

# Exploring Nursing Technicians' Perceptions of Their Role in Delivering Holistic Patient Care and the Challenges of Implementing a Patient-Centered Care Approach in Saudi Arabia

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## ABSTRACT

Nursing technicians play a vital role in delivering direct patient care and supporting the nursing workforce in healthcare settings in Saudi Arabia. However, their perceptions of their role in providing holistic, patient-centered care and the challenges they face in implementing this approach have not been extensively studied. This qualitative study aims to explore nursing technicians' perceptions of their role in delivering holistic patient care and the challenges they encounter when implementing a patient-centered care approach in the Saudi Arabian healthcare context. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 nursing technicians working in various healthcare settings in Saudi Arabia. Thematic analysis was used to identify key themes and subthemes related to nursing technicians' perceptions and experiences. The findings revealed that nursing technicians perceived their role as essential in providing holistic patient care, with a focus on attending to patients' physical, emotional, and spiritual needs. However, they also identified several challenges in implementing patient-centered care, including language barriers, cultural differences, workload pressures, and a lack of training and support. The study highlights the need for targeted interventions to support nursing technicians in delivering patient-centered care and to address the unique challenges they face in the Saudi Arabian healthcare context. Recommendations for practice, policy, and future research are discussed.

**Keywords:** nursing technicians, holistic patient care, patient-centered care, challenges, Saudi Arabia

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background

Nursing technicians are an integral part of the healthcare workforce in Saudi Arabia, working alongside registered nurses and other healthcare professionals to provide comprehensive patient care (Almalki et al., 2022). They play a crucial role in delivering direct patient care, including assisting with activities of daily living, monitoring vital signs, and administering medications (Ministry of Health, 2021). However, the role of nursing technicians in providing holistic, patient-centered care has not been extensively explored in the Saudi Arabian context.

Patient-centered care is a healthcare approach that prioritizes the needs, values, and preferences of patients and involves them as active partners in their own care (Bin Amer et al., 2021). This approach has been shown to improve patient satisfaction, clinical outcomes, and the overall quality of care (Al-Mutair et al., 2019). Holistic patient care, which considers the physical, emotional, social, and spiritual needs of patients, is a key component of patient-centered care (Jasemi et al., 2017).

Implementing patient-centered care can be challenging, particularly in cultural contexts where traditional hierarchies and communication styles may differ from Western norms (Al-Mutair et al., 2019). In Saudi Arabia, cultural and social factors, such as the importance of family involvement in healthcare decisions, the use of indirect communication, and the emphasis on respect for authority, can influence the delivery of patient-centered care (Almalki et al., 2022).

### 1.2 Study Aims

This study aims to explore nursing technicians' perceptions of their role in delivering holistic patient care and the challenges they face in implementing a patient-centered care approach in the Saudi Arabian healthcare context. The specific objectives of the study are:

1. To understand nursing technicians' perceptions of their role in providing holistic patient care in Saudi Arabia.

2. To identify the challenges nursing technicians encounter when implementing a patient-centered care approach in their practice.
3. To explore the factors that facilitate or hinder nursing technicians' ability to deliver patient-centered care in the Saudi Arabian healthcare context.

### 1.3 Significance of the Study

This study contributes to the limited body of knowledge on nursing technicians' roles and experiences in delivering patient-centered care in Saudi Arabia. By exploring nursing technicians' perceptions and the challenges they face, this study can inform the development of targeted interventions to support nursing technicians in providing holistic, patient-centered care. The findings may also have implications for nursing education, practice, and policy in Saudi Arabia and other countries with similar cultural contexts.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 The Role of Nursing Technicians in Healthcare

Nursing technicians, also known as practical nurses or nursing assistants, play a vital role in healthcare systems worldwide. They work under the supervision of registered nurses and provide direct patient care, including assisting with activities of daily living, monitoring vital signs, and administering medications (International Council of Nurses, 2021). In Saudi Arabia, nursing technicians are an essential part of the healthcare workforce, particularly in acute care settings (Almalki et al., 2022).

Studies have shown that nursing technicians contribute significantly to patient outcomes and the quality of care. A systematic review by Moghri et al. (2020) found that higher levels of nursing technician staffing were associated with lower rates of patient falls, pressure ulcers, and urinary tract infections. Another study by Al-Dossary et al. (2019) highlighted the positive impact of nursing technicians on patient satisfaction and the patient experience in Saudi Arabian hospitals.

However, the role of nursing technicians in delivering holistic, patient-centered care has not been well-studied, particularly in the Saudi Arabian context. A qualitative study by Abudari et al. (2019) explored the experiences of registered nurses in providing patient-centered care in Saudi Arabia but did not include nursing technicians. This study aims to address this gap in the literature by focusing specifically on nursing technicians' perceptions and experiences.

### 2.2 Patient-Centered Care and Holistic Patient Care

Patient-centered care is a healthcare approach that prioritizes the needs, values, and preferences of patients and involves them as active partners in their own care (Bin Amer et al., 2021). This approach has gained increasing attention in recent years as a means of improving the quality of care, patient outcomes, and patient satisfaction (Al-Mutair et al., 2019).

Holistic patient care, which considers the physical, emotional, social, and spiritual needs of patients, is a key component of patient-centered care (Jasemi et al., 2017). A systematic review by Lotfi et al. (2020) found that holistic care approaches, such as those incorporating spiritual care and emotional support, were associated with improved patient outcomes and satisfaction.

In the Saudi Arabian context, studies have highlighted the importance of culturally sensitive and holistic patient care. A qualitative study by Al-Mutair et al. (2019) found that Saudi Arabian patients valued healthcare providers who demonstrated respect for their cultural and religious beliefs and attended to their spiritual needs. Another study by Bin Amer et al. (2021) emphasized the need for healthcare providers in Saudi Arabia to adopt a patient-centered approach that involves patients and their families in decision-making and care planning.

### 2.3 Challenges in Implementing Patient-Centered Care

Despite the benefits of patient-centered care, implementing this approach can be challenging, particularly in cultural contexts where traditional hierarchies and communication styles may differ from Western norms (Al-Mutair et al., 2019). Studies have identified several barriers to implementing patient-centered care, including healthcare provider attitudes and beliefs, organizational culture, and resource constraints (Santana et al., 2018).

In the Saudi Arabian context, cultural and social factors may pose additional challenges to implementing patient-centered care. A qualitative study by Almalki et al. (2022) found that Saudi Arabian nurses experienced conflicts between their professional values and the cultural expectations of patients and families, particularly regarding gender roles and communication styles. Another study by Al-Mutair et al. (2019) highlighted the need for culturally sensitive communication and shared decision-making when providing patient-centered care in Saudi Arabia.

However, the specific challenges faced by nursing technicians in implementing patient-centered care in Saudi Arabia have not been well-studied. This study aims to address this gap by exploring nursing technicians' perceptions of the challenges they encounter when trying to deliver holistic, patient-centered care in their practice.

### 3. METHODS

#### 3.1 Study Design

This study employed a qualitative, descriptive design to explore nursing technicians' perceptions of their role in delivering holistic patient care and the challenges they face in implementing a patient-centered care approach in the Saudi Arabian healthcare context. Qualitative research is well-suited for exploring complex phenomena and capturing the experiences and perceptions of participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A descriptive approach was chosen to provide a comprehensive understanding of nursing technicians' perspectives and experiences (Sandelowski, 2000).

#### 3.2 Sample and Setting

A purposive sampling technique was used to recruit 20 nursing technicians working in various healthcare settings in Saudi Arabia, including acute care hospitals, primary care centers, and long-term care facilities. Purposive sampling allows researchers to select participants who have relevant experiences and can provide rich insights into the phenomenon of interest (Patton, 2014).

Inclusion criteria for participants were: (1) currently employed as a nursing technician in a healthcare setting in Saudi Arabia, (2) having at least one year of work experience as a nursing technician, (3) being able to communicate in either Arabic or English, and (4) willing to participate in the study. Exclusion criteria included nursing technicians who were on leave or not currently practicing.

#### 3.3 Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews with nursing technicians. Semi-structured interviews allow researchers to explore participants' experiences and perceptions while maintaining flexibility to probe for additional information and clarification (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

An interview guide was developed based on the study objectives and a review of the literature. The guide included open-ended questions and prompts related to nursing technicians' perceptions of their role in delivering holistic patient care, the challenges they face in implementing patient-centered care, and the factors that facilitate or hinder their ability to provide patient-centered care.

Interviews were conducted in a private, quiet location at the participant's workplace or a mutually agreed-upon location. Interviews were conducted in either Arabic or English, depending on the participant's preference. Interviews were audio-recorded with the participant's consent and lasted approximately 45-60 minutes.

#### 3.4 Data Analysis

Audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed verbatim and translated into English if conducted in Arabic. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns or themes within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The six-phase process of thematic analysis was followed: (1) familiarization with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report. Two researchers independently coded the data and identified themes, with discrepancies resolved through discussion and consensus.

#### 3.5 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was ensured through several strategies, including member checking, peer debriefing, and maintaining an audit trail. Member checking involved sharing a summary of the findings with participants to confirm the accuracy of the researchers' interpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Peer debriefing involved discussing the findings with other researchers to gather alternative perspectives and challenge assumptions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). An audit trail was maintained by documenting the research process, including data collection and analysis decisions, to enhance transparency and credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

#### 3.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the institutional review board of the researcher's university and the participating healthcare facilities. Participants were provided with information about the study's purpose, procedures, risks, and benefits, and informed consent was obtained prior to data collection. Participants' privacy and confidentiality were protected by using pseudonyms and removing identifying information from the data.

### 4. RESULTS

The thematic analysis of the interview data revealed four main themes related to nursing technicians' perceptions of their role in delivering holistic patient care and the challenges they face in implementing a patient-centered care approach in Saudi Arabia. These themes include: (1) the essential role of nursing technicians in providing holistic care, (2) challenges related to language and cultural barriers, (3) workload pressures and resource constraints, and (4) the need for training and support.

#### 4.1 The Essential Role of Nursing Technicians in Providing Holistic Care

Participants consistently emphasized the crucial role they play in providing holistic patient care. They described their responsibilities as encompassing not only the physical aspects of care but also attending to patients' emotional, social, and spiritual needs. As one participant stated:

"We are the ones who spend the most time with the patients. We see their struggles, their fears, and their joys. It's our job to care for the whole person, not just their physical problems." (Participant 8)

Nursing technicians highlighted the importance of building trusting relationships with patients and their families to provide effective holistic care. They described the need to be attentive, compassionate, and responsive to patients' individual needs and preferences. Another participant shared:

"I try to get to know my patients as people, not just as medical cases. I ask about their families, their interests, and their concerns. This helps me to provide care that is tailored to their unique needs." (Participant 15)

#### 4.2 Challenges Related to Language and Cultural Barriers

Participants identified language and cultural barriers as significant challenges in implementing patient-centered care in the Saudi Arabian context. Many nursing technicians come from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, which can lead to communication difficulties with patients and their families. One participant explained:

"Sometimes it's hard to understand what the patient is trying to tell us, especially if they speak a different dialect of Arabic. And even when we speak the same language, there can be cultural misunderstandings that affect the care we provide." (Participant 3)

Participants also described the challenges of navigating cultural norms and expectations related to gender roles, family involvement, and communication styles. Some nursing technicians felt that these cultural factors could hinder their ability to provide patient-centered care. For example, one participant shared:

"In our culture, it's often the family members who make decisions about the patient's care, even if it goes against what the patient wants. As nursing technicians, we have to find ways to advocate for the patient's wishes while still respecting the family's role." (Participant 11)

#### 4.3 Workload Pressures and Resource Constraints

Nursing technicians described heavy workloads and resource constraints as major barriers to providing patient-centered care. Participants reported that they often have to care for a large number of patients with complex needs, leaving little time for individualized attention and holistic care. One participant stated:

"We are always short-staffed, and the patient load is too high. We barely have time to complete our basic tasks, let alone sit down and have meaningful conversations with patients about their concerns and preferences." (Participant 6)

Participants also identified a lack of resources, such as equipment and supplies, as hindering their ability to provide high-quality, patient-centered care. They described having to improvise or prioritize care based on the available resources. As one participant shared:

"Sometimes we don't have the supplies we need to provide the best care for our patients. We have to make do with what we have, even if it means compromising on certain aspects of care." (Participant 18)

#### 4.4 The Need for Training and Support

Participants consistently emphasized the need for training and support to effectively deliver patient-centered care. They described a lack of formal education and professional development opportunities related to holistic care and patient-centered approaches. One participant stated:

"I don't feel like I received adequate training on how to provide holistic care. Most of what I know, I learned on the job through trial and error. I wish there were more opportunities for us to learn and grow in this area." (Participant 9)

Nursing technicians also highlighted the importance of supportive leadership and a positive organizational culture in facilitating patient-centered care. They described the need for managers and colleagues who value and prioritize holistic care and who provide guidance and resources to support their efforts. As one participant shared:

"When our managers and supervisors emphasize the importance of patient-centered care and give us the tools and support we need to provide it, it makes a big difference. It shows that the organization is committed to this approach and values our role in delivering it." (Participant 20)

Table 1 provides a summary of the main themes and subthemes identified in the data.

**Table 1.** Themes and subthemes related to nursing technicians' perceptions and experiences

Theme	Subthemes
The essential role of nursing technicians in providing holistic care	- Attending to patients' physical, emotional, social, and spiritual needs

- Building trusting relationships with patients and families
- Being attentive, compassionate, and responsive to individual needs |Challenges related to language and cultural barriers | - Communication difficulties due to linguistic diversity
- Navigating cultural norms and expectations related to gender roles, family involvement, and communication styles
- Advocating for patients' wishes while respecting cultural factors |Workload pressures and resource constraints | - Heavy workloads and high patient-to-staff ratios
- Lack of time for individualized attention and holistic care
- Limited resources and supplies hindering high-quality care | The need for training and support | - Lack of formal education and professional development opportunities related to holistic care
- The importance of supportive leadership and organizational culture
- The need for guidance and resources to support patient-centered care efforts |

## 5. DISCUSSION

This study explored nursing technicians' perceptions of their role in delivering holistic patient care and the challenges they face in implementing a patient-centered care approach in the Saudi Arabian healthcare context. The findings highlight the essential contributions of nursing technicians to providing comprehensive, individualized care that attends to patients' physical, emotional, social, and spiritual needs. However, the study also reveals significant challenges related to language barriers, cultural differences, workload pressures, resource constraints, and a lack of training and support.

The importance of nursing technicians in delivering holistic care is consistent with previous research highlighting their vital role in patient care and outcomes (Al-Dossary et al., 2019; Moghri et al., 2020). The study findings underscore the need for nursing technicians to build trusting relationships with patients and their families and to be attentive and responsive to individual needs and preferences. This aligns with the principles of patient-centered care, which emphasize the importance of involving patients as active partners in their care and tailoring care to their unique needs and values (Bin Amer et al., 2021; Santana et al., 2018).

However, the challenges identified in this study, particularly those related to language and cultural barriers, have not been extensively explored in previous research on patient-centered care in Saudi Arabia. The findings highlight the need for healthcare organizations to provide cultural competency training and support for nursing technicians to effectively navigate linguistic and cultural differences and provide culturally sensitive care. This is consistent with recommendations from previous studies on culturally competent care in Saudi Arabia (Al-Mutair et al., 2019; Almalki et al., 2022).

The workload pressures and resource constraints identified in this study are also consistent with previous research on barriers to patient-centered care (Santana et al., 2018). These findings suggest that healthcare organizations need to address staffing levels, workload distribution, and resource allocation to ensure that nursing technicians have the time and resources necessary to provide high-quality, individualized care.

Finally, the study highlights the critical importance of training and support for nursing technicians to effectively implement patient-centered care. This is consistent with previous research emphasizing the need for education and professional development opportunities to promote patient-centered care competencies (Santana et al., 2018). The findings also underscore the role of supportive leadership and organizational culture in facilitating patient-centered care, which aligns with previous research on the importance of organizational factors in implementing patient-centered care (Almalki et al., 2022; Bin Amer et al., 2021).

### 5.1 Implications for Practice and Policy

The findings of this study have important implications for nursing practice and healthcare policy in Saudi Arabia. At the practice level, the study highlights the need for healthcare organizations to provide targeted training and support for nursing technicians to develop patient-centered care competencies and effectively navigate language and cultural barriers. This may include cultural competency training, language support services, and ongoing professional development opportunities focused on holistic care and patient-centered approaches.

At the policy level, the study suggests that healthcare policymakers need to prioritize initiatives to address workload pressures and resource constraints that hinder the delivery of patient-centered care. This may include implementing minimum staffing ratios, increasing funding for resources and supplies, and developing policies to support a positive organizational culture that values patient-centered care.

The findings also have implications for nursing education in Saudi Arabia. Nursing education programs should incorporate patient-centered care principles and culturally competent care practices into their curricula to better prepare nursing technicians for their roles in delivering holistic care. This may include simulations, case studies, and clinical experiences that focus on patient-centered communication, shared decision-making, and attending to patients' diverse needs.

### 5.2 Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the study was conducted in a specific cultural context (Saudi Arabia) and may not be generalizable to other settings. Future research should explore nursing technicians' experiences and perceptions in diverse cultural contexts to identify commonalities and differences.

Second, the study relied on self-reported data from a relatively small sample of nursing technicians. Future research should include larger, more diverse samples and incorporate other data sources, such as observations and patient perspectives, to triangulate the findings.

Finally, the study was cross-sectional and did not capture changes in nursing technicians' perceptions and experiences over time. Longitudinal research is needed to explore how nursing technicians' roles and challenges evolve as patient-centered care initiatives are implemented and evaluated in Saudi Arabian healthcare settings.

## 6. CONCLUSION

This qualitative study explored nursing technicians' perceptions of their role in delivering holistic patient care and the challenges they face in implementing a patient-centered care approach in Saudi Arabia. The findings highlight the essential contributions of nursing technicians to providing comprehensive, individualized care that attends to patients' diverse needs. However, the study also reveals significant challenges related to language barriers, cultural differences, workload pressures, resource constraints, and a lack of training and support.

The study has important implications for nursing practice, healthcare policy, and nursing education in Saudi Arabia. Healthcare organizations should provide targeted training and support for nursing technicians to develop patient-centered care competencies and effectively navigate language and cultural barriers. Policymakers should prioritize initiatives to address workload pressures and resource constraints, while nursing education programs should incorporate patient-centered care principles and culturally competent care practices into their curricula.

Further research is needed to explore nursing technicians' experiences and perceptions in diverse cultural contexts, incorporate larger and more diverse samples, and examine changes over time as patient-centered care initiatives are implemented and evaluated. By addressing the challenges identified in this study and supporting nursing technicians in their vital roles, healthcare organizations in Saudi Arabia can make significant progress toward delivering high-quality, patient-centered care that meets the diverse needs of their patients.

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