model.

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Conflicts of Interest

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Abbreviations

MSH: Mount Sinai Hospital

RN: registered nurse

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Insights Into Factors Affecting Nurses' Knowledge of and Attitudes Toward AI and Implications for Successful AI Integration in Critical Care: Cross-Sectional Study

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Abstract

Background: Assessing the current landscape of nurses' knowledge and attitudes is a critical first step in facilitating a smooth and effective transition toward artificial intelligence (AI)-enhanced critical care.

Objective: This study aimed to assess the levels of and factors affecting the knowledge of and general attitudes toward AI in critical care among nurses.

Methods: A cross-sectional correlational design was used with 203 critical care nurses in Hail, Saudi Arabia, using the Nurses' AI Knowledge Questionnaire and the 20-item General Attitudes Toward Artificial Intelligence Scale from May 2025 to July 2025. Data were analyzed using 2-tailed *t* tests, ANOVA, Pearson correlation, and multivariable linear regression. Statistical significance was set at $P < .05$.

Results: Critical care nurses demonstrated moderate knowledge of (mean score 4.93, SD 1.78) and positive attitudes toward AI (mean score 64.39, SD 8.26). A moderate positive correlation was found between knowledge of and attitudes toward AI ($r = 0.45$; $P < .001$). In multivariable analyses, older age was associated with lower knowledge (≥ 40 years: $\beta = -1.29$, 95% CI -2.12 to -0.45 ; $P = .003$) and less positive attitudes ($\beta = -8.97$, 95% CI -12.49 to -5.44 ; $P < .001$). Female nurses reported lower knowledge ($\beta = -0.69$, 95% CI -1.20 to -0.19 ; $P = .007$) and less positive attitudes ($\beta = -2.65$, 95% CI -4.78 to -0.52 ; $P = .02$) than male nurses. Greater experience (> 5 years) was positively associated with knowledge ($\beta = 1.20$, 95% CI $0.65 - 1.75$; $P < .001$) and attitudes ($\beta = 8.08$, 95% CI $5.76 - 10.41$; $P < .001$).

Conclusions: Critical care nurses in Hail demonstrated moderate knowledge of and positive attitudes toward AI, which varied based on their demographic and professional characteristics. These findings highlight the need to strengthen AI literacy and provide targeted support to groups with lower scores, which may enhance readiness for AI integration in critical care settings.

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KEYWORDS

artificial intelligence; AI; knowledge; attitudes; factors; critical care nurses; Saudi Arabia

Introduction

The global health care model is undergoing a great revolution directed by the rapid incorporation of artificial intelligence (AI) [1,2]. AI is defined as a system designed to perceive the environment and take action to achieve specific goals [3]. AI encompasses machine learning, natural language processing, and robotics [2,4]. In medicine, AI has vast and promising potential for enhancing diagnostic precision; personalizing treatment plans; optimizing operational efficiency; and, ultimately, improving patient outcomes [5,6]. This technological shift aligns with global initiatives such as Vision 2030, which

actively encourages innovation and digital transformation within its health sector to build a robust, data-driven health care system [7,8].

Critical care units, including intensive care units and emergency departments, represent environments with exceptionally high pressure [9]. Clinicians in these settings are required to process large amounts of complex, real-time patient data to make swift decisions. AI applications can be leveraged for the early detection of patient deterioration, prediction of sepsis, forecasting intensive care unit length of stay, and managing ventilatory support. These capabilities support clinical decision-making and potentially reduce human burden [10]. By

automating routine tasks and administrative burdens, AI can free critical care nurses (CCNs) and physicians to focus on more complex clinical reasoning and direct patient care. This shift enhances both the efficiency and humanistic aspects of treatment [11].

As frontline clinicians, nurses are pivotal to the successful adoption of new technologies in clinical practice [12]. Their role involves continuous patient monitoring, assessment, and execution of complex care plans, making them key end users of AI-driven tools. Therefore, the effective integration of AI into critical care is linked to nurses' acceptance, which is shaped by their knowledge, attitudes, and willingness to incorporate these technologies into their workflow [13,14]. However, the introduction of AI in the nursing domain has sparked debate. While some view AI as a tool to augment nursing practice and mitigate workload, others perceive it as a threat to the essential human-to-human interactions that form the bedrock of compassionate care. This difference in perspective raises concerns about dehumanization and ethical implications [15-17].

A significant barrier to AI's integration is the current underrepresentation of nurses in the development, implementation, and evaluation of AI systems for health care [18,19]. This gap can lead to a misalignment among technological solutions, actual clinical needs, and workflow. Furthermore, studies have indicated that nurses' perceptions of AI are mixed and vary widely based on their understanding of its capabilities, reliability, and potential to replace human judgment [20]. Therefore, assessing the current landscape of nurses' knowledge and attitudes is a critical first step in facilitating a smooth and effective transition toward AI-enhanced critical care.

Previous research has begun to explore health care professionals' perspectives on AI, but studies focused on CCNs within the Middle Eastern context, particularly in Saudi Arabia, remain limited. Understanding the demographic, educational, and experiential factors that influence these perceptions is crucial for developing targeted educational and training programs. As critical care environments become increasingly technologically advanced, ensuring that the nursing workforce is not only proficient but also confident and ethically grounded in using AI is paramount.

This study aimed to bridge this knowledge gap by assessing CCNs' level of knowledge of and general attitudes toward AI in Hail, Saudi Arabia. The findings provide valuable insights for hospital administrators, educators, and policymakers in designing strategies that foster AI literacy and address concerns. The ultimate goal is to harness the full potential of AI to support rather than replace the critical role of nurses in delivering high-acuity patient care.

Methods

Design, Setting, Population, and Sample

A cross-sectional correlational design was used in this study. The target population of this study comprised CCNs employed in public hospitals located in the Hail region. After obtaining institutional review board approval, meetings were conducted

with the heads of critical care units across participating hospitals. In addition, formal communication was established with continuing nursing education offices within these institutions. The survey was designed using Google Forms. The link to the questionnaire and informed consent form was disseminated to the CCNs. Participants were first given an electronic information sheet outlining the study's goals, procedures, risks, benefits, confidentiality measures, and voluntary nature of participation. Data collection was conducted over 3 months, from May 2025 to July 2025. Eligibility criteria required participants to have at least 1 year of continuous experience working in critical care departments, ensuring that only nurses with sufficient exposure to clinical practice in critical situations were included. Nurses serving primarily in administrative roles, as well as those with less than 1 year of critical care department experience, were excluded to maintain a focus on direct patient care providers with adequate professional backgrounds. The required sample size was determined using OpenEpi (version 3.01). On the basis of an estimated total population of approximately 420 CCNs in the region, the minimum sample size necessary to achieve adequate statistical power was 201, with a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error. To enhance representativeness and mitigate the potential impact of nonresponses, 220 self-administered questionnaires were distributed. Of these 220 questionnaires, 203 (92.3%) were returned. The electronic survey required responses to all the items before submission; therefore, there were no missing data.

Instruments

The questionnaire consisted of 3 parts. In the first part, the characteristics of the nurses, including their age, sex, marital status, educational level, years of experience, type of shift work, unit type, and prior experience with AI in health care, were examined. We used a previously validated tool by Swed et al [21] (the Nurses' AI Knowledge Questionnaire) in the second segment of the questionnaire to gauge nurses' awareness of AI. It consists of 7 yes-or-no questions regarding common AI terms used in health care designed to gauge nurses' familiarity with this key vocabulary. The scoring system is as follows: "yes" answers are scored as 1 point, and "no" answers are scored as 0 points. The total score ranges from 0 to 7, with a higher score indicating a higher level of knowledge regarding AI terminology [21]. As Swed et al [21] noted, the Cronbach α value of 0.795 demonstrated the tool's internal consistency among the subscales. In this study, the reliability of this instrument was confirmed with a Cronbach α of 0.765.

The 20-item General Attitudes Toward Artificial Intelligence Scale (GAAIS) created by Schepman and Rodway [22] constituted the third section of the questionnaire. It gauged nurses' opinions on the use of AI in medical environments. The items are divided into positive (12 items) and negative (8 items). Positive items are scored on a 5-point Likert-type scale, with 1 denoting "strongly disagree" and 5 denoting "strongly agree." Negative items are reverse scored, with 1 denoting "strongly agree" and 5 denoting "strongly disagree." Thus, the scores range from 20 to 100, with higher scores on each subscale reflecting more positive attitudes [22]. According to Schepman and Rodway [22], the GAAIS has demonstrated a high degree of internal consistency, with Cronbach α values for the 12

positive items and 8 negative items being 0.88 and 0.82, respectively. In this study, reliability was confirmed with a Cronbach α of 0.969 for positive items and 0.952 for negative items.

Ethical Considerations

Institutional review board approval was obtained from the University of Hail (H-2025-718) on March 10, 2025, and from the Ministry of Health (2025-37) on March 18, 2025. In compliance with institutional review board approval, informed consent was obtained electronically: participants were required to study the information page before completing and submitting the survey, which constituted informed consent. The participants' anonymity and confidentiality were maintained throughout the study. As the survey platform required all items to be completed before submission, there were no partial responses or missing data. No compensation or incentives were provided for participation in the study.

Data Analysis

SPSS Statistics (version 27; IBM Corp) was used to analyze the data. The Shapiro-Wilk test was used to test for normality of the data ($P > .05$). Independent-sample t tests and one-way ANOVA were used to investigate the relationship between the

dependent and independent variables. Using multivariable linear regression analysis, significant factors affecting CCNs' knowledge and attitudes were identified. Correlations between variables were assessed using the Pearson correlation coefficient. The P value was set at less than .05.

Results

Table 1 shows that most participants were aged 20 to 29 years (121/203, 59.6%), male (129/203, 63.5%), and single (140/203, 69%). Most nurses held a bachelor's degree (141/203, 69.5%), worked rotating shifts (131/203, 64.5%), and had 5 years or less of nursing experience (117/203, 57.6%). Younger nurses showed significantly higher knowledge of ($P = .01$) and more positive attitudes toward AI ($P = .002$) than older nurses. Male nurses reported higher knowledge and more positive attitudes than female nurses ($P < .001$ in both cases). Single nurses scored higher on knowledge ($P = .03$) and attitudes ($P = .046$) than married nurses. Nurses with a master's degree had higher knowledge ($P = .02$) and more positive attitudes ($P < .001$) than those with a bachelor's degree. Additionally, nurses with more than 5 years of experience exhibited higher knowledge ($P = .02$) and more positive attitudes ($P < .001$) than less experienced nurses.

Table . Relationship between critical care nurses' (CCNs) sociodemographic characteristics and knowledge of and attitudes toward artificial intelligence (N=203).

Variable and categories	CCNs, n (%)	Knowledge			Attitudes		
		Score (0-7), mean (SD)	<i>t</i> test (<i>df</i>) or <i>F</i> test (<i>df</i>)	<i>P</i> value	Score (20-100), mean (SD)	<i>t</i> test (<i>df</i>) or <i>F</i> test (<i>df</i>)	<i>P</i> value
Age (years)			4.61 (2) ^a	.01		6.55 (2) ^a	.002
20-29	121 (59.6)	5.20 (1.68)			65.60 (8.16)		
30-39	60 (29.6)	4.68 (1.94)			63.96 (8.44)		
≥40	22 (10.8)	4.09 (1.60)			58.90 (5.99)		
Sex			3.78 (201) ^b	<.001		3.54 (201) ^b	<.001
Male	129 (63.5)	5.27 (1.65)			65.90 (8.32)		
Female	74 (36.5)	4.32 (1.85)			61.75 (7.53)		
Marital status			2.20 (201) ^b	.03		1.88 (201) ^b	.046
Single	140 (69.0)	5.11 (1.71)			65.12 (8.62)		
Married	63 (31.0)	4.52 (1.88)			62.77 (7.22)		
Educational level			-2.35 (201) ^b	.02		-4.02 (201) ^b	<.001
Bachelor's	141 (69.5)	4.73 (1.80)			62.90 (7.17)		
Master's	62 (30.5)	5.37 (1.68)			67.79 (9.56)		
Shift type			-0.41 (201) ^b	.68		-1.09 (201) ^b	.28
Day	72 (35.5)	4.86 (1.78)			63.54 (7.79)		
Rotating	131 (64.5)	4.96 (1.79)			64.86 (8.51)		
Experience (years)			-2.41 (201) ^b	.02		-4.38 (201) ^b	<.001
≤5	117 (57.6)	4.67 (1.78)			62.30 (6.91)		
>5	86 (42.4)	5.27 (1.73)			67.23 (9.12)		

^a*F* test.^b2-tailed *t* test.

The mean score for CCNs' knowledge of AI was 4.93 (SD 1.78; range 2 - 7), indicating a moderate level of knowledge. The mean score for attitudes was 64.39 (SD 8.26; range 47 - 95), reflecting a generally positive attitude toward AI (Table 2).

Table 3 shows that there was a moderate positive correlation between CCNs' knowledge of and attitudes toward AI ($r=0.45$; $P<.001$). This finding indicates that higher knowledge levels are associated with more positive attitudes.

Table . Means of critical care nurses' knowledge of and attitudes toward artificial intelligence (N=203).

Variable	Score, mean (SD; range)
Knowledge (0-7)	4.93 (1.78; 2-7)
Attitudes (20-100)	64.39 (8.26; 47-95)

Table . Correlation between study variables (N=203).

	Knowledge	Attitudes
Knowledge	1	0.45
Attitudes	0.45 ^a	1

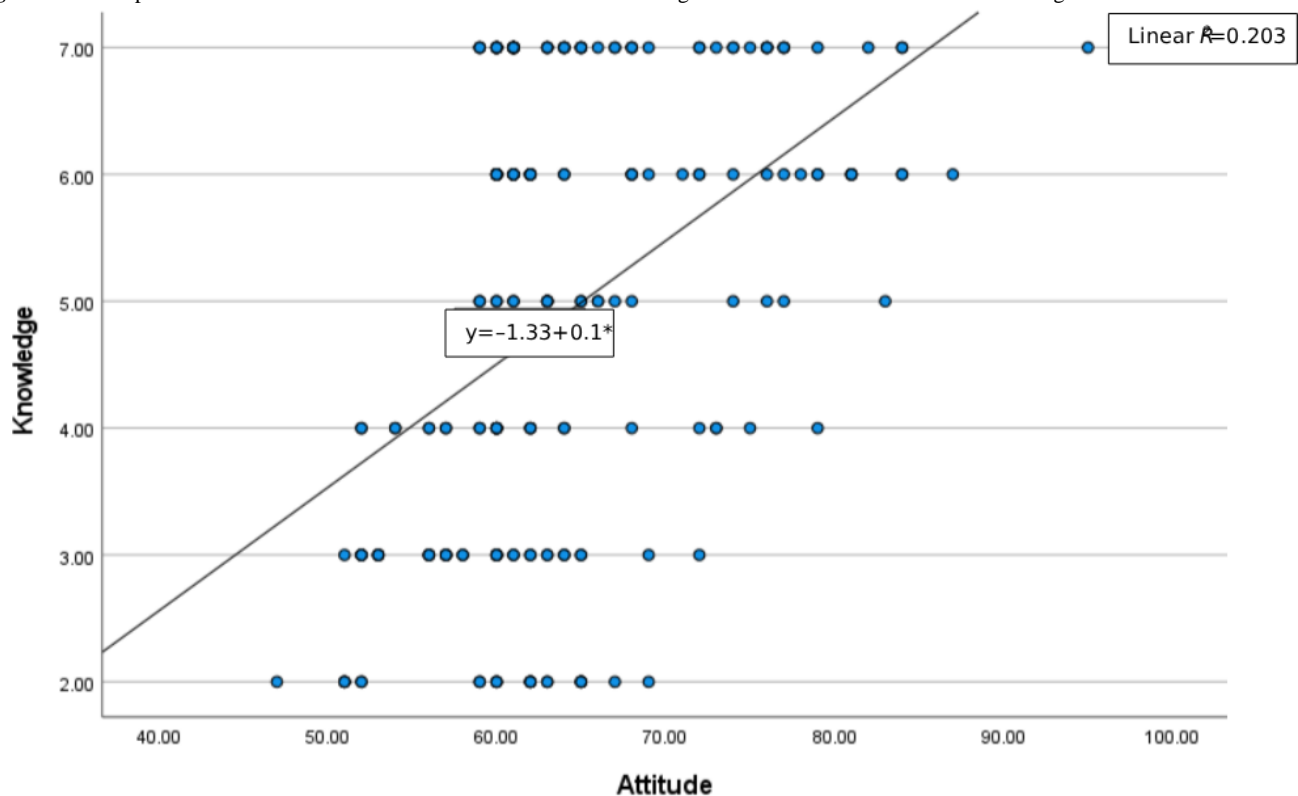
^aCorrelation is significant at the .01 level (2 tailed).

Figure 1 illustrates the moderate positive correlation between CCNs' knowledge of and attitudes toward AI. The scatterplot shows that higher attitude scores were associated with higher

knowledge levels. The regression line indicates a significant positive linear relationship ($R^2=0.20$, $P<.001$), suggesting that

attitudes were associated with approximately 20% of the variance in knowledge.

Figure 1. Scatterplot of the correlation between critical care nurses' knowledge of and attitudes toward artificial intelligence.



The regression models identified several sociodemographic predictors of CCNs' knowledge of and attitudes toward AI. Age and sex were found to be significant predictors of knowledge. Nurses aged 30 to 39 years ($\beta=-0.80$; $P=.02$) and those aged ≥ 40 years ($\beta=-1.29$; $P=.003$) had lower knowledge scores than those aged 20 to 29 years. Similarly, female nurses reported significantly lower knowledge scores than their male counterparts ($\beta=-0.69$; $P=.007$). In contrast, nurses with more than 5 years of experience had significantly higher knowledge levels ($\beta=1.20$; $P<.001$). The model's R^2 was 0.19 (adjusted $R^2=0.17$; $P<.001$), indicating that the included predictors were associated with approximately 19.4% of the variability in knowledge scores.

Age, sex, educational level, and experience were significant predictors of attitudes. Nurses aged 30 to 39 years ($\beta=-4.81$; $P=.001$) and those aged ≥ 40 years ($\beta=-8.97$; $P<.001$) reported less positive attitudes than those aged 20 to 29 years. Female nurses had significantly less positive attitudes than male nurses ($\beta=-2.65$; $P=.02$). Conversely, nurses with a master's degree ($\beta=3.38$; $P=.002$) and those with more than 5 years of experience ($\beta=8.08$; $P<.001$) demonstrated more positive attitudes. The model's R^2 was 0.33 (adjusted $R^2=0.31$; $P<.001$), indicating that the included predictors were associated with approximately 33.2% of the variability in attitude scores (Table 4).

Table . Multiple linear regression for factors affecting critical care nurses' knowledge of and attitudes toward artificial intelligence.

Factor	Knowledge ^a		Attitudes ^b	
	β (95% CI)	<i>P</i> value	β (95% CI)	<i>P</i> value
Age (years)				
20-29	Reference	Reference	Reference	Reference
30-39	-0.80 (-1.47 to -0.14)	.02	-4.81 (-7.59 to -2.02)	.001
≥40	-1.29 (-2.12 to -0.45)	.003	-8.97 (-12.49 to -5.44)	<.001
Gender				
Male	Reference	Reference	Reference	Reference
Female	-0.69 (-1.20 to -0.19)	.007	-2.65 (-4.78 to -0.52)	.02
Marital status				
Single	Reference	Reference	Reference	Reference
Married	-0.44 (-0.98 to 0.10)	.11	-1.73 (-4.01 to 0.55)	.14
Educational level				
Bachelor's degree	Reference	Reference	Reference	Reference
Master's degree	0.40 (-0.10 to 0.90)	.12	3.38 (1.270 to 5.492)	.002
Experience (years)				
≤5	Reference	Reference	Reference	Reference
>5	1.20 (0.65 to 1.75)	<.001	8.08 (5.76 to 10.41)	<.001

^a $R^2=0.19$; adjusted $R^2=0.17$; $P<.001$.

^b $R^2=0.33$; adjusted $R^2=0.31$; $P<.001$.

Discussion

CCNs' Knowledge of and Attitudes Toward AI

This study provides a timely investigation of CCNs' knowledge of and attitudes toward AI in the Hail region of Saudi Arabia, a context undergoing rapid digital transformation as part of Vision 2030. The findings revealed a moderate level of AI knowledge (mean score 4.93, SD 1.78) and a generally positive attitude (mean score 64.39, SD 8.26) among CCNs. Crucially, a significant positive correlation was established, indicating that higher levels of AI knowledge were associated with more favorable attitudes. This aligns with the technology acceptance model (TAM), which posits that perceived usefulness and ease of use are key determinants of technology adoption and that these perceptions are inherently linked to an individual's understanding of the technology [23-25]. Our results suggest that educational interventions aimed at improving AI literacy could be a powerful lever for enhancing acceptance among the nursing workforce.

Predictors of CCNs' Knowledge of and Attitudes Toward AI

Sociodemographic analyses yielded insightful results. Younger nurses (aged 20-29 years) exhibited significantly higher knowledge and more positive attitudes than their older counterparts. This generational divide is consistent with the broader literature on technology adoption, where younger individuals, often "digital natives," tend to be more comfortable and familiar with emerging technologies [26,27]. This finding underscores the need for age-tailored training programs that

support more experienced nurses in developing comparable levels of perceived ease of use and usefulness, thereby reducing TAM-related barriers among older staff while leveraging their clinical expertise.

Gender emerged as a significant predictor, with male nurses reporting higher knowledge and more positive attitudes than female nurses. This disparity may reflect broader societal and educational trends in the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics fields, where gender gaps in confidence and participation persist [28]. In the nursing context, which is predominantly female in many countries but has a different demographic profile in regions such as Saudi Arabia, this finding underscores the need for equitable access to AI training and leadership opportunities. Ensuring that these opportunities are encouraging and available to all genders is essential to preventing a new form of digital gender divide within the profession. From a TAM perspective, such differences may translate into unequal perceptions of ease of use and self-efficacy with AI systems, highlighting the importance of designing AI training and leadership opportunities that actively foster confidence and perceived control among women to prevent a digital gender divide in nursing.

Educational attainment has a strong positive influence. Nurses with a master's degree had significantly more positive attitudes and higher knowledge scores than those with a bachelor's degree. This finding reinforces the pivotal role of advanced education in fostering a forward-looking, evidence-based, and innovative mindset. This suggests that integrating AI concepts and applications into postgraduate nursing curricula is essential

for preparing future nurse leaders [6,29]. Furthermore, contrary to what might be assumed, nurses with more than 5 years of experience reported higher knowledge and more positive attitudes. This compelling finding challenges the notion that experienced clinicians are resistant to change. Instead, it implies that experienced nurses, with their developed clinical expertise, may better appreciate AI's potential to alleviate cognitive burdens, reduce errors, and enhance patient safety [11].

The regression models indicated that 19.4% of the variance in knowledge and 33.2% of the variance in attitudes were related to demographic factors. However, other variables not measured in this study also played a significant role. These could include organizational culture, quality of previous technology implementation experiences, perceived organizational support for training, and the level of trust in the institution's data governance and ethical frameworks [30,31]. Future research should explore these organizational and psychological determinants to provide a more holistic understanding of the factors that influence AI integration in nursing.

Correlation Between CCNs' Knowledge of and Attitudes Toward AI

The moderate positive correlation between knowledge and attitude ($r=0.45$; $P<.001$) strongly implies that resistance or skepticism toward AI is not unchangeable but can be mitigated through education and exposure. Within the TAM framework, this implies that structured education and meaningful hands-on experience can reshape nurses' beliefs about AI's usefulness and ease of use, moving them from passive compliance to active, informed adoption of AI tools in clinical workflows. This finding aligns with the work by Dornan [32], who suggested that a basic understanding of AI is essential for its acceptance and use in clinical practice. When nurses understand how AI works, what it can offer, and what its limits are, the technology becomes less intimidating [32]. This awareness helps them move from being passive recipients of change to being active and informed participants. Such a shift encourages genuine engagement rather than simple compliance [32]. Therefore, the observed link highlights the need for targeted education programs designed to build nurses' confidence and skills in working with AI, ensuring that technology, rather than distance, enhances nursing care. Thus, the primary barrier is not an inherent opposition to technology but a lack of structured and accessible education on what AI truly entails in nursing practice.

Implications for Nursing Education and Practice

The findings underscore the need for specific measures to improve AI preparedness among nurses through education. Older, female, and less experienced nurses had less knowledge of and a negative attitude toward AI, suggesting possible gaps in confidence and exposure that must be addressed through systematic training activities. Incorporating fundamental AI principles and practical applications into undergraduate and postgraduate nursing courses is critical for ensuring that all future nurses are prepared to work with developing technology. In nursing practice, continuing professional development programs that include practical training, simulation-based learning, and case-based scenarios can help improve comprehension and minimize anxiety. Furthermore, nursing

professionals with a more optimistic mindset can act as clinical representatives to assist in collaborative learning and ensure the smooth integration of AI in critical care settings. Improving AI literacy across the nursing profession will eventually lead to safer and more efficient clinical practice and successful incorporation of AI-driven strategies in patient care.

These findings are particularly important in the context of Saudi Arabia's ambitious health sector reforms. For AI to be successfully leveraged to build a robust, data-driven health care system as envisioned in Vision 2030, the readiness of the nursing workforce is fundamental. Aligning educational strategies, professional development, and organizational policies with TAM principles by explicitly targeting perceived usefulness, ease of use, and supportive conditions can help translate the current foundational willingness among nurses into sustained, confident use of AI in everyday practice. Our study confirms that foundational willingness is present but must be actively cultivated through targeted, demographically sensitive, and continuous educational strategies.

Strengths and Limitations

This study has several strengths. First, it addresses a significant gap in the literature by focusing specifically on CCNs in the underresearched Middle Eastern context, thus providing valuable insights for regional policymaking and educational planning. The use of validated instruments such as the Nurses' AI Knowledge Questionnaire and the GAAIS enhances the reliability and validity of the findings. Furthermore, the high response rate (203/220, 92.3% returned questionnaires) and rigorous sample size calculation strengthened the statistical power and representativeness of the results for the target population in Hail.

Despite these strengths, this study has several limitations that must be acknowledged. The cross-sectional correlational design captures a snapshot in time and cannot establish causality between the variables. This study was conducted in a single region of Saudi Arabia (Hail), which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other regions or countries with different cultural and health care infrastructures. The reliance on self-reported data for knowledge and attitudes is susceptible to social desirability bias, in which participants may have provided answers that they believed were expected rather than their true beliefs. Finally, the knowledge assessment was based on a 7-item yes-or-no questionnaire, which, while reliable, may not capture the full depth and nuance of a nurse's understanding of AI concepts and applications.

Recommendations

On the basis of this study's findings, the following recommendations are proposed.

Recommendations for Practice

Health care institutions should implement structured, ongoing AI education programs that build basic literacy for all CCNs and provide advanced modules for those in higher-responsibility roles. These programs should use practical, critical care examples to enhance perceived usefulness and ease of use. Targeted support is also needed for older and female nurses

who showed lower knowledge and more negative attitudes through tailored workshops, mentorship, and simulation-based training to ensure equitable AI readiness. Additionally, nurses with master's degrees and more than 5 years of experience should be leveraged as AI champions to mentor colleagues and support effective implementation across critical care teams.

Recommendations for Education

Nursing schools and universities should integrate core AI content—concepts, clinical applications, ethics, and limitations—into undergraduate curricula while expanding advanced, practice-oriented AI training in postgraduate programs, reflecting the strong association between higher education and more positive perceptions. Alignment between academic preparation and workplace training will create a continuous pipeline of nurses who are both knowledgeable about and favorably disposed toward AI in critical care.

Recommendations for Policy

Hospital leadership and AI developers should systematically involve CCNs from diverse age groups, genders, and educational backgrounds in the design, piloting, and evaluation of AI tools because the regression results suggest that attitudes and knowledge are shaped partly by contextual and experiential factors beyond demographics alone. Participatory

implementation can improve the perceived relevance and usability of AI systems, thereby reinforcing the positive relationship between knowledge and attitudes and supporting Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 for a technology-driven, nurse-ready health care system.

Conclusions

This study demonstrated that CCNs in Hail, Saudi Arabia, possess a moderate level of knowledge and a generally positive attitude toward AI, with a clear correlation between the 2. Key sociodemographic factors, including age, sex, educational level, and clinical experience, significantly influenced these perceptions. The findings underscore that the successful integration of AI into critical care is not a technological challenge but a human-centric one. Readiness of the nursing workforce is a critical determinant of success. By investing in comprehensive, inclusive, and continuous education and actively involving nurses in the development process, health care leaders can harness the full potential of AI. This will ensure that these powerful technologies act as supportive tools that augment the clinical judgment and compassionate care provided by nurses, ultimately leading to enhanced patient outcomes and the realization of a technologically advanced, efficient, and resilient health care system as envisioned in the Saudi Vision 2030.

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Data Availability

The datasets generated or analyzed during this study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Authors' Contributions

Conceptualization: HA

Data curation: HA, SMA, NA, KAS, HL, SAA

Formal analysis: SAA

Investigation: HA, SMA, NA, KAS, HL

Methodology: HA, SAA

Resources: HA, SAA

Validation: HA

Visualization: HA

Writing – original draft: HA

Writing – review & editing: HA, SMA, NA, KAS, HL, SAA

All authors read, revised, and accepted the final version of the manuscript for publication.

Conflicts of Interest

None declared.

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Abbreviations

AI: artificial intelligence

CCN: critical care nurse

GAAIS: General Attitudes Toward Artificial Intelligence Scale

TAM: technology acceptance model

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Patients' Perceptions of the Role of Nursing in Substance Use Disorder Treatment Programs: Qualitative Study

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Abstract

Background: Substance use disorders are chronic conditions with significant personal and social consequences. Nursing care plays a key role in outpatient and community-based rehabilitation programs, yet patients' perspectives on this role remain underexplored.

Objective: This study aimed to explore how patients with substance use disorders perceive and interpret nursing care in community addiction treatment centers operated by the Spanish Red Cross in Madrid, Spain. Specifically, it sought to describe the organizational and care-related roles attributed to community addiction treatment centers and analyze patients' perceptions of nurses' technical and relational functions.

Methods: A phenomenological qualitative design was used. Fourteen in-depth, semistructured interviews were conducted with patients undergoing treatment at Red Cross centers. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure diversity in age, gender, substance use, and treatment experiences. The data were analyzed using systematic text condensation and supported by the ATLAS.ti software.

Results: The center is perceived as a significant space not only for offering healthy leisure activities outside the context of substance use but also as a supportive environment that fosters a sense of belonging to a community. Patients valued the emotional support, empathy, and relational care provided by nurses, often highlighting their role in building trust and offering personalized attention. However, there was limited awareness of nurses' technical competencies.

Conclusions: These findings underscore the importance of holistic, patient-centered care and the need to enhance the visibility and recognition of nursing roles in addiction treatment settings.

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KEYWORDS

nurse's role; nursing staff; qualitative research; substance-related disorder; psychiatric nursing

Introduction

Background

Substance use disorders (SUDs) are defined by the *DSM-5 (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition)* as the "association of cognitive, behavioral, and physiological symptoms that indicate that the person continues to use a substance despite significant problems related to that substance" [1]. Globally, substance use represents a major public health concern and contributes substantially to the burden of disease, being associated with increased mortality, disability,

and chronic conditions, such as liver disease, cancer, and infectious diseases [2-4]. SUDs commonly coexist with psychiatric disorders, particularly mood and anxiety disorders, which complicate treatment and worsen prognosis [3,5,6]. Consequently, SUDs can have a profound impact on a person's identity, causing individuals to lose their sense of self, which can manifest itself as a change in values and priorities, a deterioration of self-image, social disconnection, or a break with previous roles [5,6].

This individual impact underscores why SUDs represent a global challenge with serious consequences at the individual level. In 2025, there were 51,255 admissions to treatment for

psychoactive substance dependence in Spain, representing an increase of 9.7% over the previous year [7]. Moreover, adherence to rehabilitation programs is often limited, with high dropout rates reported internationally and frequently linked to psychosocial vulnerability and difficulties in establishing therapeutic relationships with health care professionals [3].

Beyond physical and mental health consequences, SUDs also affect identity and social functioning, contributing to stigma, social disconnection, and loss of social roles [3]. In Europe, treatment demand continues to rise, with 51,255 admissions for psychoactive substance dependence recorded in 2025, representing a 9.7% increase compared with the previous year [7,8].

Although SUDs affect people of all genders, treatment-seeking populations in community addiction services are often predominantly male, which may lead to the underrepresentation of women's experiences in qualitative studies [6-8]. This is of relevance given the established role of gender in shaping pathways into substance use, the associated stigma, exposure to violence or trauma, caregiving responsibilities, and help-seeking behaviors. These factors might shape how nursing care is perceived and what forms of support are most beneficial. Therefore, incorporating a gender perspective might be essential when interpreting patients' accounts and designing nursing interventions in community addiction treatment centers [9].

Prior Work

Evidence-based rehabilitation programs have been shown to reduce the use of illegal opioids and improve patients' physical and mental well-being, as well as their quality of life [8]. These programs adopt a holistic approach, with a multidisciplinary team comprising nurses, psychologists, physicians, social workers, and occupational therapists. Furthermore, the centers where these programs are implemented administer substitution treatment and provide social support and nursing care [8,10]. The ideal outcome of substance use rehabilitation is a state of balance and control, where the person feels empowered to manage their life without relying on substances that alter their mental state [7,8]. This process involves a reconstruction of the individual's identity through a series of behavioral modifications, facilitated by health care professionals [7,9,10]. However, it is estimated that up to 40% of patients withdraw from these programs. In this context, the support and participation of a multidisciplinary team, including nurses, is an empowering element in addressing this condition [11].

The concept of care is understood as a natural phenomenon. The patient's world, vulnerability, health, and suffering form the core of this concept [12]. The science of care not only facilitates the treatment of disease but also addresses patients' emotional and social needs, thereby promoting their overall well-being. The quality of care is known to improve when health care professionals make a conscious effort to understand the world from the patient's perspective. This, in turn, strengthens the therapeutic relationship and promotes better care outcomes. A profound understanding of the experiences and perspectives of patients with SUDs is imperative for the development of patient-centered care. This knowledge facilitates the design of personalized interventions, tailored to the specific needs of this

vulnerable population [13,14]. By exploring the subjective experiences of these patients in relation to their care, areas for improvement in health services can be identified, more empathetic and culturally sensitive practices can be promoted, and barriers to access and adherence to treatment can be addressed. This comprehensive strategy for addressing SUDs has the capacity to markedly enhance patients' quality of life, diminish the social disapproval associated with substance use, and ensure optimal long-term therapeutic outcomes [15].

Despite the presence of nursing in SUD rehabilitation programs, the literature indicates that its role continues to be invisible and poorly understood by both patients and society. In community and outpatient settings, nursing work tends to be diluted within the multidisciplinary team, making it difficult to identify its specific functions [13,14]. However, in addiction treatment centers (CATCs), nurses carry out key interventions that include comprehensive patient assessment, clinical follow-up, health education, administration and supervision of substitution treatments, early detection of relapses, crisis care, and, especially, the establishment of a therapeutic relationship based on trust and continuous support during the rehabilitation process [16]. This apparent contradiction between the relevance of care and the low social recognition of the nursing role justifies the need to explore how users themselves perceive and understand this care [13,17].

Study Objectives

However, there is a significant gap in the literature on the perception of patients with SUDs regarding the role of nurses in rehabilitation programs [16,17].

The primary aim of this study is to explore the experiences and perceptions of patients with SUDs regarding the nursing care they receive in outpatient and community settings in Spain. Specifically, the study seeks to analyze patients' perception of the role of nursing staff, considering both the technical and relational dimensions of nursing care as experienced by users and to describe the organizational and care role that users attribute to Red Cross CATCs in Madrid (Spain), including resources, routines, and processes involved.

Methods

The question of how the role of nursing is perceived in the context of patients with SUDs undergoing rehabilitation programs lends itself to a qualitative approach, specifically a phenomenological study. Qualitative research focuses on understanding the world of the participants [18].

Study Design

The researchers were interested in how patients recover from SUDs and how they perceive the role of nurses in this process. It was therefore determined that qualitative research would best meet the objective. To gain a deeper understanding of this experience, a phenomenological study was conducted, as in-depth interviews allow the emotional, social, and personal nuances of the rehabilitation process to be captured, as well as the importance of support from nurses [19-21]. This research was conducted based on the recommendations of the COREQ guide [22].

Participants

Patients diagnosed with SUDs according to the *DSM-5* [1] were selected.

Eligibility Criteria

The inclusion criteria established at the beginning of the study were as follows: participants had to be enrolled in a rehabilitation program, be over 18 years of age, and be able to speak Spanish. Patients who did not wish to participate in the study or who were physically and/or mentally unable to complete the interview properly were excluded from the study.

Study Sample

A sample of participants was intentionally selected to represent a range of age groups, socioeconomic backgrounds, recovery times, genders, and experiences regarding substance use and the impact of nurses during the rehabilitation process. Furthermore, the data were collated pertaining to the participants' date of birth, gender, marital status, substance of abuse, alcohol consumption, and number of prior admissions to rehabilitation programs (Multimedia Appendix 1).

Of the 15 participants, 14 were male, and 1 was female. The ages of the participants ranged from 32 to 78 years (Table S1 in Multimedia Appendix 1). The participants' demographic profile was as follows: 8 were unmarried, 4 were divorced, 2 were married, and none were widowed. The participants consumed a variety of substances, including alcohol, cannabis, cocaine, heroin, opioids, methamphetamines, ecstasy, ketamine, hallucinogens and magic mushrooms, spice, mephedrone, salvia, gamma hydroxybutyrate, and lysergic acid diethylamide. The substances most frequently used were cannabis, heroin, cocaine, and alcohol. The number of previous admissions to rehabilitation programs ranged from 1 to 10. All participants were enrolled in the Red Cross rehabilitation program in Madrid, Spain.

Access to the Population

Initially, the researchers identified the various support structures for treatment and posttreatment within the Red Cross organization. In-depth interviews were conducted at 2 Red Cross CATCs in Madrid (Spain).

The management team and the multidisciplinary team at the centers were contacted, and meetings were organized to discuss the research objective and obtain the help of the various professionals in identifying participants. Participants were recruited through purposive sampling, following a preliminary presentation of the study to patients at the Red Cross centers together with the center's management team. Factors that would facilitate a more nuanced categorization of the work were considered, particularly regarding the perception of the nursing role in individual interviews.

Data Collection

In-depth, individual, semistructured interviews were conducted in person with 15 participants. One participant decided to leave the interview after 14 minutes of recording, so a total of 14 patients completed the interviews. The average interview duration was 45 (SD 15.3) minutes, and the interviews were conducted in convenient settings, such as individual rooms at

the CATCs, to ensure privacy. The interviews were conducted between January and April 2023. All interviews commenced with the following opening statement: "Please provide a brief overview of your professional background and the circumstances that led to your involvement in this field." The flexibility of this qualitative interview methodology enabled participants to share their experiences from their own perspective. Open-ended questions and prompts were strategically used to explore turning points, support, situations, and coping strategies when participants were reluctant to share them. The following questions and prompts were included: "Please find below a list of the key responsibilities that nurses in this institution typically have" (Multimedia Appendix 1). With the prior consent of the participants, the interviews were audio recorded. The data collection protocol for the interviews was consistent for all patients. Interviews were transcribed immediately after completion. Data collection ceased once sample saturation was reached [23].

Trustworthiness

The criteria used to ensure reliability, in accordance with Guba's contributions to naturalistic research, encompass credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability [24].

Credibility

All interviews were recorded, and the exact duration of each session was documented, with additional field notes providing further elaboration and complement.

Transference

The processes followed, both for data collection and subsequent analysis, have been described in detail.

Dependence

The data collection process and the instrument used for conducting the interview have been delineated and included (Multimedia Appendix 1). Furthermore, members have been added to the working team at different stages to carry out triangulation processes in the negotiation of meanings.

Neutrality

The saturation of messages and the inclusion of direct quotes in the final report ensure neutrality in the analysis of the data.

Analysis

The transcriptions of these recordings were then produced. Subsequently, a comparison was made between the recordings and transcripts to ensure accuracy. Thereafter, a systematic condensation of the text was carried out in the analytical process, with the following 4 steps [25]: first, the transcripts were read to obtain an overview and identify preliminary themes, with annotations made in the text. Second, a series of codes and code groups were developed. In the event of the emergence of divergent codes, the most appropriate ones were agreed upon to develop a shared understanding. Third, each code group was identified and condensed into categories, which were incorporated into the report, with relevant quotes selected for inclusion. Finally, the condensed subgroups were synthesized to generalize descriptions and concepts of the patients' experiences [26,27]. The data analysis was iterative and began

concurrently with data collection, using the constant comparison method as described by Strauss and Corbin [23] to identify commonalities and variations across cases progressively incorporated.

The ATLAS.ti program (version 25.0.1) was used for the analysis, as were the Office suite and Microsoft Excel for descriptive data analysis, and Microsoft Teams for facilitating digital collaboration during coding.

Ethical Considerations

This study has been approved by the Ethics Committee of the Complutense University of Madrid (Reference: CE_20221215 - 06_SAL). Furthermore, the study was conducted in accordance with the principles set out in the Declaration of Helsinki. In addition, to comply with the code of ethics for good practice in the collection of information for this research project, the resources provided by the Complutense University of Madrid have been accessed. The data have been anonymized, with all names appearing in the text being fictitious (Table S1 in [Multimedia Appendix 1](#)). Reasonable and appropriate physical, administrative, and technical measures have been taken to protect personal data from loss, misuse, unauthorized access, disclosure, alteration, or destruction.

Participants were at liberty to accept or decline participation, and those who agreed to participate signed consent forms. It is important to note that no form of compensation was provided or offered to any of the participants.

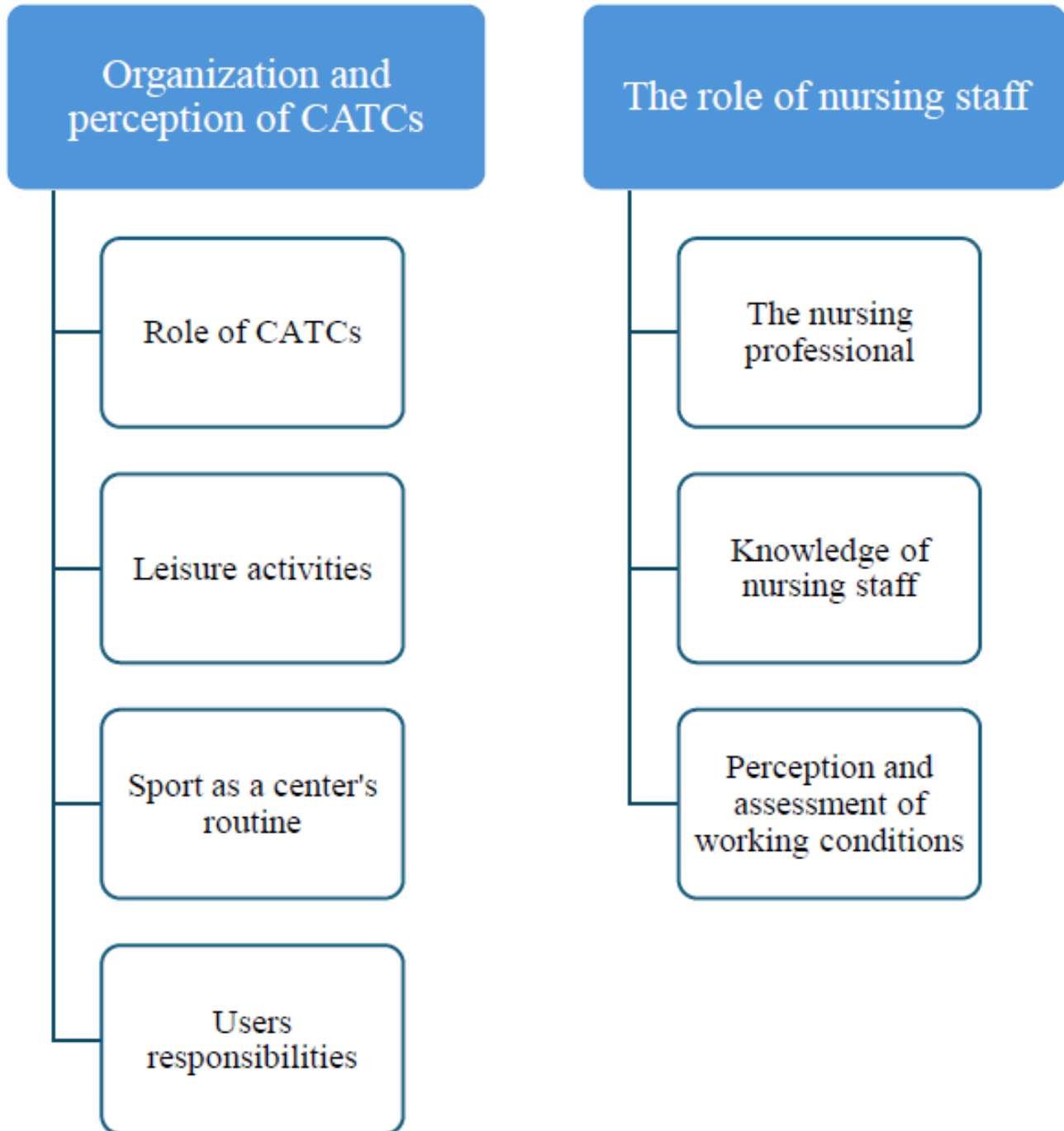
Results

Participant Characteristics

All participants had received a confirmed diagnosis of SUDs prior to the interview. Of the 15 participants, 14 were male, 8 (54%) were single, 5 (33%) were divorced, and 2 (13%) were married. The mean age of the subjects was 48.2 years (SD 9.28). The substances most frequently consumed were cocaine—used by 13 (86%) of the participants—cannabis and alcohol ([Multimedia Appendix 2](#)). The mean number of previous admissions to rehabilitation centers within the sample was 2.5 (SD 2.4).

In the following section, the results of the empirical investigation will be presented. The data obtained from the interviews have been organized into 2 overarching categories, which are related to the research objectives and questions ([Figure 1](#)). All these categories have been framed from the perspective of the users.

Figure 1. Emerging categories from patient narratives: organization of community addiction treatment centers (CATCs) and the nursing role.



The Role of CATCs

Key Functions of CATCs

The role of Red Cross CATCs is pivotal in helping participants to stop using substances. The interviews revealed several issues. First, these centers play a significant role in helping individuals stop using substances, particularly through measures such as prescribing methadone as a substitute for heroin: “This is how I became acquainted with the CATCs and the process of heroin substitution” (Óscar). It was also noted that the center offers users the possibility to have meals on-site and to receive support with various arrangements, including transport and mobility-related matters. “Additionally, my transport card is

being loaded, which is a modest amount of four euros and a few cents” (Óscar).

The same user commented on the existence of these rehabilitation centers. He said that he had gone “to a hospital because I didn’t know that the CATCs existed” (Óscar).

Leisure Activities

The importance of leisure activities in the daily lives of participants emerged as a recurring theme in the interviews, with all interviewees highlighting it as a central focus. Javier succinctly summarizes the routine of a typical day at the center, characterizing it as “attending therapy sessions.” This assertion is corroborated by the observations of other participants, such as Oscar, who states: “At the Red Cross therapy centre (...) it

helps me a lot because I was busy all day and I didn't have any nonsense going through my head." These centers, as a result, organize a variety of activities and "workshops on drugs, gender, reading ..." (Chema), which are emphasized in the interviews. Daniel elucidates the manner these centers provide support:

It's like, like, like a house where you can't just sleep. They also make us feel like this is our home. The Red Cross treats us very well and they really love us; they truly love us. I mean, it's not just a pat on the back and that's it. They are ... it's a complete embrace, from heart to heart.

As well as the points raised by Chema, there have been repeated mentions of board games, music, and dance workshops. The latter has been of particular interest, given the work carried out by the volunteer running them:

She herself, who is not like all the other workshops that are all about that, about drugs, about you, about these, about others ... No, she plays music and says, "Now you do whatever you want" and "Now you dance, and now you ... and now everyone together here and now everyone there ... now everyone ..." I mean ... she makes you forget everything at that moment. No, you don't think about your problems, you don't have time to think about anything bad, or anything that could hurt you, that could ... She doesn't give you time, she doesn't let you. She's full of life. [María]

Sport in the Center's Routines

Sport has also been mentioned in numerous interviews, often referred to as "sports activities in the morning" (Paco). To that end, the following activities have been outlined:

- "Playing table tennis or cycling or exercising." (Rodolfo)
- "Some days it's Tai Chi, other days they go walking." (Maria)
- "I played volleyball, which I hadn't played in years." (Roberto)
- "Now we are cycling." (Antonio)

In addition, sport has been referenced on a single occasion as a concomitant treatment for other conditions: "I come walking to get some exercise because of my diabetes" (Chema).

Users' Responsibilities in the Centers

Leisure time is also spent carrying out different responsibilities assigned by the center:

Oh, and if it's your turn to do the office work, you have to set the table. If it's your turn to wash up, you have to wash up too, and so on. [Fulgencio]

"As for routines ... we have a plan too ... there's a ... a notebook where they write down when we have to prepare meals, wash the dishes ... That's how we keep busy. ... the manager of the centre writes it down for everyone. And on days when it's my turn, it's someone else's turn ... When it's my turn, I have to serve the tables, then clear the dishes, take out the rubbish bins ... and so on, routine stuff ... To clean the dishes, then

dry them ... That's how it works, I don't know, to keep us busier." [Óscar]

Then one day it's your turn to wash the dishes and another week you're in charge. You're responsible for distributing the food and so on, but hey, they're supervising you. [Rodolfo]

Functions of the Nursing Professional

Role of Nurses in CATCs

A variety of professionals are employed in these centers, including nurses, doctors, psychiatrists, psychologists, and occupational therapists. Nurses have been the central focus of the work, and they have taken up a large part of the interview time. The functions of nursing staff are those that have been most frequently mentioned in the coding process, in relation to the perception of this group. It is generally understood that the profession is held in high regard by its users. There are some very compelling testimonials in this regard:

At the Jiménez-Díaz Foundation, nurses treat you excellently. I can't say anything bad about healthcare here in Spain or about the nurses, they are all lovely and very professional. [Roberto]

These comments are not isolated, as they are reinforced by other comments that echo the same sentiment.

For example, Roberto stated:

The nurse who works with the doctor [at the CATC] (...) is a lovely girl, she is super friendly, she is a sweetheart. Professionally, she is excellent, as they say. And also, she was very concerned and asked me: are you okay?

Daniel also commented that "the treatment by the nursing staff [at the CATC] was very good, very good, very good." He particularly highlighted the treatment by the nurse above all others. When asked about the care that had meant the most to him, he pointed to the emotional support provided by a nurse:

I'm very clear about this. It's (...) a nurse I had at the shelter [at the CATC] (...), accompanying me to an ambulance because I have tinnitus. Then they were saying bad things to me, and she was the first person I talked about it. And that, and how she accompanied me and went down the stairs with me ... I was shaking because I didn't want to go to the ambulance, I didn't want to go there. I was terrified of being alone for even a second with the voice. And that's the most the nurses have done for me. [Daniel]

On occasion, this positive perception was intertwined with the work of the entire team, as Antonio noted:

Here [at the CATC] we have a psychologist, a social worker, a nurse, the manager, very good people, the workers too. They get angry, which is normal sometimes, but they are people.

The testimonies are intricately interwoven throughout the interview, thereby underscoring the human dimensions of the nursing professional. Various statements highlight the staff's

attentiveness and their provision of empathetic listening and support, in response to the most useful care they have received:

Therapies where you can talk, like two people. You know what I mean? Being able to sit down, two people. You, with a therapist, being able to sit down and have .. him being able to tell you about his problems and you being able to tell him your problems, having someone there to talk to unburden yourself. Telling him, "Look, I got out of bed and cried." I cried because of this, because of this and because of this, and being able to tell you ... your things and him being able to tell you his things. [Jorge]

This girl ... the girl on the other side, at the Red Cross [at the CATC]. She ... I saw that she was concerned about my situation the first day I went there. I ... I thought she was a psychologist rather than a nurse, from the time I spent talking to her and expressing my feelings, my experiences, where I came from, where I was going, and why I found myself where I was. I was there for, I don't know, two hours, three hours, talking to her, and she was a nurse, not a psychologist. And she was concerned about ... about how I was doing. [Jero]

Even when pointing out other functions, Paco considered that

the way the staff [at the CATC] treat you is what matters most ... because that's what affects you the most. But then, of course, each person ... the pills and so on ... also have an influence. But ... the way they treat you is what attracts you the most.

Rehabilitation programs were also identified as particularly valuable forms of care, with participants citing the significance of being listened to in difficult situations:

My nurse [at the primary care centre], who has helped me to trust her a little, weigh myself, tell her when I have used drugs and when I haven't, give thanks, I am grateful to the people who have been helping me since 2015. And even though I messed up and stuff, they did everything they could to help me (...) see what we needed. [Óscar]

In other words, the same patient insisted:

She was teaching nursing classes here, for everyone. That was very positive because there were classes on all kinds of illnesses, how to use pills ... There were also classes on quitting smoking, how to quit smoking ... There are workshops for people who want to quit smoking too. These workshops are run by nurses. That's all I can say for now because I can't remember anything else. [Óscar]

María was very clear on this point: "They [at the primary care center] ... do a bit of psychology and nursing, kind of combining the two." Another user, Jero, who had already pointed out the importance of nursing staff's ability to listen, emphasized the importance this can have in other therapeutic aspects, such as methadone use:

Well, if this is the first day—I said—"it shouldn't take too long." He [at the CATC] offered me something ..., which was methadone, and I said, "Look, I don't want that, I've never taken that in my life, but I'm afraid, because I've heard that there are people who spend their whole lives taking that crap." I said, "Well, let's start with a very, very small amount. Let's see if that's enough for you and then we'll reduce it." "Okay, I'll accept it, because of the way you've treated me, because I can see that you're someone who cares about the situation I'm in without knowing me at all, and because I've ... I've opened up to you and told you about ... my plans." It was really good, to be honest, that's the part I'm most grateful for. [Jero]

Knowledge of Nursing Staff

During the interviews, references to the work of nurses were particularly prevalent, especially in discussions of more general topics and when the work functions of the entire team were intertwined. There are numerous examples of this phenomenon, particularly in relation to the role of the doctor. For instance, when asked about the duties of a nurse, Paco replied:

Well, we ... I, for example, go up to cognitive workshop, which was today ... to the girl in cognitive workshop [at the CATC]. And then, in case you have ... there's the doctor, the doctor in case something happens to you. I have a toothache and I ask him for ... a pill for toothache because it hurts and I still haven't ... I go to the medical centre by bus and I always forget to stop at medicine.

Another patient intermingled the roles of different professionals in his reflections:

I haven't had much ... much ... much experience with nurses, because as I'm new, I haven't had much time. What I do have is a good day centre, which I've had for two days now, OK? And I only have experience with Susana, who is my psychologist, and with Dr. Felipe, I don't know if you know him. They are the only ones I have experience with. [Roberto]

Comparisons were even drawn between nurses and doctors:

You know more. You are not doctors, but we can trust you more than doctors. I am quite bold, having been a salesperson all my life, so I don't mind, but ... I think a doctor can be more reserved than a nurse. [Eduardo]

These relationships and role confusions are not exclusive to CATCs, as they also mentioned past experiences in which they highlighted the importance of nurses in primary care centers:

At the mutual insurance company, for example, this leg that I told you I hurt while cleaning ambulances, they treated me like a queen. Both in physiotherapy and in ... when it came to medication, creams, everything, and all for free. [María]

Not everyone knows about nursing. There are things that if you have, if you have a wound here, you put

Betadine on it or whatever and that's it. But there are things that they have to give you. They have to tell you, "Look, the stretch consists of squats, this, that and the other, OK?" (...) Well then, I think that time should also be used to ... I see that they devote a lot of time to older people [at the primary care centre]. [Maria]

Perception and Assessment of Working Conditions

Another noteworthy aspect that emerged from the interviews was related to working conditions, including issues of overburden:

Well, I can see that he's a bit overworked, but even so, he's always available [at the CATC]. Yes, if I could add something ... a little help, give him some assistance. Because he does tests, dispenses medication, sees patients ... You don't have to make an appointment with him. Because you talk to him beforehand and Julián is immediately available. [Chema]

Appointments take a long time. For example, those at the public centre and at the outpatient clinics too. Sometimes they can't see you, even if it's an emergency, because they have someone else who maybe ... well, you say it yourself ... I mean, I don't pay for my medication, do I? Because I earn very little. So there are times when I've had to buy the medication because I needed it at that moment because they don't have enough nurses [referring to nurses in outpatient/primary care consultations]. They keep cutting back instead of ... providing more for the population. [María]

This same patient, María, concluded very clearly: "I think people should be given more permanent jobs."

Discussion

Principal Results

Patients with SUDs perceive nursing care positively, although they predominantly highlight relational aspects, such as accompaniment, active listening, and trust. In some cases, there appears to be a lack of awareness regarding nursing functions, particularly those within the scientific and technical domains. The results of this study provide valuable insight into how patients with SUDs value and interpret the nursing care they receive in outpatient and community-based rehabilitation programs in Spain.

From a phenomenological perspective, understanding patients' perceptions of the role of nursing requires first delving into their personal history of substance use. This is not merely a chronological account of events; it is a complex network of lived experiences, emotions, social relationships, and meanings attributed to the substance and its effects [28]. The mean number of previous admissions to rehabilitation centers in the sample was 2.5 (SD 2.4). This aspect also frequently features in patients' accounts, highlighting the chronic nature of SUDs and the difficulties in achieving sustained rehabilitation over time [4,7,28].

Participants offered a largely favorable evaluation of the center, regarding it as a vital asset in their rehabilitation process. This positive perception appears to be associated with the multidisciplinary team, comprising doctors, psychologists, social workers, occupational therapists, and nurses. The team's role is to address both the physical and psychological aspects of treatment and provide comprehensive support that extends beyond a purely clinical approach [12,13,15]. In their testimonies, participants highlight the professional and emotional support they received, as well as the feeling of belonging to a safe and structured environment that not only distances them from problematic consumption environments but also provides for their basic needs and offers opportunities for improvement in various areas.

On the other hand, participating in a variety of group activities, such as physical exercise, healthy leisure initiatives, and workshops focusing on integrating patients into the workplace and fostering personal relationships, was considered vital for sustaining abstinence. Physical exercise is widely used as a complementary therapy in SUD treatment. It is considered a healthy practice, as well as a meaningful and socially integrative activity [29,30]. Similarly, the other leisure workshops offered at the center are seen as potentially transformative by providing entertainment in environments unrelated to substance use and fostering a sense of belonging to a social group [28,29]. One possible explanation for these findings is that the center is perceived not only as a protective factor against relapses, but also as a safe resource for well-being and ongoing support. This finding is consistent with other studies addressing this issue but contrasts with previous studies documenting experiences of stigmatization and discriminatory treatment in hospital settings. The role of the multidisciplinary team could be pivotal in generating a positive overall experience that encourages adherence to the rehabilitation program and social integration [30,31]. This approach is consistent with the Schlossberg transition process model, in which the authors recommend that, to effectively cope with a transition—namely, rehabilitation from SUDs—people need access to diverse types of support [32]. These support categories can range from interpersonal relationships (such as sponsors and spouses) to more distant support systems (such as institutions and communities), including rehabilitation centers [33]. Consequently, rehabilitation programs that adopt a holistic perspective—combining respect for patient autonomy with a flexible and adaptable support structure—align not only with international standards but also with a patient-centered approach [7,10].

Regarding nursing care, the participants in our study recognize nurses as key figures in the rehabilitation programs of the Red Cross CATCs. Most of the nursing practices identified as beneficial by the participants in this study pertain to relational care interventions. They emphasize their close working relationships, active listening skills, and emotional support as key differentiating factors compared to other health care professionals in the multidisciplinary team. Furthermore, they place a high value on the involvement of nursing staff, particularly in health education, support in times of crisis, and management of withdrawal symptoms. This finding aligns with

the results of other studies, which indicate that patients with SUDs perceive increased support and reduced judgment from nursing professionals [34,35]. As demonstrated in previous research, the provision of compassionate care is of paramount importance, even in relation to other populations [36,37].

Comparison With Prior Work

This evidence indicates that the therapeutic relationship is fundamental for patients, regardless of their age or care setting. Skills, such as listening, communicating, and providing reassurance, are valued and recognized as essential, not as inferior or merely technical skills [38]. In addition, other studies have shown that relational interventions generate a wide variety of positive health outcomes. Research has demonstrated that effective therapeutic relationships can enhance treatment adherence and rehabilitation and reduce perceptions of stigma, as outlined in Parkhideh et al [39]. As demonstrated in the literature and as evidenced by our own findings, there is clear evidence of the importance that patients attach to being treated with respect and as people rather than as problems or diseases [40].

Among the recommendations expressed by users, the one that stands out is the suggestion that health care personnel show greater patience during care. This demand reflects a need for more humane and empathetic treatment and highlights the importance of the therapeutic relationship component. Patience is seen as a sign of understanding, respect, dignity, and a willingness to listen, which are all basic elements in building an effective working relationship. This is particularly relevant in contexts involving vulnerable populations, such as individuals with SUDs. Integrating this perspective into clinical practice has the potential to enhance the quality of care and ensure adherence to treatment [35,38].

However, there is a lack of knowledge regarding the roles performed by each member of the health care team. Although the role of the nurse remains constant within the team, participants confuse their role with those of doctors and social workers during the discussions. This is also evident from the absence of any codes or categories relating to other areas of nursing care. One potential explanation for these findings is that patients may not have had sufficient time to comprehend the nature of nursing work. However, it should be noted that all participants had previously been admitted to at least 1 other rehabilitation program. Therefore, the lack of knowledge about nursing work may not be attributable to a lack of contact with nursing staff, but rather to the invisibility of care. The extant literature supports this assertion. In both this population and the general population, care is often not directly associated with nursing. This may mean that the specific and specialized role of nurses in various contexts is not fully recognized. This lack of knowledge about nursing care reflects an underlying problem, which contributes to its social and professional devaluation [41,42].

The participants' accounts also allow us to infer a structural reality that affects the professional practice of nursing: the low institutional and social value placed on this group. This situation is evident in working conditions that often fail to reflect the complexity of the care required by patients with SUDs. These

conditions include a lack of financial recognition, excessive workloads, a shortage of adequate rest areas for staff, and limited participation by nurses in decision-making spaces. This invisibility stands in stark contrast to the pivotal role that patients themselves ascribe to nurses in their recovery processes, particularly regarding human support, active listening, and the establishment of long-term therapeutic bonds [43]. This structural invisibility might help explain why some participants were uncertain about the specific responsibilities of each professional, occasionally mixing up nursing functions with those of other team members. This confusion may also arise from overlapping interdisciplinary tasks, inconsistent role introductions—particularly at admission or during care-plan changes—and contextual factors in SUD care, such as time pressure, staff turnover, and psychosocial vulnerability. Therefore, strengthening role communication and increasing the visibility of nursing responsibilities might enhance patients' understanding and recognition of nursing care within community addiction services [41]. Role ambiguity may also limit patients' ability to actively seek nursing support. Brief standardized introductions at admission, visible role identification, and, when feasible, assigning a reference nurse may improve clarity. Future research should further explore patients' perspectives on strategies to enhance understanding of nursing roles in care [41,44].

Limitations

This study is one of a limited number of research projects conducted in Spain that address the perceptions of a particularly challenging-to-reach demographic, such as patients with SUDs. However, it is vital to understand the experiences of individuals with SUDs and their interactions with nursing care in order to improve and personalize interventions and establish effective improvement strategies within this particularly vulnerable population. Nevertheless, this study presents some limitations. Most of the participants in the sample are male, and most of them self-identify as such. This finding is consistent with the available evidence, which points to a higher prevalence of substance use among men [2]. From a gender perspective, this pattern may be influenced by social constructs associated with masculinity. These constructs include the normalization of risk, pressure to demonstrate strength or autonomy, and perceived lower access to emotional support networks [4]. These factors may facilitate the initiation and maintenance of use and therefore bias the findings. Conversely, the participants were members of merely two centers belonging to the same rehabilitation Red Cross program, which may have exerted an influence on the results due to the absence of variety in the care received. Furthermore, no distinction was made between different types of nursing care (specialized, hospital-based, or based on the years of experience of the professionals). To expand the knowledge base regarding this population's perceptions of the nursing role, future studies involving samples of patients from diverse rehabilitation programs and incorporating a gender perspective are essential. Women's perspectives may be insufficiently captured in this study, and future research should purposively recruit more women (and gender-diverse participants when possible) to better inform gender-responsive nursing care in community addiction services.

Conclusions

This study demonstrated that SUD is a chronic condition, with multiple admissions to rehabilitation programs. Participants have provided a positive evaluation of the rehabilitation center, emphasizing the comprehensive support provided by the multidisciplinary team and the safe environment it offers, beyond clinical treatment. Group activities and ongoing support are key factors in maintaining abstinence and promoting social integration.

Patients with SUDs place a high value on the role of nursing, particularly relational interventions over technical interventions.

However, this assessment contrasts with a lack of knowledge about certain functions of the nursing profession, which limits their ability to recognize and take advantage of their capacity for action in community settings.

These findings emphasize the necessity to enhance care models through a holistic approach, considering patients' life contexts and recognizing both individual care and structural conditions. Nurses can play an essential role in designing patient-centered interventions to achieve sustainable recovery and a positive therapeutic experience.

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Data Availability

No additional data are available due to data protection requirements.

Authors' Contributions

CLG, MGdQC, and BGT led the design of the study, its analysis, and the preparation of the study. BGT contributed to the data analysis, identification of codes, and categories and selection of relevant quotes. CLG, MGdQC, BGT, NMG, and GGN have contributed to preparing the study. All authors have read and approved the final study.

Conflicts of Interest

None declared.

Multimedia Appendix 1

Sociodemographic data, participant information, and interview guide.

[[DOCX File, 16 KB - nursing_v9i1e82401_app1.docx](#)]

Multimedia Appendix 2

Most used substances among interviewed participants enrolled in the rehabilitation program.

[[PNG File, 75 KB - nursing_v9i1e82401_app2.png](#)]

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Abbreviations

CATC: community addiction treatment center

DSM-5: *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition*

SUD: substance use disorder

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Retraction: Comparative Effectiveness of Health Communication Strategies in Nursing: A Mixed Methods Study of Internet, mHealth, and Social Media Versus Traditional Methods

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The JMIR Publications Editorial Office is retracting the article “Comparative Effectiveness of Health Communication Strategies in Nursing: A Mixed Methods Study of Internet, mHealth, and Social Media Versus Traditional Methods” by Hamarash et al [1]. This follows an investigation that identified concerns

regarding the integrity of the peer-review process that occurred for this article. We regret that these issues were not identified prior to publication.

All authors did not agree with retraction.

Reference

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Performance of Large Language Models in the Japanese Public Health Nurse National Examination: Comparative Cross-Sectional Study

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Abstract

Background: Large language models (LLMs) have shown promising results on Japanese national medical and nursing examinations. However, no study has evaluated LLM performance on the Japanese Public Health Nurse National Examination, which requires specialized knowledge in community health and public health nursing practice.

Objective: This study aimed to compare the performance of multiple LLMs on the Japanese Public Health Nurse National Examination and evaluate their potential utility in public health nursing education.

Methods: Three LLMs were evaluated: GPT-4o, Claude Opus 4, and Gemini 2.5 Pro. All 110 questions from the 111th Public Health Nurse National Examination were administered using standardized prompts. Questions were classified by format (text vs figure or calculation), content (general vs situational), and selection type (single vs multiple choice). Accuracy rates and 95% CIs were calculated, with statistical comparisons performed using chi-square tests.

Results: All LLMs exceeded the passing criterion (60%). The accuracy rates were as follows: 85.5% (94/110) for GPT-4o (95% CI 77.5% - 91.5%), 91.8% (101/110) for Claude Opus 4 (95% CI 85.0% - 96.2%), and 92.7% (102/110) for Gemini 2.5 Pro (95% CI 86.2% - 96.8%). No significant differences were found among the LLMs ($P>.99$). However, all models showed lower accuracy on multiple-choice questions than on single-choice questions, with significant intramodel differences observed for GPT-4o (10/16, 62.5% vs 82/92, 89.1%; $P=.01$) and Claude Opus 4 (12/16, 75% vs 87/92, 94.6%; $P=.03$).

Conclusions: LLMs demonstrated high performance on a public health nursing examination but showed limitations in complex reasoning requiring multiple-choice selection. These findings suggest the potential for LLM use as educational support tools while highlighting the need for cautious implementation in specialized nursing education.

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KEYWORDS

large language models; public health nursing; licensure; nursing; artificial intelligence; AI; education

Introduction

With advances in artificial intelligence (AI), large language models (LLMs) have gained attention in various fields. High-performance LLMs have been developed, including GPT-3.5, GPT-4, Anthropic's Claude, and Google's Gemini [1-3], which have demonstrated their ability to generate contextually appropriate responses to complex questions. In Japan, the capabilities of these models have been evaluated using questions from the national medical and nursing examinations. Liu et al [4] compared GPT-4o, GPT-4, Claude Opus 3, and Gemini 1.5 Pro using Japan's national medical examinations and found that GPT-4o achieved the highest accuracy rate (89.2%) and intermodel performance depending

on the subject area and question format. Takagi et al [5] also found that GPT-4 significantly outperformed GPT-3.5 in national medical examinations (79.9% vs 50.8%), revealing significant performance gaps between model generations. Taira et al [6] reported that LLM accuracy declined for questions about pharmacology, social welfare, and related legal regulations on national nursing examinations, suggesting limitations in responding to questions requiring specialized knowledge and institutional understanding. These findings demonstrate LLM utility and associated challenges in Japanese language processing and professional examinations.

However, no study has compared the performance of multiple LLMs on the Japanese Public Health Nurse National Examination, which assesses the knowledge and skills necessary

for public health nursing practice. The Public Health Nurse National Examination comprises content addressing community-based health issues, multidisciplinary collaboration, and public health nursing activities, requiring not only medical knowledge but also an understanding of Japan's community health systems [7]. Compared to clinical medicine, public health nursing presents unique challenges for LLMs. While medical examinations primarily assess biomedical knowledge and clinical reasoning, public health nursing requires the integration of social determinants of health, public health policy knowledge, community-level interventions, and understanding of local health systems. These multifaceted aspects demand complex reasoning that simultaneously considers multiple factors, which may pose greater challenges for current LLMs. Therefore, this study aimed to compare and evaluate the performance of GPT-4o (Open AI), Claude Opus 4 (Anthropic), and Gemini 2.5 Pro (Google AI) on questions from the Japanese Public Health Nurse National Examination to clarify the extent to which AI can respond to the specialized knowledge and skills necessary for public health nursing. We believe our work has significance for examining the potential for AI use in future public health nursing education.

Methods

Study Design

This comparative cross-sectional study evaluated the performance of 3 LLMs on the Japanese Public Health Nurse National Examination. We used a census sampling approach, analyzing all questions from the examination to compare accuracy rates across different LLMs and question types.

Tested LLMs

Three representative LLMs were selected: OpenAI's GPT-4o [1], Anthropic's Claude Opus 4 [2], and Google's Gemini 2.5 Pro [3].

Japanese Public Health Nurse National Examination

The Japanese Public Health Nurse National Examination is conducted based on the Act on Public Health Nurses, Midwives, and Nurses to assess the knowledge and skills necessary for public health nurses [8]. It includes 110 questions. The questions are classified as general and situational. General questions are worth 1 point each, whereas situational questions are worth 2 points each. The passing criterion is 60% correct answers for general and situational questions combined, although the percentage may be adjusted when inappropriate questions are excluded. The questions are in multiple-choice format, and the participants must select one or more correct answers from 4 to 5 options. The pass rate is 90% to 95%.

Study Population and Question Selection

This study used a census sampling approach, including all 110 questions from the 111th Public Health Nurse National Examination administered in February 2025 [9]. No sampling was conducted as the entire population of examination questions was analyzed. For questions containing figures and tables, figures were processed as image data, whereas the question text was handled as text. No questions were designated as inappropriate by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare; the passing criterion was 60% [9]. The examination questions were classified according to format (text questions and figure or calculation questions), content (general and situational questions), and selection type (single- and multiple-choice questions).

Prompt Engineering

Because prompt engineering significantly affects the generated output, the question input formats were standardized. On the basis of previous research [4-6], 6 prompts corresponding to different types of questions were created (Table 1).

Table . Standardized prompts for different question types in the Japanese Public Health Nurse National Examination. Template placeholders (“<” and “>”) indicate where specific content was inserted for each question type.

Prompt type	Prompt template
Prompt 1: general questions	“Japanese Public Health Nurse National Examination questions are presented. Please answer the following question in brief by selecting an option. Select one option unless otherwise specified. Question: <Question content> 1. <Option 1> 2. <Option 2> 3. <Option 3> 4. <Option 4> 5. <Option 5> (if applicable)”
Prompt 2: situational questions	“Japanese Public Health Nurse National Examination questions are presented. Based on the following situational setting, please answer the question in brief by selecting an option. Select one option unless otherwise specified. Situation: <Situational content> Question: <Question content> 1. <Option 1> 2. <Option 2> 3. <Option 3> 4. <Option 4> 5. <Option 5> (if applicable)”
Prompt 3: image questions	“Japanese Public Health Nurse National Examination questions are presented. Please review the following image and answer the question in brief by selecting an option. Select one option unless otherwise specified. Question: <Question content> 1. <Option 1> 2. <Option 2> 3. <Option 3> 4. <Option 4> 5. <Option 5> (if applicable)”
Prompt 4: situational questions with images	“Japanese Public Health Nurse National Examination questions are presented. Based on the following situational setting, please review the image and answer the question in brief by selecting an option. Select one option unless otherwise specified. Situation: <Situational content> Question: <Question content> 1. <Option 1> 2. <Option 2> 3. <Option 3> 4. <Option 4> 5. <Option 5> (if applicable)”
Prompt 5: calculation questions	“Japanese Public Health Nurse National Examination questions are presented. Please read the following question, review the mark sheet format in the image, and answer the question in brief by selecting an option. Provide your answer as a numerical value in brief. Question: <Question content>”
Prompt 6: situational calculation questions	“Japanese Public Health Nurse National Examination questions are presented. Please read the following situational setting and question, review the mark sheet format in the image, and answer the calculation question. Provide your answer as a numerical value in brief. Situation: <Situational content> Question: <Question content>”

Data Collection Procedures

Questions were input from June 25 to 26, 2025. The question text and images were directly inserted into each LLM’s chat window. Each question was input in a new independent chat window to avoid potential influence from previous responses. All questions were administered in Japanese using standardized prompts.

The definition of “correct” answers was based on the official answers published by the Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare [9]. Only answers that clearly matched the official correct answers and followed the instructions provided in the question text were considered “correct.” Ambiguous answers, evident mistakes, unclear responses, and responses with an excessive number of answer choices were considered incorrect. All responses from the LLMs were independently reviewed and scored by 2 authors (YT and RK), with any discrepancies resolved through discussion.

Data Analysis

For each LLM, the number of correct answers, accuracy rates, 95% CIs, total scores, and score rates were calculated. Accuracy rates were compared across question format (text vs figure or calculation), question content (general vs situational), and

selection type (single vs multiple choice) both between LLMs (inter-LLM comparison) and within each LLM (intra-LLM comparison). Numerical input calculation questions were excluded from the selection type analysis.

Statistical comparisons were performed using chi-square tests for expected cell frequencies of ≥ 5 and the Fisher exact test when expected cell frequencies were < 5 . For multiple pairwise inter-LLM comparisons, the Bonferroni correction was applied to control for type I error. Statistical significance was set at $P \leq .05$ (2 tailed). All statistical analyses were conducted using Stata (version 18.0; StataCorp LLC).

Ethical Considerations

Ethics approval was not required because only data from a published database were analyzed.

Results

Detailed results are presented in Table 2. The accuracy rates for each LLM for all 110 questions were as follows: 85.5% (n=94) of the questions for GPT-4o (95% CI 77.5% - 91.5%), 91.8% (n=101) of the questions for Claude Opus 4 (95% CI 85.0% - 96.2%), and 92.7% (n=102) of the questions for Gemini 2.5 Pro (95% CI 86.2% - 96.8%). The corresponding scores

were 86.2% (125/145), 91.7% (133/145), and 93.1% (135/145), respectively, all of which exceeded the passing criterion (60%). In terms of question characteristics, the accuracy rates for general questions (n=75) were as follows: 84% (n=63) for

GPT-4o, 92% (n=69) for Claude Opus 4, and 92% (n=69) for Gemini 2.5 Pro. The corresponding rates for situational questions (n=35) were 88.6% (n=31), 91.4% (n=32), and 94.3% (n=33), respectively.

Table . Performance of large language models (LLMs) on the 111th Public Health Nurse National Examination.

Category	GPT-4o		Claude Opus 4		Gemini 2.5 Pro		LLM comparison <i>P</i> value		
	Correct answers, n (%)	<i>P</i> value	Correct answers, n (%)	<i>P</i> value	Correct answers, n (%)	<i>P</i> value	GPT-4o vs Claude Opus 4	GPT-4o vs Gemini	Claude Opus 4 vs Gemini
Overall accuracy rate (n=110)	94 (85.5)	— ^a	101 (91.8)	—	102 (92.7)	—	>.99	>.99	>.99
Overall score (n=145)	125 (86.2)	—	133 (91.7)	—	135 (93.1)	—	>.99	>.99	>.99
By question content		.53		>.99		>.99			
General questions (n=75)	63 (84.0)		69 (92.0)		69 (92.0)		>.99	>.99	>.99
Situational questions (n=35)	31 (88.6)		32 (91.4)		33 (94.3)		>.99	>.99	>.99
By question format		.69		>.99		.60			
Text questions (n=98)	84 (85.7)		90 (91.8)		90 (91.8)		>.99	>.99	>.99
Figure or calculation questions (n=12)	10 (83.3)		11 (91.7)		12 (100.0)		>.99	>.99	>.99
By selection type		.04		.03		.09			
Single-choice questions (n=92)	82 (89.1)		87 (94.6)		87 (94.6)		>.99	>.99	>.99
Multiple-choice questions (n=16)	10 (62.5)		12 (75.0)		13 (81.3)		>.99	>.99	>.99

^aNot applicable.

In terms of question format, the accuracy rates for the text questions (n=98) were as follows: 85.7% (n=84) for GPT-4o, 91.8% (n=90) for Claude Opus 4, and 91.8% (n=90) for Gemini 2.5 Pro. The corresponding rates for figure or calculation questions (n=12) were 83.3% (n=10), 91.7% (n=11), and 100% (n=12), respectively. The accuracy rates for single-choice questions (n=92) were as follows: 89.1% (n=82) for GPT-4o, 94.6% (n=87) for Claude Opus 4, and 94.6% (n=87) for Gemini 2.5 Pro. However, for the multiple-choice questions (n=16), all LLMs showed decreased accuracy, and the corresponding rates were 62.5% (n=10), 75% (n=12), and 81.3% (n=13), respectively.

Statistical comparisons among the LLMs showed no significant differences. Intra-LLM comparisons revealed significant differences between single- and multiple-choice questions for GPT-4o ($P=.01$) and Claude Opus 4 ($P=.03$), with the accuracy rates for multiple-choice questions being significantly lower.

Discussion

Principal Findings

This study compared and evaluated the performances of multiple LLMs on the Japanese Public Health Nurse National Examination. All the LLMs significantly exceeded the passing criterion of 60%. These results indicate that LLMs have acquired considerable specialized knowledge, with the performance of GPT-4o (94/110, 85.5%) being comparable to that of LLMs in previous medical examinations [4] and superior to that of older-generation models [6].

While all LLMs showed high overall accuracy rates, a clear performance decline was observed for multiple-choice questions. This contrasts with the high accuracy rates for single-choice questions, with significant differences found for GPT-4o and Gemini 2.5 Pro. This phenomenon demonstrates the current limitations of LLMs in complex reasoning, which requires the

simultaneous evaluation of multiple concepts. As public health nursing practice requires comprehensive judgment considering multiple factors such as regional characteristics, residents' needs, social resources, and multidisciplinary collaboration, the performance decline on multiple-choice questions indicates that LLMs have limitations in the complex decision-making faced in actual public health nursing practice.

The accuracy rates of the LLMs evaluated in this study (94/110, 85.5% to 102/110, 92.7%) and their scores (125/145, 86.2% to 135/145, 93.1%) substantially exceeded the passing standard (60%). The pass rate for the 111th Public Health Nurse National Examination was 94% [9]; however, this represents the proportion of examinees who exceeded the passing standard, and the overall mean score for all examinees is not publicly available. Therefore, a direct comparison between the overall academic performance of examinees and LLM performance is challenging.

In the field of medical education, multiple studies comparing LLM and student performance have been reported. A study comparing final-year emergency medicine students with AI models [10] demonstrated that students achieved a 79.4% accuracy rate, outperforming ChatGPT (72.5%) and Gemini (54.4%). The superiority of students was particularly pronounced in image-based questions, highlighting current limitations in AI models' visual information processing capabilities. Additionally, a study using 1070 medical imaging questions [11] found that GPT-4 correctly answered 67.8% of the questions it attempted, whereas the students' passing mean was 63%. However, the student majority vote achieved a 94.5% accuracy rate, substantially surpassing the AI. This demonstrates that even when individual students' abilities may be equal to or slightly inferior to those of AI, collective student judgment significantly exceeds AI performance.

In our study, while LLM performance on figure or calculation questions was high (10/12, 83.3% to 12/12, 100%), the small number of questions (n=12) necessitates larger-scale validation. More importantly, the learning processes of LLMs and humans are fundamentally different. LLMs learn patterns from large volumes of text data, whereas public health nurses acquire decision-making capabilities by integrating practical experience with theoretical knowledge. Furthermore, human public health nurses possess essential practical competencies that are not measurable through written examinations, including ethical judgment, empathy, and interpersonal communication skills. As these previous studies [10,11] demonstrate, while AI shows potential as a supplementary educational tool, it cannot replace human capabilities, particularly in areas requiring visual interpretation, clinical reasoning, and collective judgment. Therefore, LLMs should be appropriately positioned as educational and learning support tools rather than as replacements for human public health nurses.

The results of this study have important implications from the perspective of competency development in public health nursing education. The "Practical Competencies Required of Public Health Nurses and Achievement Goals and Levels at Graduation" document by the Japanese Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare [12] classifies public health nurse

competencies into five domains: (1) ability to clarify community health issues and develop plans; (2) ability to provide continuous support and collaborative organizational activities for individuals, families, groups, and organizations to enhance community health promotion capacity and evaluate these activities; (3) community health crisis management capacity; (4) ability to develop projects, policies, social resources, and systems to enhance community health levels; and (5) professional autonomy and continuous quality improvement capacity. LLMs may be particularly effective in providing learning support during information gathering and assessment stages within domain 1. This competency includes information collection for clarifying community health issues, community diagnosis, and prioritization of health issues, where LLMs are expected to play a supplementary role in confirming foundational knowledge and organizing information.

For domain 1, the achievement level at graduation is set at either level 1 ("able to implement independently with minimal guidance") or level 2 ("able to implement under supervision [from supervising public health nurses or faculty]") [12]. As revealed in this study, LLMs demonstrated a performance decline in multiple-choice questions and have limitations in complex judgment tasks. Therefore, when using LLMs as educational tools, it is crucial to cultivate students' ability to critically evaluate LLM outputs and maintain practical judgment skills based on community characteristics to reach these achievement levels.

Several ethical considerations must be addressed when using LLMs in public health nursing education. The Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology guidelines [13] indicate that directly using generative AI outputs does not deepen students' own learning, that differences in generative AI types (paid vs free versions) may create disparities in student outcomes leading to unfairness, and that confidential and personal information may be unintentionally leaked or disclosed. A survey of Japanese medical students [14] found that while 41.9% had experience using ChatGPT, only 10.2% had used it for medical assignments and 47% held negative views about its use for medical reports. Many students felt that, considering the time required to verify AI responses, independent learning would be more efficient, highlighting the essential need to cultivate critical evaluation skills for LLM outputs. A narrative review on chatbot integration in nursing education [15] also emphasizes the importance of ethical considerations, indicating the urgent need to establish ethical frameworks for AI use across nursing education.

The results of this study revealed that while LLMs demonstrated high accuracy rates on the Public Health Nurse National Examination, performance declined on multiple-choice questions. This finding has important implications for using LLMs as learning support tools in public health nursing education. Given the demonstrated limitations of LLMs in complex judgment requiring simultaneous consideration of multiple factors, LLMs are suitable for supplementary roles such as confirming foundational knowledge and gathering information, whereas faculty instruction remains crucial for learning scenarios requiring complex judgment. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology has

issued guidelines [13] on the educational use of generative AI at universities and colleges of technology, and public health nurse training institutions are also called upon to develop guidelines that clearly specify appropriate use scenarios and limitations for LLMs. A nationwide survey on information and communications technology (ICT) use among public health nurses in local governments [16] found that 82.8% responded that they did not know the procedures for promoting ICT use, indicating challenges in adapting to digital technology even among practicing public health nurses. This suggests the importance of providing systematic digital literacy education from the public health nurse training stage.

A detailed examination is needed regarding curriculum integration and faculty training. For example, development of specific implementation strategies is required, including in which courses and how LLMs should be introduced, how to design a phased introduction process, and how faculty should learn appropriate LLM use methods. In particular, establishing organizational training systems for enhancing faculty AI literacy and developing assessment methods premised on LLM use are important future challenges. To accumulate knowledge regarding these strategies, pilot program implementation and evaluation will be necessary.

As practical implications, there is potential for the use of LLMs as continuing education and self-directed learning support tools for practicing public health nurses. A concept analysis of LLMs in nursing education [17] positions LLMs as transformative tools that provide accessible and personalized learning support and promote cognitive and skill development. In public health nursing education as well, use is anticipated for responding to new public health issues and during information gathering stages in community diagnosis. Additionally, there is potential for the use of LLMs as an auxiliary tool in situations requiring rapid information organization, such as during disasters or emerging infectious disease outbreaks. However, a survey on ICT use among public health nurses in local governments [16] found that 89.1% of municipalities expressed concerns about individuals who have difficulty adapting to digital technology, necessitating careful introduction that considers the essence of interpersonal support in public health nursing work. Furthermore, while 55.9% in the same survey actively promoted ICT use, only 26.7% perceived progress as smooth, indicating challenges in digital literacy education for practicing public health nurses and establishing organizational support systems. As noted in the aforementioned concept analysis [17], careful attention must be paid to LLM limitations and ethical implications, ensuring that LLM integration aligns with the values and goals of nursing education. Therefore, when using LLMs in practical settings, it is essential to critically evaluate LLM outputs and integrate them with community characteristics and practical knowledge, considering the limitations in complex judgment revealed in this study.

The findings of this study occupy an important position within the broader context of AI use in health profession education. A narrative review on chatbots in nursing education [15] demonstrated a surge in related research from 2021 to 2023 (with 2023 accounting for 70% of publications), indicating growing scholarly interest in this field. Together with LLM

evaluation studies on medical licensing examinations [4,5], it is becoming increasingly clear that LLMs demonstrate high performance across medical licensing examinations generally. However, the performance decline on multiple-choice questions demonstrated in this study indicates the existence of LLM limitations in complex judgment unique to public health nursing, such as integration of social determinants of health and planning of community-level interventions. This is consistent with findings from previous studies in medical education [10,11] showing that collective student judgment far exceeds that of AI, supporting the appropriate positioning of LLMs as educational and learning support tools rather than replacements for human health professionals. Additionally, a survey of medical students [14] showed that 47% held negative views about LLM use for medical assignments, indicating the recognition of the need for verification. A concept analysis in nursing education [17] also pointed out the need for careful consideration of LLM limitations and ethical implications. Furthermore, the aforementioned review on chatbot integration in nursing education [15] emphasizes the importance of ethical considerations and the urgency of original research while acknowledging it as a promising field. Collectively, these findings suggest that across health profession education generally, while LLMs have potential as useful auxiliary tools, cultivating the ability to understand their limitations and use them critically is a common challenge across all types of health profession education.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study has the following strengths. First, this is the first study to evaluate the performance of multiple LLMs on the Public Health Nurse National Examination. While LLM evaluations have been conducted on medical and nursing licensing examinations, this study represents the first systematic evaluation in the public health nursing field. Second, reproducibility was ensured through the use of standardized prompts. Six prompts were created according to question types, achieving consistent evaluation. Third, detailed analysis by question format revealed the important finding of performance decline on multiple-choice questions. This discovery demonstrates LLM limitations in complex reasoning requiring the simultaneous consideration of multiple factors, with important implications for future educational implementation.

This study has several limitations. First, as a cross-sectional evaluation of a single year, temporal changes in LLM performance and reproducibility across different examination years could not be evaluated in this study. Second, accuracy rates alone do not clarify the quality of reasoning processes or correlation with actual public health nursing practice competencies. Third, while LLM versions and settings may influence results, this study was limited to evaluation using specific versions (GPT-4o, Claude Opus 4, and Gemini 2.5 Pro). Fourth, results may vary depending on prompt expression methods, and there is no guarantee that the standardized prompts used in this study are optimal. Fifth, because the overall mean score for examinees is not publicly available, direct performance comparison between LLMs and human public health nurse examinees is difficult. Furthermore, this study verified LLM performance in the educational evaluation context of a national

examination and did not evaluate their utility or safety as decision support tools in actual public health nursing practice. Future research should include continued evaluation over multiple years, qualitative analysis of reasoning processes, validation of utility in practical settings, comparative studies with human public health nurses, and examination of applicability to decision support in actual practice.

Conclusions

The LLMs evaluated demonstrated high performance on the Public Health Nurse National Examination; however, they also had limitations in solving problems requiring complex judgment. These findings provide important foundational data showing the possibilities and challenges of AI use in public health nursing. On the basis of these results, LLMs should be cautiously used as supplementary tools in public health nursing education.

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Data Availability

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author (YT) upon request.

Authors' Contributions

YT contributed to conceptualization, methodology, investigation, funding acquisition, supervision, and manuscript review and editing. RK contributed to methodology, investigation, data curation, formal analysis, and writing of the original draft. RO and SO contributed to manuscript review and editing.

Conflicts of Interest

None declared.

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Abbreviations

AI: artificial intelligence

ICT: information and communications technology

LLM: large language model

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Community Health Nurses' Knowledge and Perceptions of AI in Canada: National Cross-Sectional Survey

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Abstract

Background: Artificial intelligence (AI) continues to expand into nursing and health care. Many examples of AI applications driven by machine or deep learning are in use. Examples include wearable devices or alerts for risk prediction. AI tends to be promoted by nonnurses, creating a risk that AI is not designed to best serve registered nurses. Community health nurses (CHNs) are a small but essential group. CHNs' familiarity with AI and their perceptions about its effect on their practice are unknown.

Objective: The research aims to understand CHNs' awareness, knowledge, and perceptions of AI in practice and gain insights to better involve them in AI.

Methods: An online cross-sectional Canadian survey targeting CHNs was conducted from April to July 2023. Descriptive statistics summarized respondents' characteristics and perceptions of AI, followed by a chi-square test used to determine a relationship between respondents' level of AI knowledge and their AI perceptions, with odds ratio (OR) to determine the strength of association.

Results: A total of 228 CHNs participated with varying response rates per question. Most respondents were female (172/188, 91.5%), average age of 45.5 (SD 11.7) years, and an average of 13.5 (SD 10.1) years of community practice experience. Most respondents (205/228, 89.9%) felt they welcomed technology into their practice. They reported their understanding of AI technologies as "good" (95/220, 43.2%) and "not good" (125/220, 56.8%). Overall, 39.6% (80/202) of respondents felt uncomfortable with the development of AI. They agreed that AI should be part of education (143/203, 70.4%), professional development (152/202, 75.2%), and that they should be consulted (195/203, 96.1%). Many respondents had concerns related to professional accountability if they accepted a wrong AI recommendation (157/202, 77.7%) or if they dismissed a correct AI recommendation (149/202, 73.8%). Respondents with "good" AI knowledge were significantly associated with, and twice as likely to indicate nursing will be revolutionized ($P=.007$; OR 2.28, 95% CI 1.25-4.18), nursing will be more exciting ($P=.001$; OR 2.52, 95% CI 1.42-4.47), health care will be more exciting ($P=.004$; OR 2.3, 95% CI 1.30-4.06), and agreed that AI is part of nursing ($P=.01$; OR 2.1, 95% CI 1.19-3.68). Respondents with "not good" AI knowledge were significantly associated with, and more likely to feel uncomfortable with AI developments ($\chi^2_1=4.2$, $P=.04$; OR 1.84, 95% CI 1.03-3.3).

Conclusions: CHNs reporting "good" AI knowledge had more favorable perceptions toward AI. Overall, CHNs had professional concerns about accepting or dismissing AI recommendations. Potential solutions include educational resources to ensure that CHNs have a sound basis for AI in their practice, which would promote their comfort with AI. Further research should explore how CHNs could be better involved in all aspects of AI introduced into their practice.

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KEYWORDS

registered nurses; community health nurses; artificial intelligence; survey; machine learning

Introduction

Background

Artificial intelligence (AI) covers a broad array of AI-driven applications supported by machine learning (ML) or deep learning, which have potential utility in health care and nursing practice. Many examples of AI-driven care applications exist, from wearable devices for automated detection of signs and symptoms [1], automated assessment of outcomes to support the need for a different level of care [2,3], client-specific automated predictions of risks [4-7], and bots to answer inquiries and send reminders [8]. Despite widespread uptake and use, AI is commonly driven by nonnurses (ie, scientists, engineers, and the technology industry) [9,10] and physicians [11]. The lack of participation by registered nurses (RNs) creates a risk that AI will not be designed to best serve RNs who are expected to use AI applications and their outcomes in clinical practice [11-13]. Likewise, it is unknown whether community health nurses (CHNs) have thought about how AI applications could change their practice or how AI might be useful to inform clinical practice.

The community setting has a smaller group of RNs compared to the acute care sector [14]. CHNs are RNs who provide essential services in a variety of roles (eg, home health, public health, and primary care) within community settings (eg, clients' home and schools) [15]. Home health clients are most often older adults with multiple comorbidities [2], or individuals who have chronic [16,17] and unstable conditions [18]. Public health clients can be any age, as the focus of care is on promoting better health with service delivery to groups or individuals [15]. Within these settings, CHNs make the best care decisions based on the information that exists, as well as considering other subtleties that can affect these decisions. Regardless of the setting in the community, CHNs have increased autonomy [15,17,19], and clients have reduced nursing oversight because of time between visits [20]. This decreases the amount and frequency of the client-specific data collected. Further, CHNs focus on human connections and building trustful relationships while recognizing the strengths of individuals and communities to promote and improve their health [15]. These features support the importance of having CHNs who understand the practice area involved in AI.

Nursing research within the community sector is expanding to include a focus on the use of AI (eg, ML) as a method to improve real-time risk predictions [5,20,21] and to assist with better planning or targeting of service delivery [16]. Although involving CHNs would be key to raising the right questions for AI, as well as advising and validating results [22], few researchers are reporting this type of CHN involvement in AI development. More commonly, researchers are using existing collected data [16,21,23]. This passive involvement misses the opportunity of actively involving CHNs who are familiar with the data they collect and how it may add insight to clinical issues. However, in one example, a nonnurse researcher [24] describes using CHNs to advise and evaluate throughout an AI project, concluding that nursing input validated outcomes and facilitated acceptance of the AI algorithm into practice. Hence,

nursing involvement provides a relevant perspective and knowledge that influences their informed decisions, which ensures clinical relevance and accuracy of AI and related ML [24,25]. These revelations add impetus to examine CHNs' perceptions of AI in their practice and to consider how they could be better involved.

Purpose Statement

This study aims to establish a baseline understanding of Canadian CHNs' awareness, knowledge, and perceptions of current and future effects of AI on their clinical practice. This will help to gain insights into how CHNs could be better involved in AI. Therefore, the research questions guiding this study include: (1) Are CHNs aware of the emergence of AI, including ML applications, in nursing? (2) What are CHNs' main sources of knowledge for learning about current day-to-day AI? (3) How do CHNs describe their level of knowledge of AI technologies? (4) Is there a relationship between CHNs' level of knowledge of AI technologies and their perceptions of the effects of AI on clinical practice, professional accountability, and the usefulness of AI applications? (5) What AI competencies do CHNs perceive as being needed in their community practice?

Methods

Ethical Considerations

Research approval was granted from the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC) Research Ethics Board (REB 6009080), April 2023, to conduct a single cross-sectional open survey using SurveyMonkey licensed through UNBC. The survey landing page included an informational letter to provide study details. After reading the information on the landing page, respondents were asked to voluntarily consent electronically to participate in the study. Upon confirmation of informed consent, participants were then given access to this survey. If a participant did not consent, they received a thank-you message, and access to the survey closed automatically. All aspects of data collection, storage, and analysis were password-protected and housed on an encrypted UNBC server. The invitations advertised a random draw of 5 e-gift cards at the end of the survey period as an incentive to participate in the survey.

Instrument Design

A total of 11 research papers, which used surveys to examine attitudes and perceptions toward AI, were screened for relevance to this research study's instrument design. Two papers [26,27] were validating their General Attitudes Artificial Intelligence Scale to classify individuals with positive or negative feelings toward AI. The remaining 9 research studies targeted RNs [28], nursing students [29], radiologists [30,31], physicians [32], medical students [33], a mix of health care professionals [34,35], and consumers [36]. All except Swan [28] had their survey questions included in the publication or supplemental information. A request to preview and use Swan's survey, if applicable, was granted (BA Swan, RN, PhD, personal communication, November 30, 2022).

Swan's survey was selected due to its purposeful design for use with nursing professionals. It included similar questions to the other previewed surveys, indicating that common survey topics

were covered. Further, Swan's survey was adapted by adding questions important to this study. In the adapted survey, the first question to address computer expertise was sourced from Schepman and Rodway [27], who suggested that individuals with computer expertise would be more positive about AI. Questions 32 and 33 were added from Esmaeilzadeh [36] with slight modifications to address professional accountability. More details on the survey and its adaptation are found in [Multimedia Appendix 1](#). Swan's survey had not been tested or piloted before deployment of the survey (BA Swan, RN, PhD, personal communication December 21, 2022).

The revised survey was reviewed for clarity by a retired community nursing manager with over 35 years of community experience, as a public health nurse in direct care and management. It was confirmed that the survey took 20 minutes to complete, and a direct question exploring how nurses should be involved with AI was suggested. Therefore, Q37 "How should nurses be involved in artificial intelligence that influences their practice?" was added.

The final version consisted of 37 content questions (referencing aspects of AI) plus a demographic section, which was used to describe respondents' representation across Canada, as well as their level of experience and current position. The survey was recreated on the survey platform. Complete wording of each survey item and types of questions are found in [Multimedia Appendix 1](#).

Recruitment

The target population was RNs licensed in Canada who practiced in the community setting (eg, home care and public health) or RNs who had a community nursing focus (eg, researchers, educators, administrators, and clinical informatic nurses). Collectively, the term CHNs will be used. The survey was only offered in English. The size of the targeted population was unknown. Canadian workforce data reported that 32,074 direct care RNs were employed in community health in 2023 [14]; however, this does not account for the others not providing direct care (eg, researchers, educators, and administrators) included in the population of interest. Therefore, an online calculator [37] was used with the parameters of 20,000 for an unknown population, distribution at 50%, with 5% margin of error and a 95% CI, indicating a sample size of 377 was needed. The emergence of AI into clinical practice remains a new field. Therefore, the power analysis was a reference point to guide this exploratory research study.

The participants were recruited by an "invitation to participate letter," which had the live link to the survey embedded into its content. This was shared through nursing sources by monthly newsletters, email lists (eg, existing organizational and collegial connections), and informal networks (eg, colleague-to-colleague and social media). Two national organizations, Community Health Nurses of Canada and Canadian Nursing Informatics Association, canvassed their membership by broadcast messages and posts in their monthly e-newsletter. Each provincial and territorial nursing association or licensing body was contacted by email, briefly explaining the research and asking if they would circulate it to their members. Licensing bodies recommended that the researcher contact the nursing

associations. One provincial licensing body agreed to send out the invitations by email to their members who identified as working in the community and had previously consented to be contacted for research purposes. The nursing associations kept the invitation in their monthly newsletters, or posts on their social media sites, or sent by broadcast message to their members until the survey closed. The survey was live from April 24 to July 30, 2023.

Data Management

On the survey closure date, the full dataset was exported from the survey platform to SPSS Statistics (version 29; IBM Corp). All computer IP addresses were removed, as well as respondents who provided consent but did not complete any survey questions. As it was expected that CHNs may complete this survey using a shared workstation, multiple responses from the same IP address were included as long as they were completed at different times, for different durations, and represented unique participant responses. The use of the same IP addresses was limited to 10 instances and met the above criteria. The geographical locations were grouped into regions to determine Canada-wide representation: Eastern (Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland & Labrador, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia), Central (Ontario and Quebec), Western (Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, and British Columbia), and Northern (Yukon, Northwest Territories, and Nunavut). Questions that offered "other" as a choice were reviewed and recoded into the appropriate existing choices already provided; otherwise, it was left as "other." All word responses were coded for a numerical value to enable analysis (eg, Likert scale responses). Surveys that were blank (n=5) were removed. Cases with missing data (greatest in the demographic section) were kept, thus maximizing the number of responses for any given question. Therefore, the count n/N and percent are presented per question, except for multiple response questions, where n values and percent are given, because participants could respond to more than one option. Chi-square analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between respondents' reported AI knowledge (Q6) and respondents' perceptions of AI in their practice (Q10-Q20 and Q22-Q35, Q21 "other" was not included). All questions were examined for their missing or incomplete data. Variation in response rates could be due to respondents' choices not to answer or complete the survey. Therefore, to minimize the potential for response bias, all questions with a less than 15% missing data rate were kept. The core set of survey questions used to examine the research questions met this proportion of missing variables, with response rates as follows: Q6 (220/228, 96.5%), Q10-Q20 (206/228, 90.4% to 208/228, 91.2%), and Q22-Q35 (202/228, 88.6% to 207/228, 90.8%). The missing data for these questions is as follows: Q6 (3.5%), Q10-Q20 (range 8.8% to 9.6%), and for Q22-Q35 (range 9.2% to 11.4%).

Data Analysis

Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used to examine the data. Descriptive analysis summarized respondents' characteristics and their perceptions of AI in nursing. Inferential statistics examined the relationship between their reported AI

knowledge (Q6) and their perceptions of the current and future effects of AI on nursing and health care.

The chi-square test for independence was used to determine an association between CHNs reported level of knowledge of AI technologies (independent variables) and their perceptions of the effects of AI (dependent variables). The CHNs were grouped by their reported level of knowledge of AI technologies to allow for comparison. CHNs described their level of knowledge of AI technologies as “excellent,” “very good,” “good,” “fair,” or “none.” They were grouped as “good” level of knowledge if they indicated “good” to “excellent” and “not good” level of knowledge if they indicated “fair” or “none.” The reference category chi-square test for independence was a primarily “good” level of AI knowledge; however, a “not good” level of AI knowledge was the reference category for Q26 (comfort with AI development), Q32 (concern with AI offering wrong recommendation), and Q33 (concern with dismissing appropriate AI recommendation) to promote ease in explaining the results. All statements related to CHNs’ perception or attitudes about AI were a 5-point Likert scale from strongly agree (5), agree (4), neutral (3), disagree (2), and strongly disagree (1). The responses for these questions were grouped as “agree” if the respondent indicated “agree” or “strongly agree” and grouped as “not agree” if they indicated “neutral,” “disagree,” or “strongly disagree.” Neutral was grouped with “not agree” because it was interpreted that this group of respondents had no definitive feeling either way on the subject. As the aim of the research was to gain an understanding of how to better involve nurses in AI, it was concluded that these “neutral” respondents, along with “not agree,” may need more targeted strategies to better involve them. Further, the transformed response “agree or not agree” was clarified by the sentiment being examined to ease understanding. The dependent variables were considered: comfortable or not comfortable with AI development, AI applications useful or not useful, effects of AI agree or not agree, and professional accountability concerned or not concerned. Odds ratios were calculated for chi-square tests that were significant to determine the strength of association.

Correction (ie, Yates and Bonferroni) methods for statistical testing were not used. Yates continuity correction was not used because the sample size was considered large enough (range 202 to 208) to support a Pearson chi-square [38]. It is noted that the item “nurse should be consulted” produced cells under 5

(not agree); however, this seemed a reasonable result and would not benefit from Yates correction. The Bonferroni post hoc was not used because it can be too restrictive [39]. The Bonferroni post hoc ($0.05/25=0.002$) is given for reference only and includes the 25 items (Q10-Q20 and Q22-Q35) examined for association.

The open-text question asking the respondents “How should registered nurses be involved in AI?” was examined for types of responses. Some examples of these responses included how CHNs could be engaged in AI technologies, for example, education, advising, or consulting. These responses were quantified with the frequencies reported.

Results

Overview

A total of 296 potential respondents opened the survey, 261 met recruitment criteria, with 233 (89.3%) providing consent. As reported, blank surveys (n=5) were not included. A total of 228 surveys were included in the analyses. The response rate fluctuated per question, with the response rate better at the start of the survey and waning by the final demographic section. The item, “community years experience,” had the most nonresponses (52/228, 22.8%).

Sample Characteristics

Sample characteristics (Table 1) helped to describe the sample that responded to the survey. The respondents’ average age was 45.5 (SD 11.7) years, with 58.4% (104/178) younger than 50 years. Most respondents identified as female (172/188, 91.5%). The average overall years of experience for RNs was 19.8 (SD 12.2) years, with most (161/179, 89.9%) ranging from 5 years to over 35 years of experience. For community practice, the average years of experience was 13.5 (SD 10.1) years, with many (129/176, 73.3%) ranging from 5 years to over 35 years of experience. The sample had representation from the 4 Canadian regions: Eastern (47/186, 25.3%), Central (72/186, 38.7%), Western (65/186, 34.9%), and Northern (2/186, 1.1%). The practice descriptions are multiple-response questions. The reported practice settings (Table 2) included public health (65/191, 22.3%), home care (56/191, 19.2%), community health centers (44/191, 15.1%), primary care (41/191, 14%), and case management (16/191, 5.5%). Approximately half indicated they provided direct care (108/191, 51.4%), and the majority (115/190, 60.5%) held a bachelor’s degree.

Table . Sample characteristics of respondents.

Characteristic	Participants
Gender, n (%) ^a	
Male	16 (8.5)
Female	172 (91.5)
Age (years), means (SD)	45.5 (11.7)
Age (years), n (%) ^b	
25-29	13 (7.3)
30-34	26 (14.6)
35-39	29 (16.3)
40-44	17 (9.6)
45-49	19 (10.7)
50-54	30 (16.9)
55-59	21 (11.8)
60 and older	23 (12.9)
RN ^c experience (years), means (SD)	19.8 (12.2)
RN experience (years), n (%) ^d	
Less than 5 years	18 (10.1)
5-9	24 (13.4)
10-14	29 (16.2)
15-19	22 (12.3)
20-24	18 (10.1)
25-29	21 (11.7)
30-34	22 (12.3)
35 and greater	25 (14)
Community experience (years), means (SD)	13.5 (10.1)
Community experience (years), n (%) ^e	
Less than 5 years	47 (26.7)
5-9	24 (13.6)
10-14	30 (17)
15-19	26 (14.8)
20-24	13 (7.4)
25-29	19 (10.8)
30-34	13 (7.4)
35 and greater	4 (2.3)
Geographic location, n (%) ^f	
Eastern Canada	47 (25.3)
Central Canada	72 (38.7)
Western Canada	65 (34.9)
Northern Canada	2 (1.1)

^aN=188.^bN=178.^cRN: registered nurse.

^dN=179.^eN=176.^fN=186.**Table .** Education and employment data of respondents.

Characteristic	Participants
Education level, n (%) ^a	
Diploma	27 (14.2)
Bachelor	115 (60.5)
Masters	38 (20)
Doctoral or PhD	10 (5.3)
Employment sector, n (%) ^{b, c}	
Public	140 (70.4)
Private	45 (22.6)
Academia	14 (7)
Practice setting, n (%) ^{b, d}	
Health informatics	12 (4.1)
Community health	44 (15.1)
Case management	16 (5.5)
Older adult	13 (4.5)
Home care	56 (19.2)
Hospice palliative	11 (3.8)
Primary care	41 (14)
Community mental health	9 (3.1)
Public health	65 (22.3)
College or university	18 (6.2)
Other	7 (2.4)
Current position (years), n (%) ^{b, d}	
Direct care	108 (51.4)
Nurse informatician	6 (2.9)
Manager or administrator	34 (16.2)
Staff education	23 (11)
Researcher	6 (2.9)
Faculty	19 (9)
Strategic planning	5 (4.3)
Other	9 (4.3)

^aN=190.^bMultiple response questions, n summed in each section, may be greater than N.^cN=187.^dN=191.

Acceptance of Technology and Competent Users of Technology

The survey questions 1 and 2 were used to explore the CHNs' acceptance of technology into their practice, and how they described their computer use. Almost all participants (205/228,

89.9%) agreed or strongly agreed to welcoming technology into their practice. More than half (129/227, 56.8%) identified as competent users of the internet and standard applications, and another 36.6% (83/227) indicated they were users of specialist applications. The survey, included in [Multimedia Appendix 1](#),

is subdivided into sections related to the headings addressing each of the research questions.

CHNs' Awareness of the Emergence of AI, Including ML Applications, in Nursing

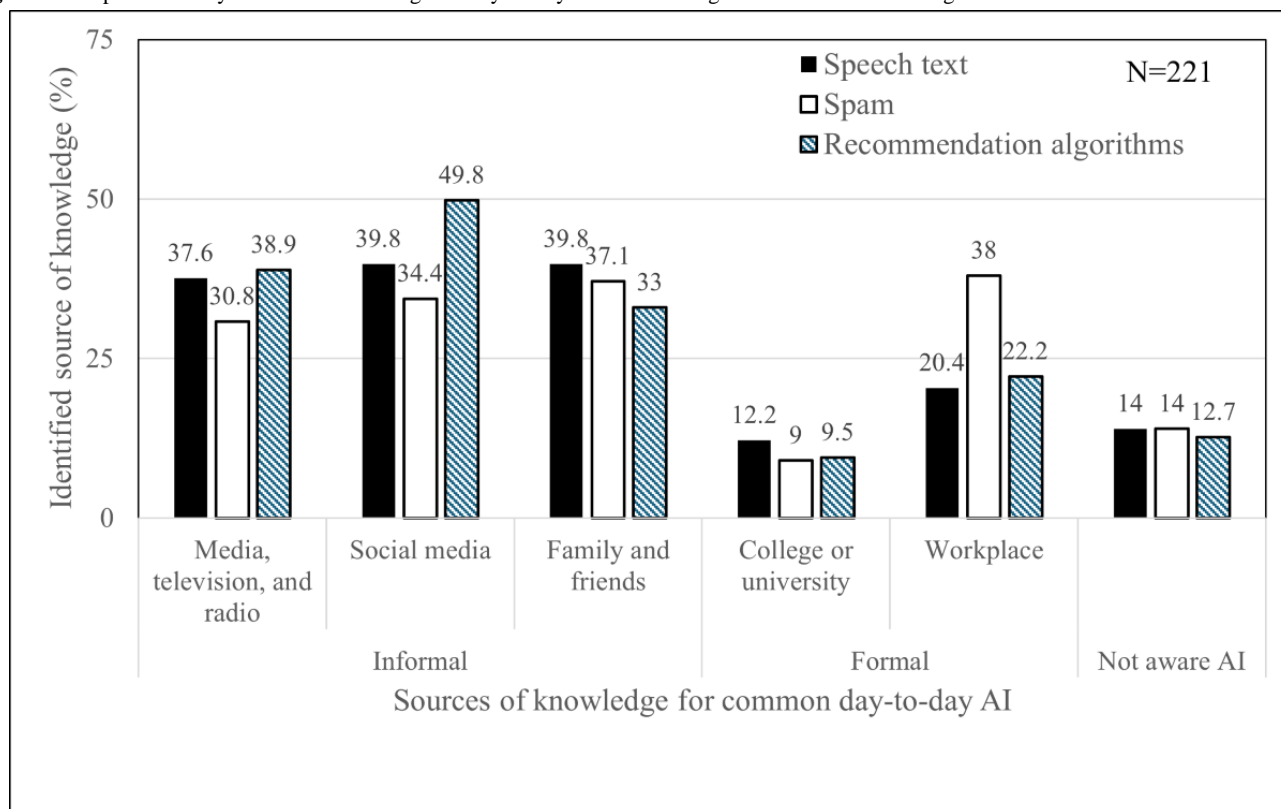
CHNs' awareness of AI (Q8) in health care was more prevalent than their awareness of AI in nursing. The respondents were aware of AI (multiple response questions) in health care (123/220, 55.9%), but fewer were aware of AI in nursing (67/220, 30.5%). This was similar for ML and deep learning (Q9): respondents had heard of it in health care (84/220, 38.2%), and fewer had heard of it in nursing (35/220, 15.9%).

CHNs' Main Sources of Knowledge for Learning About Current Day-to-Day AI

The key sources of knowledge for learning about current day-to-day AI (Q3-Q5) varied between informal and formal

methods. The respondents' major source of knowledge (multiple response questions) of common forms of day-to-day AI applications (Figure 1; ie, speech-text, spam, and recommendation algorithms) was informal resources such as media, television, or radio (range 68/221, 30.8% to 86/221, 38.9%); social media (range 76/221, 34.4% to 110/221, 49.8%); and family and friends (range 73/221, 33% to 88/221, 39.8%). Formal sources were indicated less often: colleges and universities (range 20/221, 9% to 27/221, 12.2%) and workplace (range 45/221, 20.4% to 84/221, 38%). It is worth noting that some respondents were not aware that these applications (speech-to-text, spam, and recommendation algorithms) were forms of AI (range 28/221, 12.7% to 31/221, 14%).

Figure 1. Respondents' key sources of knowledge for day-to-day artificial intelligence. AI: artificial intelligence.



CHNs' Description of Their Level of Knowledge of AI Technologies

Respondents described their understanding of the technologies used in AI (Q6) as none (42/220, 19.1%), fair (83/220, 37.7%), good (67/220, 30.5%), very good (23/220, 10.5%), and excellent (5/220, 2.3%). These results were grouped into 2 levels of AI knowledge: "good" level of knowledge included good to excellent (95/220, 43.2%), and "not good" level of knowledge used fair and none (125/220, 56.8%). Level of AI knowledge (Q6) was used in the chi-square test, as AI was more commonly known with a more balanced representation. For ML or deep learning (Q7), it was a similar trend, more nurses indicated "not good" level of knowledge (148/220, 67.3%) than "good" level of knowledge (72/220, 32.7%).

The Relationship Between CHNs' Level of Knowledge of AI Technologies and Their Perceptions of the Effects of AI on Clinical Practice, Professional Accountability, and the Usefulness of AI Applications.

Effects of AI on Clinical Practice

Questions 22 to 31 and 34 to 35 examined the respondents' perception of the effects of AI on their practice. An overview of respondents' perceptions indicated 39.6% (80/202) felt uncomfortable with the developments in AI, ML, and deep learning. Over half (133/206, 64.6%) of the respondents agreed that AI would revolutionize both health care and nursing. Few respondents agreed that the human nurse, 10.2% (21/205), or members of the interprofessional team, 12.6% (26/207), would

be replaced. Almost half of respondents felt AI would make nursing more exciting, 44.1% (89/202), and similarly, health care more exciting, 47.5% (96/202). Likewise, 44.8% (91/203) perceived AI to be part of nursing. Many respondents (143/203, 70.4%) felt that AI should be part of nursing education and included in professional development (152/202, 75.2%). Most respondents agreed they should be consulted (195/203, 96.1%) about AI, as well as having the opportunity to raise relevant nursing questions (189/202, 93.6%).

Examination with the chi-square test for independence (Table 3) was used to determine if there was a relationship between

the respondents' reported AI knowledge and their perceptions of the potential effects of AI on clinical practice. For Q26, the reference category for level of AI knowledge was "not good." There was a significant relationship between respondents reporting "not good" level of AI knowledge and their perception of "feel uncomfortable" (ie, "agree" with statement) with AI developments ($\chi^2_1=4.2$, $P=.04$; $\alpha=.05$; small effect $\phi=.15$). Respondents reporting "not good" AI knowledge were 1.84 (95% CI 1.03-3.3) times more likely to indicate developments in AI made them feel uncomfortable.

Table . Respondents' perceptions of current and future effects of AI^a on clinical practice related to their level of AI knowledge.

Questions	Knowledge level	Effects		Chi-square (<i>df</i>)	Effect (ϕ)	OR ^b (95% CI)	<i>P</i> value
		Agree n (%)	Not agree n (%)				
Q22 revolutionize nursing				7.3 (1)	0.19	2.28 (1.25-4.18)	.007
	Good	66 (75)	22 (25)				
	Not good	67 (56.8)	51 (43.2)				
Q23 revolutionize health care				2.3 (1)	0.11	1.58 (0.88-2.86)	.13
	Good	62 (70.5)	26 (29.5)				
	Not good	71 (60.2)	47 (39.8)				
Q24 replace human RN ^c				0.85 (1)	0.07	1.53 (0.62-3.78)	.36
	Good	11 (12.5)	77 (87.5)				
	Not good	10 (8.5)	107 (91.5)				
Q25 replace interprofessional team member				0.2 (1)	0.03	1.18 (0.52-2.70)	.69
	Good	12 (13.6)	76 (86.4)				
	Not good	14 (11.8)	105 (88.2)				
Q26 uncomfortable with AI developments ^d				4.2 (1)	0.15	1.84 (1.03-3.3)	.04
	Not good	53 (45.7)	63 (54.3)				
	Good	27 (31.4)	59 (68.6)				
Q27 nursing will be more exciting				10.1 (1)	0.22	2.52 (1.42-4.47)	.001
	Good	49 (57)	37 (43)				
	Not good	40 (34.5)	76 (65.5)				
Q28 health care will be more exciting				8.3 (1)	0.20	2.3 (1.30-4.06)	.004
	Good	51 (59.3)	35 (40.7)				
	Not good	45 (38.8)	71 (61.2)				
Q29 AI is part of nursing practice				6.6 (1)	0.18	2.1 (1.19-3.68)	.01
	Good	48 (55.2)	39 (44.8)				
	Not good	43 (37.1)	73 (62.9)				
Q30 AI included in nursing education				0.7 (1)	0.06	1.3 (0.71-2.4)	.40
	Good	64 (73.6)	23 (26.4)				
	Not good	79 (68.1)	37 (37.9)				
Q31 AI included in professional development				2.0 (1)	0.10	1.6 (0.83-3.14)	.16
	Good	69 (80.2)	17 (19.8)				
	Not good	83 (71.6)	33 (28.4)				
Q34 nurses should be consulted				0.2 (1)	-0.03	0.74 (0.18-3.05)	.68
	Good	83 (95.4)	4 (4.6)				
	Not good	112 (96.6)	4 (3.4)				
Q35 identify relevant AI nursing questions				2.0 (1)	-0.10	0.44 (0.14-1.39)	.15
	Good	78 (90.7)	8 (9.3)				
	Not good	111 (95.7)	5 (4.3)				

^aAI: artificial intelligence.

^bOR: odds ratio.

^cRN: registered nurse.

^dReference category was set to "good" for all variables with the exception of Q26 where the reference category was set to "not good."

The remaining statements (Q22-Q25 and Q27-Q35) used the reference category "good" level of AI knowledge. There were significant relationships between "good" level of AI knowledge and the following perceptions. Respondents perceived AI would revolutionize nursing ($\chi^2_1=7.3$, $P=.007$; $\alpha=.05$; small to moderate effect $\phi=.19$) and were 2.28 times more likely to agree that nursing would be revolutionized (95% CI 1.25-4.18). Respondents perceived AI would make both nursing ($\chi^2_1=10.1$, $P=.001$, $\alpha=.05$, small to moderate effect $\phi=.22$) and health care ($\chi^2_1=8.3$, $P=.004$, $\alpha=.05$, small to moderate effect $\phi=.20$) more exciting. Respectively, these respondents were 2.52 times more likely (95% CI 1.42-4.47) and 2.3 times more likely (95% CI 1.30-4.06) to perceive that AI will make nursing and health care more exciting. These respondents perceived that AI is part of nursing practice ($\chi^2_1=6.6$, $P=.01$; $\alpha=.05$; small to moderate effect $\phi=.18$) and were 2.1 times more likely to agree that AI is part of nursing practice (95% CI 1.19-3.68).

There was no association observed between level of AI knowledge and perceived effects: for revolutionizing health care ($P=.13$) nor between level of AI knowledge and perceived effects for replacing human RN ($P=.36$) or replacing interprofessional team members ($P=.69$). There was no association between level of AI knowledge and perception that AI should be part of nursing education ($P=.4$), part of

professional development ($P=.16$), nurses should be consulted ($P=.68$), or nurses should identify relevant nursing questions for AI ($P=.15$).

Professional Accountability

Two statements (Q32 and Q33) used "what if" scenarios to examine CHNs' perceptions of AI and professional accountability. One described an AI providing the wrong recommendation, and the other described a correct recommendation that was dismissed by the nurse. Respondents expressed concern regarding their responsibility in both scenarios. The majority, 77.7% (157/202), were concerned if AI offered the wrong recommendation, and likewise, 73.8% (149/202), if an appropriate AI recommendation was dismissed. Examination with chi-square test for independence (Table 4) with "not good" as the reference category revealed no association between level of AI knowledge and perceived concern if AI provided a wrong recommendation ($P=.06$). Conversely, the chi-square test for independence suggested a significant association between a "not good" level of AI knowledge and perceived concern if a correct recommendation was dismissed ($\chi^2_1=3.98$, $P=.046$; $\alpha=.05$; small effect $\phi=.14$). Respondents reporting "not good" AI knowledge were 1.9 times more likely to be concerned with dismissing an appropriate AI recommendation (95% CI 1.01-3.57).

Table . Respondents' perceptions of concern with professional accountability related to their level of AI^a knowledge.

Questions	Knowledge level	Concern		Chi-square (<i>df</i>)	ϕ	OR ^b (95% CI)	<i>P</i> value
		Agree n (%)	Not agree n (%)				
Q32 if AI offers wrong recommendations				3.7 (1)	0.14	1.9 (0.98-3.74)	.06
	Not good	95 (82.6)	20 (17.4)				
	Good	62 (71.3)	25 (28.7)				
Q33 if correct recommendation is dismissed				3.98 (1)	0.14	1.9 (1.01-3.57)	.046
	Not good	91 (79.1)	24 (20.9)				
	Good	58 (66.7)	29 (33.3)				

^aAI: artificial intelligence.

^bOR: odds ratio.

Usefulness of AI Applications

Q10-Q20 examined the respondents' perceptions of the utility of various AI applications. Respondents perceived that overall, each AI application would be useful (Figure 2), with agreement ranging from 68.6% (142/207) to 88% (183/208). Most respondents indicated Q15 bots (183/208, 88%), Q18 risk prediction (161/208, 77.4%), and Q20 summarizing narrative text from a client's notes (160/207, 77.3%) would be useful. Further examination to determine if the level of AI knowledge

was associated with CHNs' perception of the utility of AI application revealed that in all but one example, there was no association between level of AI knowledge and their perception of utility (Table 5). There was a significant association between a "good" level of AI knowledge and perception of utility for Q13 transition management ($\chi^2_1=7.9$, $P=.005$, $\alpha=.05$, small to moderate effect $\phi=.2$). Respondents reporting "good" AI knowledge were 2.45 times more likely to agree that transition management would be useful (95% CI 1.3-4.63).

Figure 2. Respondents' perception of the utility of AI applications. AI: artificial intelligence.

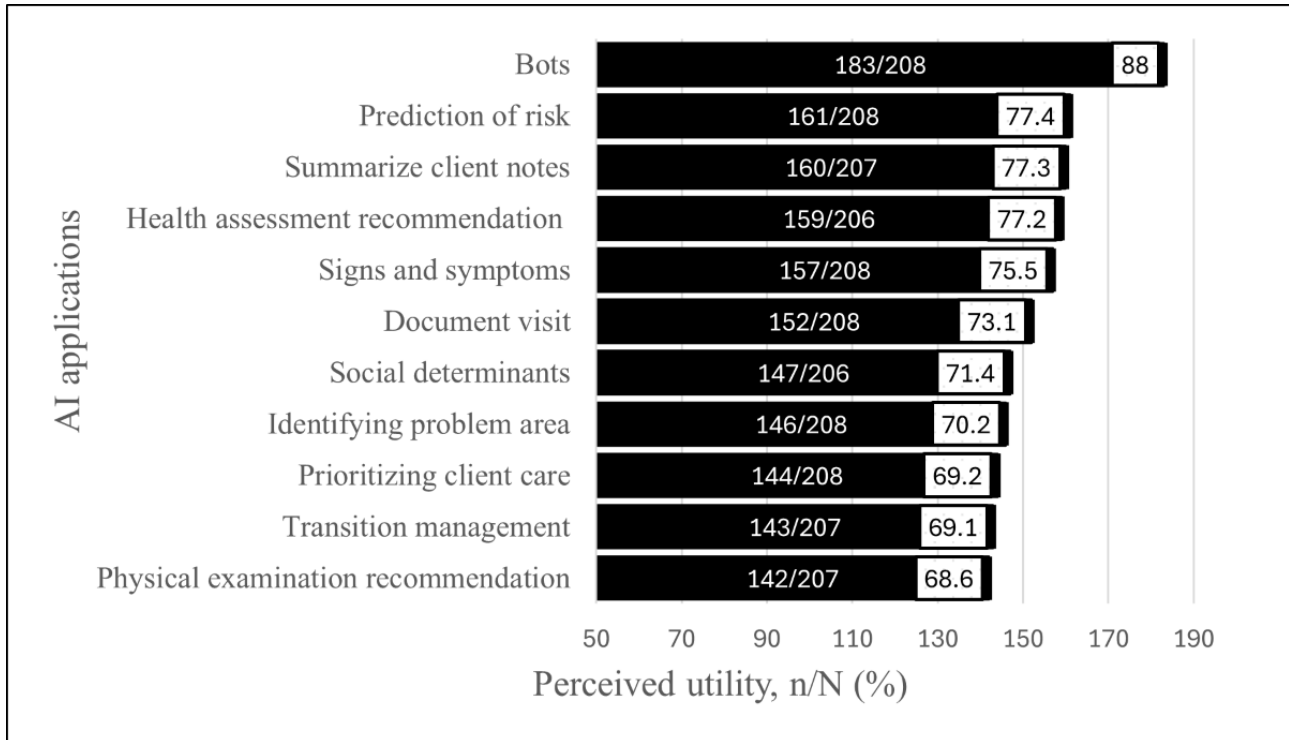


Table . Respondents' perception of the utility of AI^a applications related to their level of AI knowledge.

Questions	Knowledge level	Utility of AI		Chi-square (<i>df</i>)	ϕ	OR ^b (95% CI)	<i>P</i> value
		Agree n (%)	Not agree n (%)				
Q10 signs and symptoms				0.27 (1)	0.034	1.18 (0.62-2.26)	.61
	Good	68 (77.3)	20 (22.7)				
	Not good	89 (74.2)	31 (25.8)				
Q11 social determinants				0.8 (1)	0.06	1.3 (0.72-2.48)	.36
	Good	65 (74.7)	22 (25.3)				
	Not good	82 (68.9)	37 (31.1)				
Q12 prioritizing client care				0.9 (1)	0.07	1.3 (0.73-2.45)	.35
	Good	64 (72.7)	24 (27.3)				
	Not good	80 (66.7)	40 (33.3)				
Q13 transition management				7.9 (1)	0.20	2.45 (1.30-4.63)	.005
	Good	70 (79.5)	18 (20.5)				
	Not good	73 (61.3)	46 (38.7)				
Q14 problem area				3.7 (1)	0.13	1.83 (0.98-3.42)	.06
	Good	68 (77.3)	20 (22.7)				
	Not good	78 (65)	42 (35)				
Q15 bots				0.03 (1)	-0.01	0.93 (0.40-2.15)	.86
	Good	77 (87.5)	11 (12.5)				
	Not good	106 (88.3)	14 (11.7)				
Q16 health assessments				0.1 (1)	-0.02	0.90 (0.47-1.74)	.76
	Good	67 (76.1)	21 (23.9)				
	Not good	92 (78)	26 (22)				
Q17 physical assessment				0.04 (1)	-0.01	0.94 (0.52-1.7)	.84
	Good	59 (67.8)	28 (32.2)				
	Not good	83 (69.2)	37 (30.8)				
Q18 prediction of risk				0.4 (1)	0.04	1.24 (0.64-2.41)	.53
	Good	70 (79.5)	18 (20.5)				
	Not good	91 (75.8)	29 (24.2)				
Q19 documentation of visit				3.2 (1)	0.13	1.8 (0.95-3.44)	.07
	Good	70 (79.5)	18 (20.5)				
	Not good	82 (68.3)	38 (31.7)				
Q20 summarize client notes				1.6 (1)	0.09	1.54 (0.78-3.05)	.21
	Good	71 (81.6)	16 (18.4)				
	Not good	89 (74.2)	31 (25.8)				

^aAI: artificial intelligence.

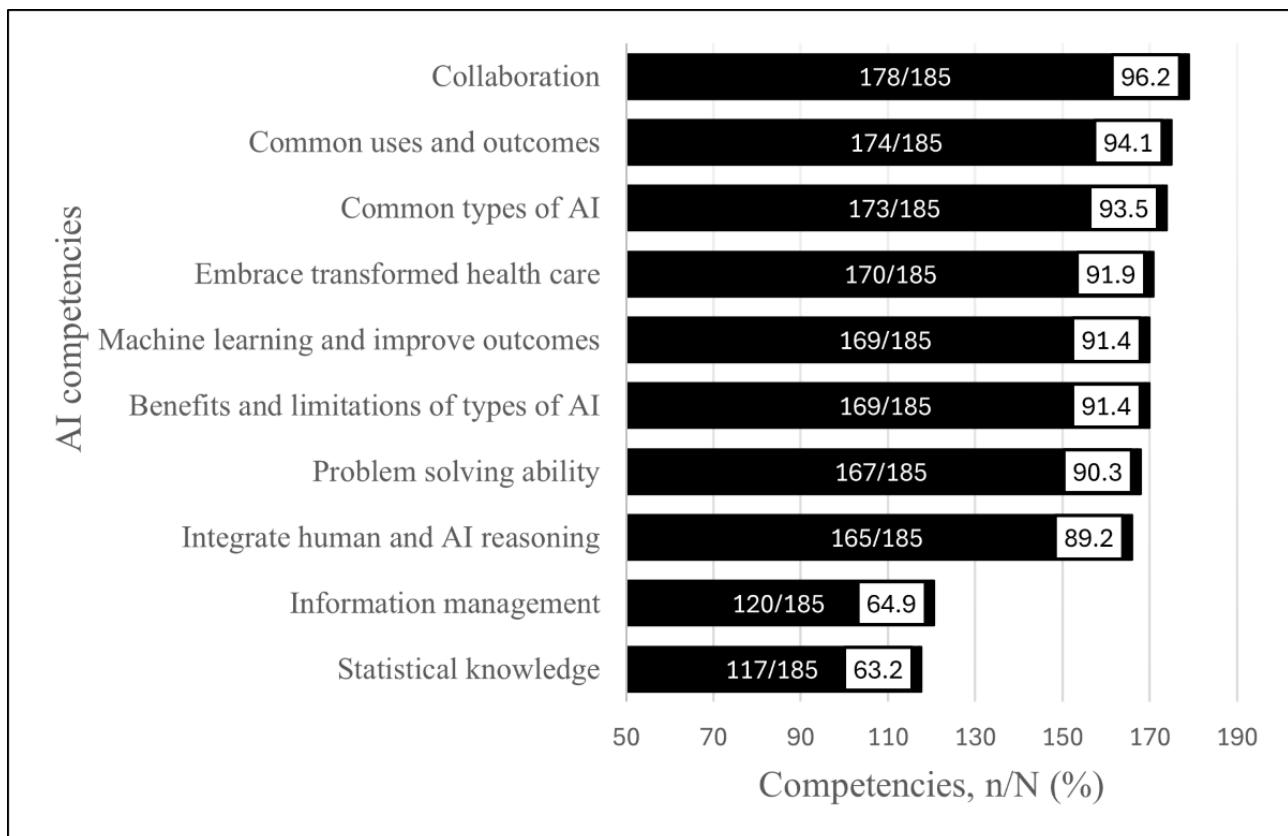
^bOR: odds ratio.

AI Competencies CHNs Perceive as Being Needed in Their Community Practice

The survey (Q36) offered 10 competencies for respondents to indicate which were needed by CHNs (multiple-response question). The 3 competencies most identified as needed (Figure 3) were (1) communications, collaboration, and cross-functional

knowledge (178/185, 96.2%); (2) knowledge of common uses and outcomes of AI (174/185, 94.1%); and (3) knowledge of common types of AI (173/185, 93.5%). The competency identified least was statistical knowledge, which also covered skills related to clinical analytics, data management, and algorithm awareness (117/185, 63.2%). Complete wording of each competency is found in Multimedia Appendix 1.

Figure 3. Competencies identified by respondents as needed by CHNs to integrate AI into clinical practice. AI: artificial intelligence; CHN: community health nurse.



Insights on How CHNs Could Be Better Involved in AI

An open-ended question (Q37) asked how respondents thought they should be involved. It produced (70/228, 30.7%) responses, which provided insights into nurse involvement and their perspectives on related aspects of AI in their practice. Respondents expressed a need for further education (21/70, 30%) using phrases like “learn,” “knowledge acquisition,” “stay up to date,” and “education.” Most respondents (57/70, 81.4%) cited numerous roles or functions where nurses should be involved: raising relevant questions (5/70, 7.1%); advising and consulting (24/70, 34.3%); planning, development, and implementing (14/70, 20%); evaluation (12/70, 17.1%); change management (5/70, 7.1%); regulation, policy, and ethics (7/70, 10%); and all phases (13/70, 18.6%). They used terms like “key stakeholders” and “subject matter experts.” They felt nurses needed to be involved to make AI relevant. Respondents (7/70, 10%) specifically identified that direct care (front-line and end user) CHNs should be involved. Some respondents (8/70, 11.4%) referred to AI as a tool or an additional resource. Other respondents (13/70, 18.6%) acknowledged their apprehension with AI being introduced into practice. Respondents (6/70, 8.6%) referred to the need to be mindful about the human relationship with phrases like “relationships are key aspects of community health nursing” and “human connection care can not be replaced.”

Discussion

Principal Findings

The main findings indicated CHNs differ in their level of knowledge and perceptions of AI technologies in nursing and health care. Many CHNs have a limited awareness of AI emerging in health care and report even less awareness of AI emerging in nursing practice. The main sources of information for day-to-day AI applications are predominantly informal methods (eg, social media) compared to academic and workplace sources. Some CHNs are unaware that common day-to-day applications are AI-driven. Fewer CHNs describe their knowledge of AI technologies as “good.” However, the CHNs who describe their AI knowledge as “good” are twice as likely to be optimistic or have favorable perceptions of AI effects, such as revolutionizing nursing, making nursing more exciting, and agreeing that AI is part of nursing. Whereas CHNs with “not good” AI knowledge are almost twice as likely to feel uncomfortable with AI development. Regardless of the level of AI knowledge, most CHNs agree they should be involved in AI by consulting and raising nurse-relevant questions in various phases of AI development, such as implementation and ongoing evaluation. The results substantiate the need for appropriate AI education for CHNs to prepare them to participate in AI that will influence their practice.

CHNs have a limited awareness of AI emerging in nursing practice (30.5%), which aligns with results found in similar nursing research [28,40]. However, other questions in this current research are used to gain further insights into why their

understanding of various AI technologies might be limited. CHNs use informal (eg, social media, and family and friends) methods of learning about common day-to-day AI applications, with 12.7% (28/221) to 14% (31/221) of respondents being unaware that these common forms (ie, speech to text, spam, and recommendation algorithms) are driven by AI. This limited awareness could be related to relying on informal sources of knowledge. CHNs may turn to readily available sources of information because of convenience. Likewise, being aware of spam from work-related sources could be as simple as “don’t see a reply, check your spam folder,” while having no real understanding of the algorithms that recognize and reroute spam. This lack of understanding whether an application is driven by AI has been linked to clinical practice by another study [40] where 22% of Canadian nurses did not know if AI is used in their practice area. Similarly, Coakley et al [31] identified that approximately 40% of radiographers did not recognize work-related AI-driven applications. This raises a potential concern that CHNs may be using AI-driven applications within their practice unbeknownst to them. Lastly, over half (125/220, 56.8%) of CHNs describe their knowledge of AI technologies as “not good.” This limited awareness of AI in nursing and lack of knowledge of AI technology highlights a knowledge deficit, stressing the importance of AI education for CHNs.

The composition of the survey sample strengthens the clinical value of the results. First, this Canadian sample is an experienced group of CHNs, both in years of practice as an RN and years of experience in the community sector. They describe themselves as competent and welcoming of technology. This was expected because Canada has been striving since 2000 to improve digital health connections (eg, electronic health records) within the Canadian health care system [41]. A current report [40] confirms a continual uptake in digital technology. This steady increase of new technologies into practice (eg, electronic health records and electronic assessments) emphasizes CHNs’ adaptability and resiliency to new technologies in their practice, considering these decisions are made at higher levels in the organization rather than from staff who are expected to use them [42]. Second, more than half of the survey respondents provide direct care services. This means they are familiar with community practice, its clinical data, and provision of care at the client level, and have the potential to offer pragmatic insights. Third, this group of CHNs includes end users who are seldom involved in the development of AI. They are, however, important stakeholders in ensuring clinical relevance in new technology [22,24]. The various characteristics (eg, experienced, competent, and end users) of this CHN sample provide validity and relevance to the results.

A common technique for assessing the level of knowledge across surveys is asking the respondent to indicate their level of AI knowledge. Most surveys use this subjective method, finding fewer respondents rate their level of AI knowledge as “good” compared to “not good” level of knowledge) [28,32,40,43,44], aligning with the current study (level of knowledge “good” 95/220, 43.2% versus “not good” 125/220, 56.8%). None of the cited surveys uses the difference in knowledge level to compare groups and their perceptions.

The subjective evaluation of CHNs’ level of AI knowledge may be underestimated or overestimated. However, professionally, CHNs self-reflect on practice and learning gaps, so they have familiarity in evaluating their competencies [45]. It seems plausible to use the self-identified AI knowledge level as a starting point to determine if there is a relationship between the level of knowledge and CHNs’ perceptions of AI. The 2 groups of “good” and “not good” knowledge level of AI technologies in this study suggest that the level of AI knowledge affects some of the AI perceptions of CHNs.

The CHNs reporting “not good” level of knowledge are almost two times more likely to indicate that they are uncomfortable with the developments in AI. Intuitively, this makes sense. It can be argued that having “good” AI knowledge provides a method to evaluate the benefits or disadvantages of AI and perhaps provides some control [46]. CHNs reporting a “good” level of knowledge are more than two times more likely to feel nursing will be revolutionized, nursing and health care will become more exciting, and agree that AI is part of nursing practice. Therefore, CHNs with a “good” level of AI knowledge are more optimistic about the future effects of AI [46]. The differences between AI perceptions for CHNs with a “good” level of knowledge versus a “not good” level further stress the necessity for education and ongoing learning opportunities to decrease apprehension and promote optimism around AI [46].

Regardless of their level of knowledge, few CHNs believe that human RNs (21/205, 10.2%) or interprofessional team members (26/207, 12.6%) will be replaced by AI. This sentiment aligns with that of Swan [28]. The underlying belief that human touch is integral to nursing care, along with humans’ ability to reconsider and change care when an unexpected situation arises, supports human RNs and other interprofessional members’ continued importance to the care team [47-49]. CHNs’ responses (Q37) defend the importance of human involvement: “relationships are a key aspect of community health nursing” and “human connection care can not be replaced.” CHNs’ belief that they will not be replaced does not address how they think their role within health care will change. This aspect should be examined in future research.

Professional accountability is a central feature for all regulated professionals. Several studies include some reference to the issue (eg, medical liability). This current study demonstrates a mixed outcome. There is no association between the level of AI knowledge and concern with AI providing a wrong recommendation, versus an association between the level of AI knowledge and concern with dismissing a correct recommendation. Still, the clinical importance should be addressed because most CHNs, regardless of their level of AI knowledge, have concerns about who would be held responsible for either accepting a wrong recommendation (157/202, 77.7%) or dismissing a correct recommendation (149/202, 73.8%). Other studies confirm that professionals have concerns about the use of AI in practice [32,40,43]. Further research needs to explore what CHNs feel they require to help address and remediate their concerns.

Although CHNs have a limited understanding of AI, more than two-thirds perceived the examples of AI-driven applications as

useful. It suggests that, superficially, they perceived a value in the application to their practice setting. Positive perceptions of the utility of AI applications trend across surveys [28,33,40,43]. However, it is unknown why CHNs perceive the AI applications as useful to them; that is, whether it is the function of replacing a task or the function of supporting decision-making that is important. Future research should follow the open text response “start by asking nurses what they feel could be automated,” thus gaining an understanding of what makes an application useful.

A more comprehensive picture of how CHNs should be involved in AI becomes apparent through the open text responses. First, CHNs confirm their need to “learn,” for “knowledge acquisition,” to “stay up to date,” and “education” as important prerequisites to being involved in AI. Although the quantitative sample identifies the necessity of AI to be included in nursing education and professional development, the open text responses connect AI education to facilitating CHNs’ involvement (participation). Second, the open text responses share a wide range of ways CHNs can be involved. It verifies the importance of including all levels of nurses, specifically noting direct care nurses, and validates that CHNs need to be engaged during all phases of AI. Areas of involvement include: raising relevant questions, planning, development, implementing, evaluation, and monitoring to ensure AI is clinically relevant and accurate. Third, they recognize that their involvement includes regulation, workplace policies, and ethical frameworks to guide their practice because AI is a tool. Fourth, they readily admit to being apprehensive, citing concerns with loss of some of their skills (eg, assessment) along with the human connection and relationship with clients because of AI. This loss of human connection because of technology is also a common concern explored in the literature [49,50]. Further research should continue to examine how CHNs can be better involved.

Clinical Implications and Recommendations

This research reveals 2 interrelated concepts, preparation and participation. These are both essential to better involve CHNs. The first, preparation, acknowledges the importance of education and ongoing professional development. This builds the foundation that will support CHNs to become involved. AI needs to be consciously integrated both in nursing education and ongoing professional development, with attention to a standardized curriculum to ensure all nurses have a basic understanding of AI. Specific areas of concentration should address professional accountability. This will provide CHNs with knowledge to evaluate AI outputs as part of their decision-making, as well as planning and ameliorating perceived future effects of AI. The second, participation, addresses the various aspects of involving CHNs to identify relevant questions and to contribute their nursing perspective to all phases of development and implementation of AI. Professional nursing groups and health care organizations are instrumental in ensuring that the right mix of CHNs, from end user to leadership, have participation on AI advisory committees. Although this research was initiated to examine the perceptions of CHNs about AI in clinical practice, it now raises the necessity of further research to expand on these results by conducting small group consultations to gain an in-depth understanding of how best to involve CHNs.

Strengths and Limitations

The strengths of this study include establishing baseline knowledge and perceptions of AI among Canadian CHNs. An effort was made to recruit the appropriate sample population by targeting national nursing groups as well as provincial and territorial nursing organizations. This survey identifies the need for appropriate education (preparation) and confirms that CHNs want to be involved (participation). It explores the use of the self-reported level of knowledge to determine differences between the “good” and “not good” levels of knowledge.

Several limitations exist. The original survey that was foundational to this study did not have psychometric or reliability testing done. Further testing and reporting of reliability is recommended as a future step. In this variation of the survey, only 1 experienced community nurse was used to determine face validity. A notable limitation of the research is the length of the instrument, as nonresponses increased as the survey progressed. The multiple response questions allowed for several responses, which may have blurred the interpretation. For example, under “current position,” a respondent could have 2 different positions within the community, for example, direct care and educator. Self-reported knowledge is subjective; we are unable to verify what the respondents know or do not know or evaluate the expertise of their knowledge. However, CHNs who feel they have knowledge were more favorable or optimistic about AI within their practice. This study did not examine whether respondents had AI-related practical experience or whether current AI is integrated into their practice. Each survey statement or question is briefly explained or described, for example, “AI will revolutionize nursing by supporting health promotion and disease prevention, helping create personalized treatment plans, speeding up administrative tasks.” Each respondent could interpret it differently depending on their understanding of how this might occur and their experience with any of the concepts in the descriptor. There were no respondents identified from Prince Edward Island, Saskatchewan, or the Northwest Territories. With a nonresponse rate (42/228, 18.4%) for this question, it could not be determined where the missing respondents were located. An online survey has challenges. The recommended number of 377 respondents to have a 5% error margin was not achieved. The true response rate is unknown because it is unknown how many CHNs received the recruitment invitations due to the method used to recruit respondents. Respondents’ bias or selective reporting may have occurred because it was an online survey; only nurses who could access the survey could respond. Additionally, using the term AI in the survey title may have only interested a select group of nurses. As well, the survey was only offered in English, limiting the participation and insights from Francophone nursing colleagues. Lastly, for analysis, the chi-square test can only test for the association of the categorical variables, not causation.

Conclusions

The survey results provide insights into the proposed research questions. Only a third of CHNs are aware that AI is emerging in nursing practice. CHNs use informal sources of knowledge (eg, family and friends) to learn about day-to-day AI applications, with some unaware that these day-to-day

applications are AI-driven. This raises the concern that CHNs may be using AI in their practice without realizing that the technology they are using is AI-based. CHNs who report better AI knowledge tend to be more optimistic (ie, “more exciting”) and less uncomfortable about AI and its effects on practice. However, many CHNs have concerns with AI and their professional accountability. Many CHNs agree that AI as a topic should be included in nursing education as well as professional

development. This study identifies that most CHNs want to be involved in AI, highlighting that they want to be consulted and given opportunities to raise nurse-relevant questions. An important step to better involve CHNs should address the availability of appropriate and consistent education. This will help to promote the awareness of AI in nursing and alleviate professional concerns, thus preparing CHNs to be better involved.

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Data Availability

The data are presented in the main paper.

Authors' Contributions

Conceptualization: MHB, LC, SF

Data curation: MHB, SF

Formal analysis: MHB, SF, LC, PJ

Investigation: MHB

Methodology: MHB, SF, DB, LC, PJ

Project administration: MHB

Supervision: SF, DB, LC, PJ

Validation: MHB, SF, DB, LC, PJ

Visualization: MHB, SF, DB, LC, PJ

Writing – original draft: MHB

Writing – review & editing: MHB, SF, DB, LC, PJ

Conflicts of Interest

None declared.

Multimedia Appendix 1

Survey instrument.

[\[DOCX File, 39 KB - nursing_v9i1e78560_app1.docx \]](#)

Checklist 1

CHERRIES checklist.

[\[DOCX File, 26 KB - nursing_v9i1e78560_app2.docx \]](#)

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Abbreviations:

- AI:** artificial intelligence
- CHN:** Community Health Nurse
- ML:** machine learning
- OR:** odds ratio
- RN:** registered nurse
- UNBC:** University of Northern British Columbia

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Development of Telenursing Guidelines to Improve the Quality of Services in Diabetic Wound Care in a Hospital in Thailand: Case Study

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Abstract

Background: The majority of patients with diabetic wounds living in Mae Chan District, Chiang Rai Province face challenges such as a shortage of nurses, limited access to health care, and insufficient resources. Strategies such as specialist networks, patient monitoring, and online care platforms are crucial to improving diabetic wound management in the community.

Objective: This study aims to develop telenursing guidelines for caring for patients with diabetic wounds and foot ulcers, and to investigate the effects of telenursing on wound healing among patients.

Methods: Participatory action research was conducted in three cycles: (1) assessing the current situation and feasibility of telenursing; (2) evaluating telenursing guidelines for wound healing; and (3) examining the effects of telenursing on wound healing, amputation rates, and patient satisfaction.

Results: The mean diabetic wound severity scores decreased after receiving telenursing care at weeks 2, 4, 6, and 8 ($P < .001$). No patients were found to have foot or leg amputations. The patients in the group who received telenursing care showed that their wounds healed in an average of 8.6 (SD 4.3) weeks. The satisfaction score for telenursing care was 4.7 out of 5 (SD 0.2).

Conclusions: Telenursing guidelines were developed to enhance access to wound care, reduce amputation rates, and promote wound healing, resulting in a significant reduction in wound severity and the absence of amputations. The study further demonstrated that telenursing not only expedited healing times but also reduced health care costs and improved patient satisfaction.

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KEYWORDS

telenursing; diabetic ulcers; wound care; nursing guideline; quality of service

Introduction

Diabetes is one of the serious chronic diseases strongly associated with health complications, including macrovascular disease, microvascular disease, peripheral vascular complications, and neuropathy, leading to serious health problems such as coronary heart disease, stroke, kidney disease, and retinal abnormalities. In addition, patients with diabetes are at risk of having foot ulcers, which are the most common complications causing disability, amputation, or premature death. This is one of the most critical public health problems. Diabetic foot ulcers are among the most common complications in persons with diabetes who have problems with uncontrolled blood sugar [1]. The incidence shows that patients with diabetes develop foot ulcers at 19% to 34% and have recurrence symptoms within 3 to 5 years at 65%; moreover, foot or leg

amputation is found to be shared among patients with diabetes compared to the general population at 50% to 70%, and they have a chance of premature death within 5 years [2]. Foot ulcers among persons with diabetes take longer to recover than those of normal people, taking an average of 11 to 14 weeks. This could affect the lifestyles of the patients because it causes physical, mental, and social limitations. According to a study of health expenses for caring for patients with foot ulcers in a tertiary university hospital in Singapore between 2013 and 2017, the average cost of wound care alone was US \$3368 per patient per year; the cost of minor amputation below the ankle was US \$10,468 per patient per year; and the cost of major amputation above or below the knee was US \$30,131 per patient per year [3].

Foot ulcers [4,5] can be classified into the following types of wounds. First, infected ulcers are where the wound is infected

and becomes inflamed. The area around the wound is red and spreading from the original site. Symptoms of infected wounds are redness, swelling, pain, and pus. Second, neuropathic ulcers are the most common complication of uncontrolled diabetes. The wound is usually round in shape, with a deep hole in the middle part and thickened skin on the edges. It is found at the base of the big toe and pinky toe. Neuropathic ulcers develop from smaller wounds with symptoms of redness, swelling, numbness, or inflammation around the affected area. Third, ischemic ulcers are wounds that develop when the arteries do not deliver enough blood flow to a specific area, causing local ischemia in the skin and the underlying tissues. Initially, these ulcers manifest as blue discoloration, necrosis, or gangrene. They are painful wounds often found on the tips of the toes, especially the big and pinky toes. The characteristics of the wounds are pale, yellow, and cold, with a weak or absent pulse. They often start at the fingertips and pose an increased risk of amputation if left untreated. Diabetic ulcers are complex and chronic wounds that cannot follow the normal wound-healing process. When the wound is infected, dead tissue (sloughing or shedding) and purulent exudate from inflammation of the wound. There is no new tissue formation, and it does not heal within 4 weeks. Diabetic wounds heal slowly, and sometimes they do not heal. If the wounds are left without proper care, they will cause an infection that will spread to the bone layer (osteomyelitis), requiring organ removal (amputation). If a severe infection enters the bloodstream (septicemia), it can cause death. The essential goals in caring for patients with diabetic ulcers are to prevent disability from the wound spreading to the point where it is necessary to amputate the involved organ, to prevent new wounds from forming after treatment, and to increase the quality of life of the patients.

Diabetic wound care is integral to medical practice to heal wounds better and faster. To promote wound healing faster, (1) clean the wound to prevent infection and promote the wound healing process, (2) keep the wound elevated to reduce fluid accumulation and promote blood circulation, (3) provide adequate knowledge regarding nutrition to promote the wound healing process, (4) have enough rest because resting will reduce the metabolic process inside unnecessary cells and tissues and can carry enough oxygen and nutrients to the wounds, and (5) promote personal hygiene [6]. Diabetic wound care should be supervised by a nurse with clinical expertise who can collect, evaluate, analyze, and identify the needs and problems of patients. Expert nurses should be able to manage options for care and use medical supplies and equipment correctly and appropriately, obtain communication skills to coordinate with the treatment team and encourage family members to participate in care, identify health services and resources, protect patients' rights and privacy, and preserve patient safety and prevent harm during care [7-9]

Despite a community point prevalence of approximately 1.5% to 5% for diabetic foot ulcers, the lifetime incidence risk reaches 19% to 34% [1]. This elevation is frequently linked to suboptimal foot self-care practices; however, there are not enough nurses to meet the increasing demand for care and other issues in Mae Chan District, Chiang Rai Province, such as a lack of health equipment; resources; and access to health

services, communication channels for health care advice, and continuity of care rehabilitation. Therefore, strategies for caring for diabetic wounds are necessary, such as creating a network of channels for giving advice from specialists to nurses, caregivers, and patients in the community, monitoring and following up with patients, and providing quality of service through online channels. Various health care advice channels could increase access to services, reduce waiting time, and facilitate patients in a new way of life (New Normal). Moreover, the use of digital technology systems to provide health services for continuous care and referral to primary care units with the best practice guidelines, The Nursing and Midwifery Council has announced telenursing strategies to provide health care advice and to find solutions related to health within the knowledge framework of the nursing and midwifery profession [10].

Telenursing uses information and communication technologies to develop all fields of nursing care, education, and research at a distance [11]. In Thailand, the Nursing and Midwifery Council provides advice and solutions related to health within the knowledge framework by using this digital technology system to provide services and support all forms of nursing care, including continuous care, quality of care, equal access to health, and allowing people to manage their health through online services [10]. Telenursing care increases channel access to health services, covers health care in remote areas, especially in areas with travel restrictions, and maintains professional standards and quality. Patients also do not need to commute to the hospital, which helps reduce the cost of hospital admission and other related expenses while still allowing monitoring and following up on patients' conditions through online channels.

The Mae Chan Hospital is located in the Chiang Rai Province. It is a middle-level hospital that can host up to 120 beds and support referrals from community hospitals in the joint service network of 4 districts: Mae Chan District, Mae Fah Luang District, Doi Luang District, and Chiang Saen District. The Mae Chan Hospital is responsible for caring for patients referred from community hospitals when the capacity of those hospitals in the 4 districts reaches the limit. The hospital helps increase access to treatment for service users in the area, reduces referrals to regional hospitals (advanced-level hospital), and supports primary service units in each district. The Wound and Ostomy Care Clinic, Mae Chan Hospital, provides services for patients with chronic wounds, bedsores, general wounds, penetrating wounds, drains, and ostomy care. Some nurses specialize in diabetic wounds, one specialist in ostomy care, and one in general care for patients. There were a number of people who received services from 2020 to 2022, including a total of 2142, 1571, and 1675 patients, representing 3725, 4931, and 6239 visits, respectively. There were 114, 70, and 67 patients with diabetic ulcers, accounting for 405, 281, and 291 visits, respectively. The average cost of commuting to the hospital for patients to receive wound care is US \$10 per time. The average number of days to receive wound care services is 14 to 45 days per person. In general, the travel distance for patients to visit the wound care and ostomy clinic is 1 to 40 km. Due to travel distance and expenses involved in wound care at the hospital, some of the patients are unable to receive treatment regularly

and continuously, so many patients experience wound spreading and recurrence of wound infection, leading to foot or leg amputation in some cases.

According to literature reviews, telenursing is important in assisting patients to access standard care for chronic wounds. Telenursing care helps reduce complications and the number of patients admitted to the hospital, which encourages participation among patients, caregivers, and nurses in self-care practices, and increases patient satisfaction because it reduces travel time, traveling costs, and other related expenses of going to the hospital. Therefore, the research team was interested in studying the development of telenursing guidelines for caring for patients with diabetic wounds and foot ulcers, and the effects of telenursing on wound healing in patients to provide quality service and prevent the spread and recurrence of wound infections and foot and leg amputations in patients.

Methods

Study Design

This was participatory action research [12], which divided the study into 3 cycles.

Cycle 1

The current situations, problems, and needs of patients with diabetic wounds and the feasibility of using telenursing guidelines in the context of the Mae Chan Hospital, Chiang Rai Province, and community networks in the research area were studied. The researcher used lessons learned from the study to conclude the issues and needs of developing and drafting telenursing guidelines for diabetic wound care. Informants and participants in the design of diabetic wound care guidelines and telenursing system were purposively selected, consisting of (1) patients with diabetic wounds and/or their caregivers who received care in the Wound and Ostomy Care Clinic, totaling 10 persons; (2) the multidisciplinary team including a surgeon, a pharmacist, a nutritionist, and 9 registered nurses at subdistrict health-promoting hospital in the Mae Chan Hospital networks, totaling 12 people; and (3) a computer technical officer.

The interprofessional team plays a critical role in providing comprehensive care for patients with chronic diabetic wounds. The surgeon is central to diagnosing the underlying causes of chronic wounds, determining their etiology, and formulating an integrated treatment plan. In collaboration with the health care team, the surgeon ensures the effective implementation of telenursing guidelines, addressing the needs of patients who face barriers to in-person health care access. The pharmacist works closely with the physician and nursing staff to select appropriate topical treatments that promote wound healing and minimize the risk of infection. In addition to this, the pharmacist is responsible for educating both patients and their families on the proper use of medications and wound care techniques. The nutritionist plays a vital role by recommending dietary strategies that support wound healing, promote tissue regeneration, and address underlying risk factors such as poor circulation or diabetes. Their tailored nutritional guidance is designed to strengthen the immune system and accelerate recovery. Finally, the computer technical officer ensures the seamless operation

of the telemedicine system, facilitating smooth communication via platforms like the “Wound Care Mae Chan” LINE app. They provide technical support, enabling real-time updates and enhancing the overall telehealth experience for both health care providers and patients.

Cycle 2

Telenursing guidelines toward diabetic wound healing were studied. Participants recruited in the study were patients with diabetic wounds and professional nurses from subdistrict health-promoting hospitals under the Mae Chan Hospital network, totaling 20 persons. A sample size calculation was done using G*Power software version 3.1.9.4 (Fual et al), with test power set at 0.70, confidence value at 0.05, and influence value (effect size) at 0.30. The number of samples obtained from the calculation was 13. An additional 50% was added to the sample size, so the total number of participants in this cycle was 20.

Cycle 3

The effects of telenursing on diabetic wound healing were studied by evaluating the wounds, foot or leg amputation, and satisfaction with using telenursing guidelines. A quasi-experimental one-group pretest-posttest design was employed in this stage of the study.

Research Instruments

The tools used for data collection are given below:

1. General information on characteristics was collected, including gender, age, education level, occupation, history of smoking, history of diabetes and duration, and types of diabetic wounds.
2. Bates-Jensen Wound Assessment Tool (BWAT): the BWAT consists of 13 wound characteristics: size, visible depth, wound edges, undermining and tunneling processes, necrotic tissue type and amount, exudate type and amount, surrounding skin discoloration, peripheral tissue edema, peripheral tissue induration, granulation tissue, and epithelialization [13]. The scores range from 13 to 65, and content validity and concurrent validity are both equal to 0.91. The assessment tool was used in a tryout among 10 patients with similar characteristics to find reliability using the Cronbach α coefficient formula, and the reliability value was 0.88. The cutoff scores of BWAT are the following: minimal scores are 13 to 20, mild severity scores are 21 to 30, moderate severity scores are 31 to 40, and critical severity scores are 41 to 65.
3. The questionnaire on satisfaction with the telenursing guidelines consists of 7 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale measuring satisfaction, with response options ranking from 5 (very satisfied), 4 (satisfied), 3 (neutral), 2 (dissatisfied), and 1 (very dissatisfied).

The tools used to conduct the study included the following:

1. Guidelines for diabetic wound care: the researcher developed the guidelines based on the existing literature review by specifying keywords to search for papers and related documents, including diabetic wounds, chronic wounds, guidelines for wound care, and wound care. The

literature review search period was set from 2014 to 2023. Information was also obtained from cycle 1, which involved studying the current situations, problems, and needs of patients with diabetic wounds and the feasibility of using telenursing guidelines. The researcher presented a draft of telenursing guidelines to 3 experts in the fields of surgery, preventive medicine, and wound and ostomy care. These experts reviewed the guidelines to ensure they were consistent with the research objectives. Content validity was performed by measuring the Index of Item Objective Congruence, which was equal to 0.80.

2. LINE app “Wound Care Mae Chan”
3. Telemedicine Service System (Telemedicine; ITELE) of Mae Chan Hospital

Ethical Considerations

The Human Research Ethics Committee at Chiang Rai Provincial Public Health Office approved this research study under approval 37/2023, with certification granted on April 1, 2023. The researcher adhered strictly to ethical principles throughout the study. Before participation, the researcher clearly communicated the objectives of the study, the research process, the expected duration, and the anticipated benefits to ensure a full understanding; subsequently, written informed consent was obtained from all participants before any data collection commenced. Informants and participants were informed that communication regarding wound care would be conducted via the LINE application, specifically designated for this research group. They were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time, without any impact on their current treatment or benefits received from the hospital.

Participants received a remuneration of US \$6 for each completed data collection session. The researchers were committed to protecting the participants' rights and privacy. As such, all data were recorded using codes instead of real names, ensuring anonymity. All participant information was kept confidential and could not be traced back to any individual. The findings of the study were presented as aggregated data to protect participant identity. Furthermore, all recorded data, including images, would be destroyed 1 year after the publication of the research results.

Results

As per the study objectives, we developed telenursing guidelines for caring for patients with diabetic wounds and foot ulcers, and studied the effects of telenursing on wound healing, using participatory action research.

In cycle 1, to study the current situations, problems, and needs of patients with diabetic wounds and the feasibility of using telenursing guidelines, we recruited 10 informants who were patients with diabetic wounds and foot ulcers aged between 30 and 74 years (average age 62.6, SD 12.4 years; duration of diabetes 1-10 years; average duration of diabetes 4.9, SD 3.5 years; average wound assessment score 51.3, SD 3.3); additional informants included a surgeon, a pharmacist, a nutritionist, 9 registered nurses at the subdistrict health-promoting hospital, and a computer technical officer. The following needs and problems were found.

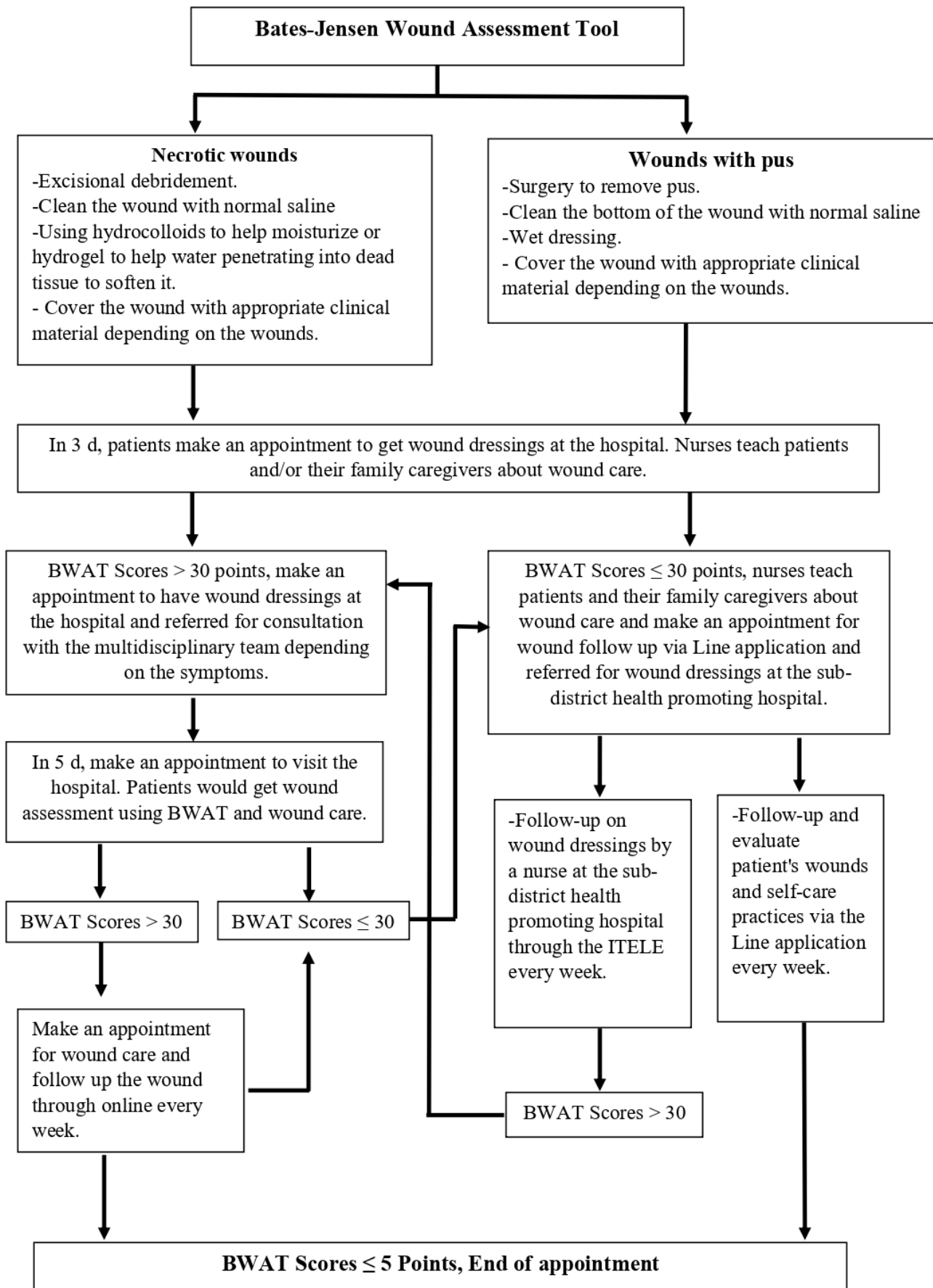
Some patients could not receive wound care regularly and continuously because of the distance to the hospital, traveling difficulties, expenses for transportation, food, medical care, and related costs. Findings showed that some patients live far from the hospital. It costs them a lot of money per hospital visit. In some cases, patients have no one to take them to the hospital because family members have to work, and if they have to accompany the patients to the hospital, they have to miss their work and lose income. Moreover, they must spend extra money on transportation and food while waiting for patients to receive wound care. The cost of traveling to the hospital to receive wound care services is approximately 100 to 1000 Baht (US \$2.85-\$28.50) per visit, which is too much for them to spend, especially for patients and their family members who live in a remote community area.

Lack of knowledge about diabetic wound care is one of the problems. Patients lack adequate knowledge of wound care, nutrition, and control of blood sugar levels. These are factors for wound healing. In some cases, patients did not follow up on the appointment, which could also affect their physical health. Because of this, many patients experienced wound spreading and recurrence of wound infection, and in some cases, may experience foot or leg amputation.

Treating severely infected wounds requires skills and expertise in advanced wound care, which exceeds the potential of community nurses working in subdistrict health-promoting hospitals, and patients did not have access to or resources for advanced wound care, such as hydrocolloid, hydro fiber, alginate, hydrogel, foam, and film dressings.

Nowadays, the majority of patients and their family caregivers have smartphones that can be used to communicate via the LINE app. Introducing telenursing for diabetic wound care among patients could help reduce barriers to receiving health care services. Based on the study of situations, needs, and problems among patients with diabetic wounds, telenursing guidelines for diabetic wound care are summarized as shown in [Figure 1](#).

Figure 1. Telenursing guidelines for diabetic wound care. BWAT: Bates-Jensen Wound Assessment Tool; NSS: normal saline solution.



In cycle 2, the telenursing guidelines for diabetic wound healing were evaluated.

The study sample included 20 patients with diabetic wounds and foot ulcers, and half of them were female (n=10, 50%) and

aged 30 to 81 years, with an average age of 47.6 (SD 9.4) years and an average duration of diabetes of 7.6 (SD 6.4) years. Studies showed that the wounds were found most on the leg, foot, and toe (n=15, 75%). The average assessment wound

severity score was 50.8 (SD 4.4), indicating that patients had wound critical severity (BWAT=41 - 65 points represents critical severity), and the results are shown in [Table 1](#).

Table . Attributes of the sample.

Items	Value
Sex, n (%)	
Male	10 (50)
Female	10 (50)
Age (y)	
30 - 49, n (%)	2 (10)
50 - 59, n (%)	3 (15)
60 - 69, n (%)	9 (45)
≥70, n (%)	6 (30)
Mean (SD)	62.6 (12.4)
Duration of diabetes (y), n (%)	
0 - 2	4 (20)
3 - 5	6 (30)
6 - 10	7 (35)
≥10	3 (15)
Wound location, n (%)	
Head and neck	1 (5)
Arm, hand, and fingers	4 (20)
Legs, feet, and toes	15 (75)
Pain, n (%)	
Pain occurs during wound dressing	7 (35)
Pain is present at all times	8 (40)
Intermittent pain	5 (25)
Wound status score	
Mean (SD)	50.8 (4.35)
Critical severity (BWAT ^a =41 - 65 points), n (%)	20 (100)
Wound characteristics, n (%)	
Size (length × width) (cm ²)	
<4	3 (15)
4-16	11 (55)
16.1-36	2 (10)
36.1-80	3 (15)
>80	1 (5)
Depth	
Obscured by necrosis	5 (25)
Full-thickness skin loss with extensive destruction, tissue necrosis, or damage to muscle, bone, or supporting structures	15 (75)
Wound edges	
Indistinct, diffuse, and none clearly visible	19 (95)
Distinct, outline clearly visible, attached, and even with wound base	1 (5)
Undermining	
<2 cm in any area	14 (70)
2 - 4 cm involving <50% wound margins	6 (30)

Items	Value
Necrotic tissue type	
Loosely adherent yellow slough	3 (15)
Adherent, soft, and black eschar	17 (85)
Necrotic tissue amount	
>50% and <75% of wound covered	14 (70)
75%-100% of wound covered	6 (30)
Exudate type	
Serosanguineous: thin, watery, and pale red or pink	1 (5)
Serous: thin, watery, and clear	7 (35)
Purulent: thin or thick, opaque, tan or yellow, and with or without odor	12 (60)
Exudate amount	
The amount of secretion is \leq 25%	1 (5)
The amount of secretion is more than 25% - 75%	7 (35)
The amount of secretion is more than 75%	12 (60)
Skin color surrounding the wound	
Bright red and/or blanches to touch	16 (80)
Black or hyperpigmented	4 (20)
Peripheral tissue edema	
Pitting edema extends <4 cm around the wound	9 (45)
Crepitus and/or pitting edema extends >4 cm around the wound	11 (55)
Peripheral tissue induration	
None present	1 (5)
Induration, <2 cm around the wound	2 (10)
Induration 2 - 4 cm extending <50% around the wound	6 (30)
Induration 2 - 4 cm extending >50% around the wound	11 (55)
Granulation tissue, n (%)	
Bright, beefy red; <75% and >25% of wound filled	3 (15)
Pink and/or dull, dusky red and/or fills <25% of wound	17 (85)
Epithelialization, n (%)	
50% to <50% wound covered	3 (15)
<25% wound covered	17 (85)

^aBWAT: Bates-Jensen Wound Assessment Tool.

The researcher prepared workshops and set up a meeting to explain the task of developing telenursing guidelines to the committee and those responsible for the continuous care, advanced wound care, and training program using the ITELE.

In cycle 3, mean wound severity scores were compared before and after receiving telenursing guidelines for diabetic wound care at week 2, week 4, week 6, and week 8 using 1-way

repeated measures (ANOVA) statistical analysis; the results are shown in Table 2. The mean scores for wound severity were significantly different at the .001 level. A comparison of the wound severity scores before and after receiving telenursing nursing care guidelines for wound care at week 2, week 4, week 6, and week 8 using *t* test (1-tailed) statistical analysis is shown in Table 3.

Table . Comparison of the wound severity scores before and after receiving telenursing guidelines toward diabetic wound care using repeated measures of 1-way ANOVA statistics.

ANOVA	Sum of square	df	Mean square	F test	df	P value
Between-group	15,379.4	4	3844.8	401.7	4	<.001
Within-group	3360.2	95	35.4	— ^a	95	—
Total	18,739.6	99	—	—	99	—

^aNot applicable.

Table . Comparison of the wound severity scores before and after receiving telenursing guidelines towards diabetic wound care at week 2, week 4, week 6, and week 8.

	Wound severity scores, mean (SD)	t test (df)	P value
Before and after receiving telenursing care guidelines for diabetic wound care in the second week	23.7 (5.3)	20.0 (19)	<.001
Before and after receiving telenursing care guidelines for diabetic wound care in the fourth week	29.6 (3.9)	34.3 (19)	<.001
Before and after receiving telenursing care guidelines for diabetic wound care in the sixth week	32.0 (4.0)	35.3 (19)	<.001
Before and after receiving telenursing care guidelines for diabetic wound care in the eighth week	34.0 (4.7)	36.1 (19)	<.001
After receiving telenursing care guidelines for diabetic wound care in the week 2 and week 4	5.9 (3.9)	6.8 (19)	<.001
After receiving telenursing care guidelines for diabetic wound care in the week 2 and week 6	8.3 (5.0)	7.4 (19)	<.001
After receiving telenursing care guidelines for diabetic wound care in the week 2 and week 8	10.3 (6.5)	7.1 (19)	<.001
After receiving telenursing care guidelines for diabetic wound care in the week 4 and week 6	2.4 (2.6)	4.1 (19)	<.010
After receiving telenursing care guidelines for diabetic wound care in the week 4 and week 8	4.4 (3.9)	5.1 (19)	<.001
After receiving telenursing care guidelines for diabetic wound care in the week 6 and week 8	2.0 (2.3)	3.8 (19)	<.010

According to Table 3, the wound severity scores after receiving telenursing care in the 2nd, 4th, 6th, and 8th weeks had decreased statistically ($P<.001$). The scores after receiving telenursing care in weeks 4, 6, and 8 had decreased statistically from week 2 ($P<.001$). The scores after receiving telenursing care in weeks 6 and 8 had decreased statistically from week 4 ($P<.001$), and the scores after receiving telenursing care in week 8 had decreased statistically from week 6 ($P<.001$).

Discussion

Principal Findings

The findings of this study showed that samples had a mean age of 62.6 (SD 12.4) years, an average duration of having diabetes

for 4.9 (SD 3.5) years, and high levels of wound severity on average (BWAT=50.8, SD 4.3). This indicates that the majority of the sample were older people, who have a high risk for critical wound severity. First, the factors affecting the wound healing process include infection, high blood sugar levels, and nervous system disorders. This is consistent with the study by Burgess et al [14], which found that the pathophysiology related to the diabetic wound healing process includes hyperglycemia, neuropathy, microvascular complications, infection, inflammation, and immune system deficiency in chronic wounds, and the psychological impacts of diabetes mellitus. Second, the factors preventing patients from receiving wound care continuously include financial limitations, distance to the hospital, no caregivers taking them to the hospital, and so on.

From the in-depth interviews, it was found that the majority of patients live far from the hospital. Distance is one of the barriers to accessing health services. Some patients do not have anyone to care for because family members have to work. Due to this reason, some of the patients are unable to go to the hospital by themselves. If a caregiver comes to the hospital, it would cost more money for traveling expenses, which is more than the net income received each day. The average cost is US \$6 to US \$10 per time, which is considered a high expense. Third, the knowledge factors where the patient does not have enough knowledge regarding blood sugar control and nutrition, which are important factors to promote wound healing. The problems and needs of patients led to the development of telenursing guidelines to provide patients with access to wound care services to prevent leg or foot amputation, increase the rate of wound healing, reduce wound healing time, reduce inequality, and distribute opportunities to access advanced wound care and resources for wound healing.

A study of the development of using telenursing guidelines on diabetic wound healing found that the mean wound-based severity scores had decreased significantly after receiving telenursing guidelines for diabetic wounds in week 2, week 4, week 6, and week 8 ($P < .001$). Moreover, no patients were found to have foot or leg amputation. This can be explained by the fact that the samples in this study received baseline assessment, including illness history, duration of the wound, history of received medicine, financial status, nutrition, and wound assessment using the BWAT. Patients also received wound assessment every week from the beginning throughout the study. Having regular wound assessments is important for effective wound care. Understanding factors affecting wound healing helps nurses make appropriate decisions in wound care [15]. This allows the wound healing process to proceed normally, and it works well together by preparing the wound to be in an appropriate state according to the principles of wound bed preparation [16]. Wound management consists of three phases. First, the debridement of the wound is when dead or unhealthy tissue is removed from a wound. It stimulates wound healing to the proliferative phase, causing re-epithelialization of the wound to be smaller, which prevents or reduces the amount of infection by removing pathogenic parts such as foreign bodies. Second, the wounds are made moist by dealing with secretions, making the wound healing more effective and causing angiogenesis, the formation of granulation tissue, and the process of re-epithelialization. Third, the wound infection is controlled by cleaning the wound to reduce the number of germs and giving topical antibiotics [17,18].

Information for developing telenursing guidelines was obtained from studying the situations, problems, and needs of patients with diabetic wounds and foot ulcers, as well as from reviewing the existing literature. Based on the information, self-care behaviors are important for promoting wound healing among patients, such as controlling blood sugar levels, taking care of the wound by cleaning and getting wound care regularly and

continuously, and eating proper food with good nutrition. According to this study, the patients in the group that received telenursing care could heal wounds in an average of 8.6 (SD 4.3) weeks. The patients in the group that received advanced wound care and normal wound care could heal their wounds in an average of 10.2 weeks. The patients in the group that received wound care every day (conventional wound dressings) and normal wound care could heal in an average of 11.72 weeks. The average cost of wound care for the group receiving telenursing guidelines was 11,772 Baht (US \$336.34) per person, receiving advanced wound care and normal care was 14,772 Baht (US \$422.06) per person, and receiving wound care and normal care every day was 22,740 Baht (US \$649.71) Baht per person. In terms of the average score of satisfaction using telenursing guidelines, it was 4.7 out of 5 (SD 0.2). This is consistent with many studies stating that self-care behaviors, blood sugar level control, and continuous use of medication among patients with diabetes were better after telenursing care [19-22], and this reduces the use of resources for treating diabetic wounds, hospital admissions, and patient expenses while maintaining service quality [19,23-26].

This research is in alignment with both national and international policies that promote the incorporation of digital technology as a tool for enhancing health care services. It also functions as a conduit, bridging the gap between communities and health care systems, thereby mitigating geographical and relational disparities between the public and health care providers. Moreover, digital technology empowers individuals to stay informed about evolving health conditions, understand their rights to access high-quality, equitable, and safe health care, and fosters public awareness and collaboration in improving personal and community health outcomes [27,28].

Suggestions for Using Research Results

To continuously produce good results when implementing telenursing guidelines for improving the quality of services in diabetic wound care, those involved in the development process, including community people, patients, health care providers, nurses, health staff, and family caregivers, must be prepared in terms of knowledge in the field of diabetic wound care such as advanced wound care, the ITELE program, community nursing, self-care practices and knowledge regarding the use of remote technology in accordance with the steps of the nursing process, and health assessment, including defining problems, planning, practice, and evaluation.

There must be supervision, monitoring, and evaluation of the use of telenursing guidelines to improve nursing practices suitable to the community context and in accordance with knowledge about advanced wound care, diabetic wounds, chronic wounds, and remote technology.

Limitations

The small sample size limits the ability to generalize the findings to a broader population.

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Conflicts of Interest

None declared.

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Abbreviations

BWAT: Bates-Jensen Wound Assessment Tool

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