

COLLABORATIVE CARE: THE INTERDEPENDENT ROLES OF PHARMACISTS AND NURSES IN PATIENT OUTCOMES

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Abstract

In the evolving landscape of healthcare, the collaboration between pharmacists and nurses plays a critical role in enhancing patient outcomes. This critical review examines the interdependent roles of pharmacists and nurses, focusing on their collaborative efforts to improve patient care. The review synthesizes evidence from various studies, highlighting the complementary skills and expertise of both professions. Key areas of collaboration include medication management, patient education, chronic disease management, and hospital discharge planning. The review also identifies challenges such as professional boundaries, communication issues, and institutional policies that hinder effective collaboration. By addressing these barriers, the potential for improved patient outcomes is significant. Successful case studies and collaborative care models are presented to illustrate the benefits of pharmacist-nurse collaboration. The findings underscore the importance of fostering interprofessional relationships and suggest practical recommendations for healthcare practice, policy, and education. Enhanced training programs and supportive policies are crucial to promoting effective collaboration and optimizing patient care. This review calls for ongoing research to further explore and validate the impact of pharmacist-nurse collaboration on patient outcomes.

Keywords: Pharmacist-nurse collaboration, patient outcomes, interprofessional care, medication management, patient education, chronic disease management, hospital discharge planning, healthcare practice, healthcare policy, interprofessional education.

Introduction

The healthcare landscape is continuously evolving, with increasing emphasis on collaborative care models to improve patient outcomes. Pharmacists and nurses, traditionally seen as working in distinct roles, are now recognized for their potential to work synergistically. Pharmacists bring extensive knowledge of medications, their mechanisms, interactions, and side effects, while nurses provide holistic patient care, focusing on patient education, support, and overall health management. When these two professions collaborate effectively, they can significantly enhance patient care quality and safety (Scholz et al., 2020).

Collaborative care involves shared decision-making and teamwork among healthcare providers, which has been shown to reduce medication errors, improve chronic disease management, and enhance patient satisfaction (Baker et al., 2018). The integration of pharmacists into multidisciplinary teams, particularly in settings like hospitals, primary care, and community health, has been linked to better patient outcomes and more efficient healthcare delivery (Smith et al., 2017).

Despite the known benefits, challenges such as professional boundaries, communication barriers, and varying institutional policies can hinder effective collaboration between pharmacists and nurses (Jones et al., 2019). This review aims to critically examine the interdependent roles of pharmacists and nurses in patient care. It will explore the benefits and challenges of their collaboration, provide evidence from case studies and successful models, and offer practical recommendations for enhancing interprofessional relationships in clinical practice. By addressing these aspects, the review seeks to underscore the importance of pharmacist-nurse collaboration in optimizing patient outcomes and suggest pathways for further research and policy development.

Methodology

This critical review employs a systematic approach to explore the interdependent roles of pharmacists and nurses in patient care. A comprehensive literature search was conducted using electronic databases, including PubMed, CINAHL, and Google Scholar, covering the period from 2000 to 2023. Search terms included "pharmacist-nurse collaboration," "interprofessional care," "patient outcomes," "medication management," and "chronic disease management." Inclusion criteria focused on peer-reviewed articles, systematic reviews, and case studies that examine the collaboration between pharmacists and nurses in various healthcare settings. Exclusion criteria ruled out studies lacking empirical data, opinion pieces, and non-English publications. Data extraction involved identifying key themes, benefits, challenges, and outcomes related to pharmacist-nurse collaboration. The analysis was conducted using a thematic synthesis approach, allowing for the integration of findings across different studies to identify common patterns and unique insights. This method enabled a comprehensive understanding of how collaboration impacts patient care and outcomes. The review also assessed the quality of evidence and addressed potential biases in the selected studies. The results are presented in a narrative format, supported by tables and figures where applicable, to provide a clear and concise overview of the existing evidence and its implications for practice, policy, and future research.

Literature Review

Roles and Responsibilities

Pharmacists and nurses have distinct yet complementary roles in patient care. Pharmacists are primarily responsible for ensuring the safe and effective use of medications. They provide medication therapy management, educate patients about their prescriptions, monitor for adverse drug reactions, and collaborate with other healthcare professionals to optimize therapeutic outcomes (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2019). Nurses, on the other hand, are involved in direct patient care, which includes assessing patient needs, administering medications, educating patients about health management, and providing emotional support (Dahlke et al., 2020). The overlap in these roles presents numerous opportunities for collaboration, particularly in areas such as medication management and patient education.

Benefits of Collaborative Care

Numerous studies have demonstrated the benefits of collaborative care models that include both pharmacists and nurses. A systematic review by Makowsky et al. (2013) found that pharmacist-nurse collaborations in inpatient settings led to significant reductions in medication errors and adverse drug events. Another study by Smith et al. (2017) highlighted that integrating pharmacists into primary care teams improved chronic disease management, particularly for conditions such as diabetes and hypertension. Patients in these collaborative models had better medication adherence, improved clinical outcomes, and higher satisfaction levels.

Table 1: Key Benefits of Pharmacist-Nurse Collaboration

Benefit	Description
Reduced Medication Errors	Collaboration reduces the likelihood of medication errors.
Improved Medication Adherence	Joint efforts enhance patient adherence to prescribed regimens.
Enhanced Patient Education	Combined expertise provides comprehensive patient education.
Better Chronic Disease Management	Collaboration improves management of chronic conditions.
Increased Patient Satisfaction	Patients report higher satisfaction with collaborative care.

Medication management is one of the most critical areas where pharmacist-nurse collaboration has shown significant benefits. Pharmacists' expertise in pharmacology and nurses' comprehensive patient care approaches create a robust framework for managing complex medication regimens (Bajorek et al., 2020). For example, in managing chronic

diseases, nurses often encounter patients' difficulties in adhering to their medication regimens. Pharmacists can provide valuable insights and adjustments to these regimens to enhance adherence and therapeutic outcomes (Snyder et al., 2017).

Patient education is another crucial area of collaboration. Nurses frequently educate patients about disease management, lifestyle modifications, and the importance of medication adherence. When pharmacists join this educational process, they can offer detailed explanations about the medications, their potential side effects, and interactions with other drugs or foods (Patel et al., 2019). This combined effort ensures that patients receive comprehensive and accurate information, thereby empowering them to manage their health better.

Challenges and Barriers

Despite the clear benefits, several challenges and barriers hinder effective collaboration between pharmacists and nurses. One significant barrier is the traditional professional boundaries and hierarchies within healthcare settings. Historically, pharmacists and nurses have operated within distinct domains, and this separation can create resistance to collaborative efforts (Reeves et al., 2018). Additionally, communication issues often arise due to differences in professional language and terminologies, leading to misunderstandings and inefficiencies (Zwarenstein et al., 2013).

Institutional policies and organizational structures can also impede collaboration. Many healthcare institutions have rigid protocols and a lack of integrated systems that do not facilitate the seamless sharing of information between pharmacists and nurses (Liu et al., 2018). Moreover, time constraints and workload pressures can limit opportunities for pharmacists and nurses to engage in collaborative activities (Hughes et al., 2020).

Another challenge is the varying levels of interprofessional education and training. While some healthcare programs emphasize the importance of interprofessional collaboration, others do not, resulting in a workforce that is not uniformly prepared for collaborative practice (Van C et al., 2017). This inconsistency can hinder the development of effective collaborative care models.

Case Studies and Examples

Several case studies and examples illustrate the potential of pharmacist-nurse collaboration. One notable example is the collaborative care model implemented in the Veterans Affairs (VA) healthcare system. In this model, pharmacists and nurses work together within interdisciplinary teams to manage chronic diseases among veterans. Studies have shown that this collaborative approach has led to improved clinical outcomes, reduced hospital readmissions, and increased patient satisfaction (Rudolph et al., 2018).

Another example is the integration of pharmacists into hospital discharge planning teams. In this model, pharmacists and nurses collaborate to ensure that patients understand their discharge medications and have a plan for managing their medications at home. This approach has been shown to reduce medication-related readmissions and improve patients' transitions from hospital to home care (Setter et al., 2016).

Implications for Practice

The findings from this literature review underscore the importance of fostering interprofessional relationships between pharmacists and nurses. To enhance collaboration, healthcare institutions should implement policies that support team-based care and create opportunities for joint training and continuing education (Reeves et al., 2018). Developing standardized communication protocols and integrated information systems can also facilitate better collaboration (Zwarenstein et al., 2013).

Moreover, healthcare educators should emphasize interprofessional education in their curricula, ensuring that future pharmacists and nurses are well-prepared for collaborative practice (Van C et al., 2017). By addressing these challenges and implementing supportive measures, the potential benefits of pharmacist-nurse collaboration can be fully realized, leading to improved patient outcomes and more efficient healthcare delivery.

Discussion

The findings from the literature review underscore the significant benefits of pharmacist-nurse collaboration in enhancing patient outcomes. The integration of pharmacists into patient care teams, especially in areas like medication management and chronic disease management, has consistently shown positive results. Collaborative efforts lead to reduced medication errors, improved adherence to treatment regimens, better management of chronic conditions, and overall higher patient satisfaction (Makowsky et al., 2013; Smith et al., 2017). Despite these benefits, several barriers persist, including professional boundaries, communication issues, and institutional policies that hinder effective collaboration (Reeves et al., 2018; Liu et al., 2018).

To translate these findings into practice, healthcare institutions must prioritize fostering interprofessional collaboration. Developing standardized communication protocols and integrated information systems can facilitate better interaction and information sharing between pharmacists and nurses (Zwarenstein et al., 2013). Institutions should also implement policies that support team-based care and create opportunities for joint training and continuing education. For instance, simulation-based interprofessional education can help build teamwork skills and mutual understanding among healthcare providers (Reeves et al., 2018).

Furthermore, practical measures such as co-locating pharmacists within patient care areas, involving them in patient rounds, and establishing regular interdisciplinary meetings can enhance collaborative efforts. These steps can help break down professional silos and promote a culture of teamwork and mutual respect (Hughes et al., 2020).

Healthcare policies should be updated to support interprofessional collaboration. Policies that mandate the inclusion of pharmacists in healthcare teams, especially in primary care settings, can institutionalize collaborative practices (Smith et al., 2017). Additionally, reimbursement models should recognize and reward collaborative care efforts, ensuring that both pharmacists and nurses are compensated for their contributions to patient care.

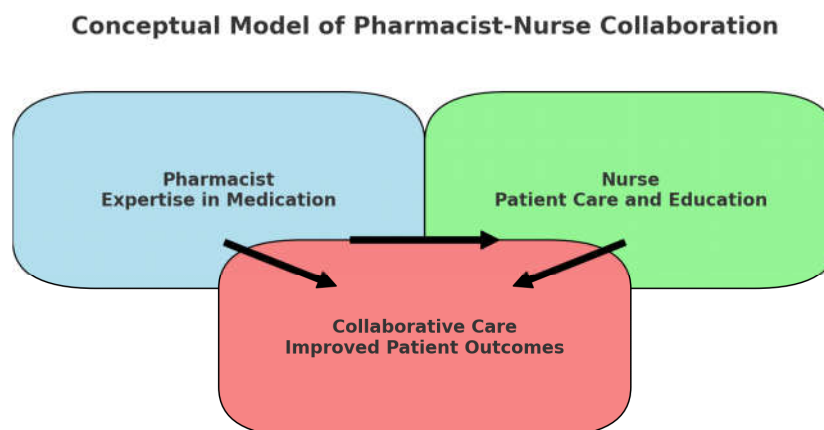


Figure 1: Conceptual Model of Pharmacist-Nurse Collaboration

Educational institutions also play a crucial role in preparing the next generation of healthcare professionals for collaborative practice. Interprofessional education (IPE) should be a core component of the curricula for both pharmacy and nursing students. Studies have shown that early exposure to IPE can improve attitudes toward collaboration and enhance teamwork skills (Van C et al., 2017). Moreover, continuing education programs for practicing pharmacists and nurses should emphasize the importance of collaboration and provide practical training in teamwork and communication.

While this review provides a comprehensive overview of the benefits and challenges of pharmacist-nurse collaboration, it is not without limitations. The scope of the review was limited to studies published in English, which may exclude relevant research conducted in other languages. Additionally, the review primarily focused on settings in developed countries, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to developing healthcare systems.

Moreover, the review relied on published literature, which may be subject to publication bias. Studies demonstrating positive outcomes of collaboration are more likely to be published than those reporting negative or null results. Future research should include a broader range of sources, including grey literature and studies from diverse healthcare settings.

Future research should focus on addressing the identified barriers to collaboration and exploring innovative models of interprofessional care. Longitudinal studies are needed to assess the long-term impact of pharmacist-nurse collaboration on patient outcomes and healthcare costs. Additionally, research should examine the effectiveness of different educational interventions in promoting interprofessional collaboration among healthcare providers.

Studies should also explore the perspectives of patients on pharmacist-nurse collaboration. Understanding patient experiences and preferences can provide valuable insights into how collaborative care models can be tailored to meet their needs. Finally, research should investigate the impact of healthcare policies on the implementation and sustainability of collaborative practices.

Pharmacist-nurse collaboration holds immense potential for improving patient outcomes and enhancing the efficiency of healthcare delivery. By addressing the identified barriers and fostering a culture of collaboration, healthcare institutions can harness the complementary skills and expertise of pharmacists and nurses. This review highlights the need for supportive policies, robust educational programs, and ongoing research to fully realize the benefits of interprofessional collaboration in patient care.

Conclusion

This critical review highlights the substantial benefits of pharmacist-nurse collaboration in improving patient care and outcomes. The evidence consistently shows that when pharmacists and nurses work together, particularly in areas such as medication management, patient education, and chronic disease management, patient outcomes improve significantly. These collaborative efforts lead to reduced medication errors, better adherence to treatment regimens, improved clinical outcomes, and enhanced patient satisfaction.

However, the review also identifies several barriers that hinder effective collaboration. These include traditional professional boundaries, communication issues, and institutional policies that do not support interprofessional teamwork. Addressing these challenges is crucial for realizing the full potential of pharmacist-nurse collaboration.

To enhance collaboration, healthcare institutions should prioritize the development of standardized communication protocols, integrated information systems, and supportive policies that facilitate team-based care. Additionally,

healthcare education should emphasize interprofessional training, preparing future pharmacists and nurses for collaborative practice. Continuing education programs for current practitioners should also focus on enhancing teamwork and communication skills.

Policies that mandate the inclusion of pharmacists in healthcare teams and reward collaborative care efforts are essential for institutionalizing collaborative practices. Furthermore, ongoing research is needed to explore innovative models of interprofessional care, assess the long-term impact of collaboration, and understand patient perspectives on collaborative practices.

In conclusion, fostering a culture of collaboration between pharmacists and nurses holds immense potential for improving patient outcomes and healthcare efficiency. By addressing the identified barriers and implementing supportive measures, healthcare systems can harness the complementary expertise of pharmacists and nurses, leading to more effective and patient-centered care. The insights from this review provide a roadmap for enhancing interprofessional collaboration and underscore the importance of ongoing efforts to integrate pharmacists and nurses into cohesive care teams.

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