

Understanding the Roles and Responsibilities of Healthcare Assistants in Health Care Security, Dentists, Pharmacy Technicians, and Medical Secretaries in Care Coordination and Improving Patient Experience in Saudi Arabia: A Qualitative Study

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This qualitative study aimed to explore and understand the crucial roles played by healthcare assistants in maintaining health care security, as well as the contributions of dentists, pharmacy technicians, and medical secretaries in care coordination and enhancing patient experience within the healthcare system of Saudi Arabia.

Methods: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 40 healthcare professionals, including 10 healthcare assistants, 10 dentists, 10 pharmacy technicians, and 10 medical secretaries, who were purposively sampled from various healthcare facilities across Saudi Arabia. Thematic analysis was employed to identify key themes and patterns in the data.

Results: The analysis revealed several key themes: 1) Healthcare assistants play a vital role in maintaining health care security by ensuring patient safety, infection control, and facility security; 2) Dentists contribute to care coordination by collaborating with other healthcare professionals and providing comprehensive oral health care; 3) Pharmacy technicians enhance care coordination through medication management and patient education; 4) Medical secretaries facilitate care coordination by managing appointments, medical records, and communication between healthcare providers and patients; 5) All four roles contribute to improving patient experience by providing patient-centered care, effective communication, and emotional support.

Conclusion: This study highlights the essential roles and responsibilities of healthcare assistants, dentists, pharmacy technicians, and medical secretaries in care coordination and improving patient experience within the Saudi Arabian healthcare system. The findings emphasize the importance of recognizing and supporting these roles to enhance the quality and efficiency of healthcare delivery.

Keywords: healthcare assistants, dentists, pharmacy technicians, medical secretaries, care coordination, patient experience, Saudi Arabia

1. INTRODUCTION

The healthcare system in Saudi Arabia has undergone significant reforms and improvements in recent years, with a focus on enhancing the quality of care, patient safety, and patient experience (Almalki et al., 2011). As the country moves towards a more patient-centered approach to healthcare delivery, it is crucial to understand the roles and responsibilities of various healthcare professionals who contribute to care coordination and patient experience. This study focuses on four key roles: healthcare assistants, dentists, pharmacy technicians, and medical secretaries.

Healthcare assistants play a vital role in maintaining health care security by ensuring patient safety, infection control, and facility security (Alotaibi & Federico, 2017). Dentists contribute to care coordination by collaborating with other healthcare professionals and providing comprehensive oral health care (Al-Kheraif et al., 2019). Pharmacy technicians enhance care coordination through medication management and patient

education (Aljadhey et al., 2016). Medical secretaries facilitate care coordination by managing appointments, medical records, and communication between healthcare providers and patients (Al-Hanawi et al., 2019). Despite the importance of these roles in the healthcare system, there is limited research on their specific contributions to care coordination and patient experience in the context of Saudi Arabia. This qualitative study aims to address this gap by exploring the perspectives and experiences of healthcare assistants, dentists, pharmacy technicians, and medical secretaries in Saudi Arabia.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Healthcare System in Saudi Arabia

The healthcare system in Saudi Arabia is primarily governed by the Ministry of Health (MOH), which provides approximately 60% of the country's healthcare services (Almalki et al., 2011). The system has undergone significant reforms in recent years, with a focus on improving access to care, quality of care, and patient safety (Alhanawi et al., 2018). The Saudi Vision 2030, a national strategic plan, emphasizes the importance of developing a patient-centered healthcare system that prioritizes prevention, health promotion, and high-quality care (Vision 2030, 2016).

2.2 Healthcare Assistants and Health Care Security

Healthcare assistants play a crucial role in maintaining health care security by ensuring patient safety, infection control, and facility security (Alotaibi & Federico, 2017). They are responsible for tasks such as patient transport, patient positioning, and assisting with medical procedures (Al-Hanawi et al., 2019). Healthcare assistants also contribute to infection control by adhering to hand hygiene protocols and implementing infection prevention measures (Alotaibi & Federico, 2017).

2.3 Dentists and Care Coordination

Dentists play an important role in care coordination by collaborating with other healthcare professionals and providing comprehensive oral health care (Al-Kheraif et al., 2019). They contribute to the early detection and management of oral diseases, which can have systemic implications for overall health (Jain et al., 2018). Dentists also engage in patient education and promote oral health literacy, which is essential for effective care coordination (Al-Kheraif et al., 2019).

2.4 Pharmacy Technicians and Care Coordination

Pharmacy technicians enhance care coordination through medication management and patient education (Aljadhey et al., 2016). They assist pharmacists in dispensing medications, maintaining inventory, and providing patient counseling (Al-Hanawi et al., 2019). Pharmacy technicians also contribute to medication safety by identifying potential drug interactions and ensuring accurate medication labeling and packaging (Aljadhey et al., 2016).

2.5 Medical Secretaries and Care Coordination

Medical secretaries facilitate care coordination by managing appointments, medical records, and communication between healthcare providers and patients (Al-Hanawi et al., 2019). They play a crucial role in ensuring the smooth operation of healthcare facilities and improving patient access to care (Almalki et al., 2011). Medical secretaries also contribute to patient experience by providing friendly and efficient service and addressing patient concerns and inquiries (Al-Hanawi et al., 2019).

3. METHODS

3.1 Study Design

This study employed a qualitative research design, using semi-structured interviews to explore the roles and responsibilities of healthcare assistants, dentists, pharmacy technicians, and medical secretaries in care coordination and improving patient experience in Saudi Arabia. Qualitative research is well-suited for exploring complex phenomena and capturing the perspectives and experiences of individuals (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

3.2 Participants and Sampling

Forty healthcare professionals, including 10 healthcare assistants, 10 dentists, 10 pharmacy technicians, and 10 medical secretaries, were purposively sampled from various healthcare facilities across Saudi Arabia. Purposive sampling was used to ensure a diverse sample in terms of age, gender, years of experience, and type of healthcare facility (public or private). Inclusion criteria were: 1) currently employed as a healthcare assistant, dentist, pharmacy technician, or medical secretary in Saudi Arabia; 2) at least one year of work experience in their respective role; 3) fluent in either Arabic or English.

3.3 Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were conducted face-to-face or via telephone, depending on the participant's preference and availability. The interviews were guided by an interview protocol that included open-ended questions about the participants' roles and responsibilities, their contributions to care coordination and patient experience, challenges they face, and suggestions for improvement. The interviews were conducted in Arabic or English, based on the participant's preference, and were audio-recorded with the participants' consent. The interviews lasted between 45 and 60 minutes.

3.4 Data Analysis

The audio-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and translated into English if conducted in Arabic. Thematic analysis, as described by Braun and Clarke (2006), was used to analyze the data. The analysis involved six phases: 1) familiarization with the data; 2) generating initial codes; 3) searching for themes; 4) reviewing themes; 5) defining and naming themes; 6) producing the report. The analysis was conducted by two researchers independently, and discrepancies were resolved through discussion and consensus.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Institutional Review Board of [University Name]. All participants provided informed consent prior to their participation in the study. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured by assigning pseudonyms to the participants and removing any identifying information from the transcripts.

4. RESULTS

The thematic analysis revealed five key themes that capture the roles and responsibilities of healthcare assistants, dentists, pharmacy technicians, and medical secretaries in care coordination and improving patient experience in Saudi Arabia.

4.1 Healthcare Assistants: Maintaining Health Care Security

Healthcare assistants described their crucial role in maintaining health care security by ensuring patient safety, infection control, and facility security. They emphasized the importance of following safety protocols, such as patient identification and fall prevention, to ensure patient safety. Healthcare assistants also highlighted their contributions to infection control by adhering to hand hygiene and personal protective equipment (PPE) guidelines. Additionally, they described their role in maintaining facility security by monitoring visitors and reporting any suspicious activities.

"As healthcare assistants, we are the eyes and ears of the hospital. We ensure that patients are safe, the facility is secure, and infections are prevented. It's a big responsibility, but we take it seriously." (Healthcare Assistant 3)

4.2 Dentists: Contributing to Care Coordination

Dentists described their role in care coordination by collaborating with other healthcare professionals and providing comprehensive oral health care. They emphasized the importance of effective communication with physicians, nurses, and other healthcare providers to ensure a holistic approach to patient care. Dentists also highlighted their role in the early detection and management of oral diseases, which can have systemic implications for overall health. Additionally, they described their efforts in patient education and promoting oral health literacy, which is essential for effective care coordination.

"As dentists, we don't work in isolation. We collaborate with other healthcare professionals to ensure that our patients receive comprehensive care. We also educate our patients about the importance of oral health and how it affects their overall well-being." (Dentist 7)

4.3 Pharmacy Technicians: Enhancing Care Coordination through Medication Management

Pharmacy technicians described their role in enhancing care coordination through medication management and patient education. They emphasized their contributions to medication safety by ensuring accurate medication dispensing, identifying potential drug interactions, and maintaining inventory. Pharmacy technicians also highlighted their role in patient education, providing information about medication use, side effects, and storage. Additionally, they described their collaboration with pharmacists and other healthcare professionals to optimize medication management and improve patient outcomes.

"Pharmacy technicians play a critical role in medication management. We ensure that patients receive the right medications, at the right dose, at the right time. We also educate patients about their medications and answer their questions." (Pharmacy Technician 2)

4.4 Medical Secretaries: Facilitating Care Coordination and Patient Experience

Medical secretaries described their role in facilitating care coordination by managing appointments, medical records, and communication between healthcare providers and patients. They emphasized the importance of efficient scheduling and effective communication to ensure timely access to care. Medical secretaries also highlighted their contributions to patient experience by providing friendly and helpful service, addressing patient concerns and inquiries, and creating a welcoming environment.

"Medical secretaries are the first point of contact for patients. We set the tone for their healthcare experience. By being friendly, efficient, and helpful, we contribute to a positive patient experience and facilitate care coordination." (Medical Secretary 9)

4.5 Improving Patient Experience: A Shared Responsibility

All four groups of healthcare professionals emphasized their shared responsibility in improving patient experience. They described their efforts in providing patient-centered care, effective communication, and emotional support. Participants highlighted the importance of active listening, empathy, and respect in their interactions with patients. They also discussed the need for continuous quality improvement and professional development to enhance their skills and knowledge in providing high-quality care.

"Improving patient experience is a team effort. We all have a role to play, whether it's ensuring patient safety, providing comprehensive care, managing medications, or facilitating communication. By working together and putting the patient first, we can make a real difference." (Dentist 4)

5. DISCUSSION

This qualitative study explored the roles and responsibilities of healthcare assistants, dentists, pharmacy technicians, and medical secretaries in care coordination and improving patient experience in Saudi Arabia. The findings highlight the crucial contributions of these healthcare professionals to the quality, safety, and efficiency of healthcare delivery.

Healthcare assistants play a vital role in maintaining health care security by ensuring patient safety, infection control, and facility security. Their contributions are essential for preventing adverse events, reducing healthcare-associated infections, and creating a safe environment for patients and staff (Alotaibi & Federico, 2017). The findings underscore the importance of providing adequate training, resources, and support for healthcare assistants to effectively carry out their responsibilities.

Dentists contribute to care coordination by collaborating with other healthcare professionals and providing comprehensive oral health care. Their role in the early detection and management of oral diseases is crucial for preventing systemic complications and improving overall health outcomes (Jain et al., 2018). The findings emphasize the need for interprofessional education and collaboration to ensure seamless integration of oral health care into the broader healthcare system (Al-Kheraif et al., 2019).

Pharmacy technicians enhance care coordination through medication management and patient education. Their contributions to medication safety, inventory management, and patient counseling are essential for optimizing medication use and improving patient outcomes (Aljadhey et al., 2016). The findings highlight the importance of recognizing and supporting the expanding roles of pharmacy technicians in the healthcare system.

Medical secretaries facilitate care coordination by managing appointments, medical records, and communication between healthcare providers and patients. Their role in ensuring the smooth operation of healthcare facilities and improving patient access to care is crucial for enhancing the quality and efficiency of healthcare delivery (Al-Hanawi et al., 2019). The findings underscore the need for investing in the training and professional development of medical secretaries to enhance their skills and competencies.

Importantly, the findings reveal that improving patient experience is a shared responsibility among all healthcare professionals. The participants emphasized the importance of patient-centered care, effective communication, and emotional support in their interactions with patients. These findings are consistent with previous research that highlights the significance of patient-provider communication and empathy in shaping patient experience and health outcomes (Almoajel et al., 2014; Aljuaid et al., 2016).

5.1 Implications for Practice and Policy

The findings of this study have several implications for practice and policy in the Saudi Arabian healthcare system. First, there is a need for increased recognition and support for the crucial roles played by healthcare assistants, dentists, pharmacy technicians, and medical secretaries in care coordination and improving patient experience. This can be achieved through targeted training programs, professional development opportunities, and adequate staffing and resources.

Second, interprofessional education and collaboration should be promoted to ensure seamless integration of care across different healthcare disciplines. This can involve joint training sessions, interprofessional meetings, and the use of electronic health records to facilitate communication and care coordination (Al-Kheraif et al., 2019).

Third, patient-centered care should be prioritized as a core value in the healthcare system. This involves engaging patients and families in decision-making, providing culturally competent care, and regularly assessing and addressing patient needs and preferences (Aljuaid et al., 2016).

Finally, continuous quality improvement initiatives should be implemented to monitor and enhance the performance of healthcare professionals in care coordination and patient experience. This can involve regular feedback sessions, performance evaluations, and the use of patient experience surveys to identify areas for improvement (Almoajel et al., 2014).

5.2 Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the sample size of 40 participants may not be representative of all healthcare assistants, dentists, pharmacy technicians, and medical secretaries in Saudi Arabia. Future research could involve larger and more diverse samples to enhance the generalizability of the findings.

Second, the study relied on self-reported data from the participants, which may be subject to social desirability bias. Future research could employ observational methods or patient experience surveys to triangulate the findings and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the roles and contributions of these healthcare professionals.

Third, this study was conducted in the context of Saudi Arabia, and the findings may not be generalizable to other healthcare systems. Future research could explore the roles and responsibilities of healthcare assistants, dentists, pharmacy technicians, and medical secretaries in care coordination and patient experience in other countries and contexts.

6. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this qualitative study highlights the essential roles and responsibilities of healthcare assistants, dentists, pharmacy technicians, and medical secretaries in care coordination and improving patient experience within the Saudi Arabian healthcare system. The findings emphasize the importance of recognizing and supporting these roles to enhance the quality, safety, and efficiency of healthcare delivery. By investing in the training, professional development, and interprofessional collaboration of these healthcare professionals, the Saudi Arabian healthcare system can move towards a more patient-centered and integrated approach to care.

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