

Review

The Nurses' Role in Complaint Management



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Article Info	Abstract
Article history: Received: 17 May 2024 Accepted: 20 July 2024	<i>Introduction:</i> As primary caregivers, nurses ensure patient safety and quality health services by effectively managing patient complaints. Proper handling of these complaints is crucial for providing effective treatment. Develop management and understanding of handling patient complaints efficiently by providing a systematic framework and identifying effective communication techniques to deal with patient complaints effectively. <i>Methods:</i> ProQuest, Ebsco, Science Direct, and Elsevier were the literature sources examined between 2013 and 2023.
Keywords: communication skills, handling complain, satisfied	<i>Results:</i> Nursing managers should enhance nurses' communication skills to improve patient care and complaint management. Studies indicate that targeted training in communication significantly boosts nurses' effectiveness and patient satisfaction. <i>Conclusion:</i> Implementing training programs, regular assessments, and ongoing support will improve patient outcomes and more effective complaint handling.

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INTRODUCTION

Communication is a dynamic, complex, multidimensional, multifactorial phenomenon related to the environment in which individual experiences are shared. [1]. Effective communication is crucial in patient care as it strengthens the nurse-patient bond and significantly impacts the acceptance and success of treatments [2]. Healthcare professionals must communicate effectively not only with patients and their families but also with members of the multidisciplinary team to ensure patient safety and quality of care [3], [4]. The ability to convey clear, empathetic, and accurate information is essential for fostering trust and understanding and facilitating collaborative care efforts among all parties involved.

Effective communication is critical to providing high-quality nursing care and promoting patient satisfaction and health. [5], [6]. According to Rosengarten [9] (2019); Sevilla-Zeigen [8] (2016, professional communication skills are crucial for delivering healthcare services and have a good effect on raising patient satisfaction. Poorly maintained infrastructure and human resources are frequently to blame for problems with hospital services. Patient reports are used to gauge dissatisfaction with the service provided [10].

Nurses are trained in communication and conflict resolution theories to handle patient and family complaints [11]. However, practical challenges such as high stress, heavy workloads, and diverse patient backgrounds can impede the practical application of these skills [12], [13]. Research is needed to

examine how these real-world challenges impact complaint management and evaluate the effectiveness of current training programs. Addressing these gaps can help align theoretical knowledge with practical application, enhancing overall patient and family satisfaction. Handling patient complaints can be particularly challenging for some nurses, underscoring the need for confidence and practical skills [14], [15]. Complaint handling is essential for addressing and resolving client issues, allowing institutions to improve their services. Unfortunately, many nurses remain unresponsive to patient concerns, leading to excessive waiting times for resolution. Improving response strategies and complaint management practices is crucial to meeting patient needs better and enhancing service quality.

Nurses are trained in communication and conflict resolution to handle patient and family complaints, but real-world challenges like stress and heavy workloads can hinder their effectiveness. Research is needed to explore how these factors affect complaint management and the impact of current training. Additionally, according to Veneau & Chariot (2013), HR variables, such as the responsibilities and qualifications of customer service officers, also play a significant role in complaint handling [17]. The research objectives are to investigate how stress and workload affect nurses' complaint management abilities, evaluate training programs' effectiveness, and examine HR factors' impact on complaint handling. Addressing these issues is urgent because inadequate management of complaints can

lead to patient dissatisfaction and extended resolution times. Improving our understanding of these factors and refining training and response strategies are essential for enhancing patient care and overall service quality.

Handling Complaints

Complaints from patients and their families indicate problems in the healthcare system. As a user of healthcare services, the patient's perspective is essential because it has different views on the issues reported by healthcare professionals in the incident reporting system. Complaints from patients are often related to safety and service quality issues in care [3], [4]. The main concern of patients is the quality and safety of health services [18]. Things that are important in handling complaints directly[19]-[22] :

a. Attitude and approach with effective communication

A positive attitude and empathy in the form of respect, being open, taking complaints seriously, understanding patients, and avoiding being defensive. An important step towards effective communication is the concern of health professionals about how patients understand information [22]. A communication approach with soothing intonation improves the quality of patient care [23].

b. Listen attentively

Generally speaking, poor communication is the cause of patient complaints. In addition to actively listening to grievances, the party receiving them

must also address them. The first step is to ask open questions and allow the patient to explain from his point of view. The second phase gives the patient at least one minute of uninterrupted speaking time. After that, establish that the patient has an explicit knowledge of the issue and repeat the explanation to help him feel at ease and release his feelings.

c. Offer information

Additional information is provided to strengthen patients' faith in nurses. The nurse must explain the loss if the doctor fails to give all pertinent facts. Nurses should encourage patients to make decisions rather than offer recommendations when delivering information.

d. Summarize the contents of the conversation

Nursing staff can repeat critical points of their encounters by summarizing the conversation's contents, enabling them to continue the conversation to relevant subjects.

Complaint Management

The handling and planning done by the organization to deal with or overcome complaints, responses, and reactions of dissatisfaction with the activities of the management function that are performed inefficiently is known as complaint management. According to Lawton et al. [35], healthcare institutions should prioritize preventing both types of failure and fostering a safe culture. Patient complaints can be used

to pinpoint areas of the services needing improvement.

Responding to patient complaints

Managing patient complaints effectively involves several essential practices [36]. Firstly, responding to complaints with compassion and responsiveness is crucial, as poor communication can lead to dissatisfaction [37], [38]. Nurses should maintain eye contact, listen attentively, avoid blame or judgment, and provide proactive solutions, as therapeutic communication is vital in addressing patient concerns [39]. Listening to complaints without disrupting others demonstrates respect for patients' opinions and increases satisfaction [11], [40]. Empathy plays a significant role in this process, as understanding and sharing patients' emotions—through cognitive, emotional, and compassionate empathy—helps build trust, enhances communication, and improves care outcomes. A caring attitude, where nurses take responsibility for the patient's recovery and provide encouragement, adds emotional meaning to the patient's experience [41], [42]. Acknowledging mistakes and offering sincere apologies are essential for resolving conflicts and maintaining positive relationships. Such actions reflect honesty and transparency, restore trust, and prevent issues from escalating. Taking additional steps to address and fix the problem improves patient satisfaction and fosters a supportive environment [43], [44]. Finally, accurate documentation and timely communication are crucial for effective complaint

management. Thoroughly recording complaints, including resolution details and duration, ensures accountability and supports quality improvement. Informing patients or their families about the status of their complaints and providing a written response as soon as possible builds trust and manages expectations [2], [27]. This comprehensive approach enhances patient satisfaction, improves care quality, and fosters a positive healthcare experience.

Impact of complaints

Ineffective handling of patient complaints can severely damage a hospital's reputation, consumer trust, and financial stability. Unresolved complaints often lead to negative public perception and a loss of credibility, causing patients to seek care elsewhere and resulting in decreased revenue. Additionally, the hospital may face increased operational costs, legal risks, and regulatory scrutiny. Staff morale can decline, leading to higher turnover and challenges in recruitment. Furthermore, failing to address complaints prevents the hospital from identifying areas for improvement and implementing necessary changes. To maintain quality and enhance its image, the hospital must implement a robust complaint-handling system that effectively manages, resolves and follows up on patient concerns [45], [46].

Inhibiting and Supporting Factors in Patient Complaint Management

Quickly resolving complaints should include maintaining a therapeutic alliance with the patient. In this instance, organizational

support takes the form of policies that do not accept poor leadership conduct and the development of interpersonal skills for empowering and strengthening others [47]. Excellent service quality is produced by nurses who see their workplace as supportive and empowering [48], [49]. A complaint management system can ensure the proper handling of complaints [50]. This will help nurses and other staff to resolve complaints systematically. For nurses and other staff to be able to settle complaints following their policies and duties, protocols and policies need to be widely distributed and backed managerially with training. All team members play a crucial part in handling complaints by building mutual trust, owning up to mistakes, and committing to corrective action.

How to manage patient complaints

Complaints are an inevitable aspect of public services, including hospital healthcare, and must be managed effectively to prevent negative impacts on the hospital's reputation. To handle complaints properly, hospitals should first inform patients and their families about available complaint services, ensuring these channels are accessible and user-friendly [52]. Specialized personnel should be designated to manage complaints, with appropriate training in communication, conflict resolution, and empathy [53], [54]. Integrating the complaint management process into daily operations, including thorough documentation and timely responses, is crucial [46]. Hospitals should also follow up to ensure concerns are addressed and use feedback to drive

continuous improvement. Common issues in complaint management include inadequate communication, insufficient staff training, inconsistent processes, and resistance to feedback. Addressing these challenges through structured processes and ongoing improvements can enhance patient satisfaction and overall service quality.

Educate all staff workers—especially those interacting directly with patients—on how to file complaints and emphasize the need for polite communication and empathy on the part of all staff members. Customer complaints that cannot be resolved internally will be coordinated with adjacent units, and the hospital must have a legal adviser who walks alongside and helps with complex situations. If the complaint has not been resolved, it will be determined by the hospital leadership. There is a complaint handling policy to create and implement appropriate and suitable policies to learn about and address patient problems:

- a) Spoken complaints must be submitted in writing. Use simple, understandable language in your written reply, and include details about any steps you took to solve the issue. The availability of complaint channels via SMS, email, telephone, suggestion boxes, and complaint forms that can accommodate all complaints and allow for their optimal resolution are examples of support facilities that must be capable of processing patient complaints.
- b) Patient rights disclosure. At admission, inform patients of their rights, including the ability to complain. Additionally, it is important to let patients and their

families know how to complain and who to contact.

- c) Evaluation of grievances through the use of root-cause analyses (RCA) or effect analyses. Customers' information will be gathered through efficient complaint management to help create and improve service-related activities.

Action plan managing patient complaints

1. Training

Patients may complain to anyone. Thus, every member of staff, especially those who deal with patients directly, must be aware of the process for processing complaints and whom to contact and follow up with. Patient complaints provide an overview to improve patient safety [55].

2. Communication

Poor communication is a significant predictor of patient complaints and litigation. Based on a report from the Medical Council in 2019, 35% (n=170) of all complaints were related to communication. A

shortcoming is the inability to interact therapeutically. Effective communication is recognized as an important attribute for healthcare professionals.

Effective communication between healthcare professionals is essential for all decisions involving patient care. Clinical competence, communication abilities, and problem-solving skills must all be integrated by nurses to develop effective communication.

3. Empower staff

Empowerment can authorize and boost nurse satisfaction at work, affecting efficient and qualified care. A learning process is necessary to develop strategies to enhance the effectiveness of responding to patient concerns. Suppose there are more reports of patient complaints. In that case, discipline should not be meted out in the form of punishment but rather should place importance on the staff's capacity to handle complaints efficiently [16].

Table 1

Summary of patient complaint reporting and critical strategies to enhance managing patient

No	Author/Year/Country	Title	Result
1	Råberus et al. [14] 2019 Sweden	The nature of patient complaints: a resource for healthcare improvements	Health service provider attitudes, follow-up, patient safety, and access to health services are all the subject of complaints. Patient-centered treatment is the focus of this communication strategy's warning to patients, which improves patient satisfaction.
2	Ming et al. [15] 2019 China	Analyzing Patients' Complaints: Awakening of the Ethic of Belonging	Injustice, poor communication, disregard for patient rights. Implications: increasing nurse competence in fostering trusting relationships with patients and families, treating patients respectfully, communicating information, respecting patient autonomy rights, and involving patients in treatment decision-making.
3	Veneau & Chariot, [16] 2023 Paris	How do hospitals handle patients' complaints? An overview of the Paris area	Poor communication, lower-quality care, long wait times, and financial regulations. They systematically resolve complaints by altering attitudes, values, nursing conduct, and managerial improvement.
4	Jiang et al. [17] 2014 Shanghai	Managing patient complaints in China: A qualitative study in Shanghai	From an organizational and managerial standpoint, a procedure for managing patient complaints through a transparent and systematic complaint mechanism/flow is required to enhance the standard of nursing care. The following elements affect management complaints: health service providers' lack of socialization, knowledge, and competency complaint management factors, managerial HR complaint management abilities, complaint management policies/protocols, and rewards.
5	Skär & Söderberg, [24] 2018 Council in the northern part of Sweden	Patients' complaints regarding healthcare encounters and communication	Patients complain that the provider is less responsive to their issues. Nurses must be able to use communication techniques to convey apologies, give patients enough information, and include patients in making decisions about the care they get.
6	Harrison et al. [25] 2016 Australia	Patient complaints about hospital services: Applying a complaint taxonomy to analyze and respond to complaints	3 Domains of patient complaints: clinical, management, and relationships. Systemic improvements include modifying policies, conducting training, reviewing guidelines, policies, and protocols, conducting audits, improving the physical and administrative environment,

No	Author/Year/Country	Title	Result
			establishing roles and responsibilities, and informing patients of the risks and benefits of the services rendered.
7	O'Dowd et al. [26] 2021 Ireland	A multi-perspective exploration of the understanding of patient complaints and their potential for patient safety improvement in general practice	Communication could be more effective, but it should be treated dishonorably. Treatment standards need to be more consistent, and there is no channel for submitting complaints. Support is required for healthcare providers to overcome the negative impact of complaints by including patients in the treatment process to provide feedback on improving patient safety and ensure the results of the analysis of management complaints as a reference in improving patient safety.
8	Ha et al. [27] 2015 Vietnam's	Patient complaints in healthcare services in Vietnam's health system	Steps to improve patient complaint handling: building a robust complaint management system, training staff in effective communication and conflict resolution, and fostering a culture of transparency and accountability.
9	Hsieh, [28] 2011 Taiwan	A system for using patient complaints as a trigger to improve quality	Establishing a robust information system is highly anticipated to support the reporting, documentation, and monitoring of complaint management. Complaint-handling officers, including nurses, should receive adequate training and be granted sufficient authority.
10	Allan et al. [29] 2015 United Kingdom	Supporting staff to respond effectively to informal complaints: Findings from an action research study	Empowering staff in this context involves highlighting the comprehension and management of the intricacies of complaints, potentially resulting in enhanced care quality and patient satisfaction.
11	Clavel & Pomey, [30] 2020 Canada	Enhancing patient involvement in quality improvement: How complaint managers see their roles and limitations	Steps to improve patient complaint handling: building a robust complaint management system, training staff in effective communication and conflict resolution, and fostering a culture of transparency and accountability.
12	Robinson et al. [31] 2014 England	A 36-month study of patient complaints at a tertiary fertility center	Empowering staff in this context involves highlighting the comprehension and management of the intricacies of complaints, potentially resulting in enhanced care quality and patient satisfaction.
13	Jabbari et al. [32] 2014 Iran	The profile of patients' complaints in a regional hospital	Steps to improve patient complaint handling: building a robust complaint management system, training staff in effective communication and conflict resolution, and fostering a culture of transparency and accountability.

No	Author/Year/Country	Title	Result
14	Mazor et al. [33] 2013 Washington	More than words: Patients' views on apology and disclosure when things go wrong in cancer care	Establishing a robust information system is highly anticipated to support the reporting, documentation, and monitoring of complaint management. Complaint-handling officers, including nurses, should receive adequate training and be granted sufficient authority.
15	Noorulhuda et al. [34] 2023 Washington DC	Communication of patients' and family members' ethical concerns to their healthcare providers	Patients and families frequently address ethical concerns with clinicians and desire clinicians to be receptive and attentive. Most find these discussions agreeable and beneficial. Respondents recommended improved communication quality, empathy, openness, honesty, and sufficient time and resources to enhance comfort and effectiveness.

Table 2

Effective direct complaint-handling techniques

Procedure	Program	Description
Complain handling	Invite	Healthcare settings that support patients and families in raising complaints regarding unpleasant experiences, incidents, or omissions.
	Respond	Responses and feedback are provided in patient-centered care.
Quality monitoring and improvement	Report	Data on complaints is routinely and accurately recorded for analysis.
	Analyse	A follow-up study of complaints aids in the systematic discovery of issues that may then be addressed to improve service quality.
	Improve	The analysis findings can be used to prioritize problem-solving efforts to improve service quality.

IMPLICATIONS

Integrating caring-based training into the hospital's nursing competency enhancement program will systematically equip nurses to manage patient complaints, thereby improving both the quality of care and patient satisfaction.

CONCLUSION

A complaint-handling strategy must be

implemented to provide exceptional or excellent service with information and public transparency. A phase in the complaint-handling strategy is proper management using forceful and effective communication when solving problems.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflicts of interest related to the study.

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