

Application of the Nursing Process: A Phenomenological Study of Registered Nurses Experiences at a District Hospital in Ghana

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ABSTRACT

The nursing process is a universal concept which forms the bedrock for nursing practice and has been widely accepted as a scientific tool and an approach to guide nursing practice to promote quality of nursing care. Effectively applying the process is essential to realizing the high quality of nursing care and better health outcomes for clients. However, its use is reported to be low and incomplete in most settings notwithstanding its importance in client management. The study explored the perceptions and utilization of the nursing process in clinical practice at the War Memorial Hospital in Navrongo. A qualitative study design was used to explore the experiences of registered nurses. A purposive sampling method was used to recruit 12 registered nurses as participants for the in-depth interviews and focus group discussion. Records were also reviewed to gather data for the study. The finding of the study indicates that participants perceive the nursing process as a scientific process and a tool useful to the work of nurses. The nursing process was not systematically used in the facility owing to some constraints.

Keywords: experiences; Ghana; Nurses; nursing process; utilization

1. INTRODUCTION

The nursing process is a universal concept, which forms the bedrock for nursing practice and has been widely accepted as a scientific tool and approach to guide nursing practice to promote quality of

nursing care. [1-3] It is a thorough method used to identify, treat and prevent actual and potential health problems of clients as well as promote wellness. [4]

The nursing process is thought to provide guidelines to orderly reasoning in clinical milieu [5,6] with the goal of providing quality individualized care in a holistic and organized manner. [6-8]

A study on the perception of professional nurses on the Nursing Process (NP), nurses found it to be a scientific approach, a decision-making, a problem-solving and an information processing process as common perceptions of the nursing process. [9] Sabona et al [10] also found that Nurses see the nursing process in the first instance as a system of documenting care, but also as a cognitive approach, that is, decision making, problem solving and information processing process. Although the nursing process has been established as a standard for the provision of nursing care globally, the perception persists among nurses that it is time-consuming and impractical. [11,12] For professionals with more favourable or positive positions towards the nursing process, it will probably be easier to get involved in the changes required for its utilization, while those with more negative positions will probably experience more difficulties. [13] The usage of the nursing process blends the art and science of nursing and is a valuable approach to transform nursing practice and

clients outcomes universally. ^[14] A Brazilian study on the nursing process found that some of the phases were not recorded and carried out consistently. ^[14] The use of the nursing process was found to be poor and unsystematic ^[15] in a Kenyan study.

Agyemang-Yeboah et al found out that, non-availability of nursing care plans forms in the wards, poor understanding of the nursing process, time-consuming and shortage of nurses to be factors that affected the application of the nursing process.

Effectively applying the process is essential to realizing a high quality of nursing care and better patient health outcomes. ^[3,16] However, its use is still low and incomplete notwithstanding its importance in client management. ^[6] Previous studies have been conducted in settings within both developed and developing countries, which have health care parameters that vary from those of Ghana. Exploring the perceptions and use of the nursing process among registered nurses will be useful at directing strategies to foster the utilization of the nursing process.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 Design

A qualitative study design (descriptive phenomenology) is used in the study to explore the perceptions and utilization of the nursing process in clinical practice among registered nurses. Qualitative studies aim to explore the individual and social experiences, meanings and practices and how the context shapes these. “Qualitative research thus takes as a starting point the belief that there are benefits to exploring, unpacking, and describing social meanings and perceptions of a phenomenon.” ^[17,18]

2.2 Study setting

The study was conducted in a district hospital in the Upper East Region. The hospital is a Government Health facility rendering a variety of health services to the general public. It is the second-largest health facility in the Upper East Region

after the Bolgatanga Regional Hospital. The hospital has a total bed capacity of 164. The facility also has 29 units and wards.

2.3 Sampled participants and sampling

Purposive sampling which is a non-probability sampling method (purposive) was used to recruit participants for the study. Data collection is very important in research, as the data is meant to contribute to a better understanding of the phenomenon under study. ^[19,20] “The purposive sampling technique also referred to as judgment sampling, is the deliberate choice of a participant due to the qualities the participant possesses. It is a non probability technique that does not need underlying theories or a set number of participants. Simply put, the researcher decides what needs to be known and sets out to find people who can and are willing to provide the information by knowledge or experience.” ^[19,20] A sample size of twelve (12) participants was used for the study. This was determined by data saturation as further interactions with participants yielded no new information but rather a repetition of what has already been said by earlier participants. All the participants were registered nurses with at least four years of working experience in the facility. Nurse assistants, rotation nurses and registered nurses with less than four years working experience in the facility were however excluded for the study.

2.4 Data collection and analysis

Before the main data collection for the study, a pilot study was carried out using the semi-structured interview guide that was designed to meet the research objectives with similar characteristics as the study settings. The piloting involved three registered nurses from another facility. This took place two weeks before the main study was conducted to gain inputs from participants regarding the clarity and relevance of questions. The piloting proved that the interview guide was clear, precise, concise and easily understood by the participants.

2.5 Trustworthiness

According to, [21] trustworthiness is an imperative way researchers can convince themselves and readers that their research findings are worth attention. [21] Concepts of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were adhered to as measures to ensure trustworthiness in the current study. Selecting an appropriate method for data collection, member checking of transcripts by study participants and checking transcripts and generated themes for correctness by experienced qualitative researchers ensured credibility of the study. Further, a detailed description of the study setting, participants and the research process, as well as detailed field notes, enhanced transferability and dependability of the study findings aided trustworthiness.

2.6 Ethical consideration

Ethical approval for the study was granted by the CHRPE, KNUST – School of Medical Sciences, Ghana (Ref: CHRPE/AP/517/18). Written permission was also sorted from the hospital authorities before conducting the study. Participants' privacy, confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation were ensured throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants included in the study.

3.1 RESULTS

3.1 Demographics

In all, twelve (12) registered nurses participated in the study and were aged between thirty (30) to forty-five (45) years. Four were females and the rest were males. Ten of the respondents were married while two were single at the time of the study. Four of the participants indicated that they have worked for five (5) years, five of them have worked for eight (8) years and the other three have worked for twelve (12) years. Their ranks were, five of the participants were senior staff nurses, four were nursing officers and three were senior nursing officers. One of the participants had a master's degree in nursing, five had a

Bachelor of Science degree in nursing and six had a diploma in nursing.

3.2 Perceptions of the nursing process

3.2.1A tool nurses use to work

One of the most prevalent perceptions among participants regarding the nursing process was that; it is a tool that nurses employ for providing care to clients. As a tool, it enables them to provide better and holistic care for clients without which quality may be compromised. A participant opined that it is a tool professional nurses use to identify patient problems and an organized method for meeting clients' needs. The nursing process was also seen as a method for rendering quality care as it guides the nurse to manage clients. These were what some participants specifically said:

"I think the nursing process is a very useful tool in providing holistic care to patients/clients. So I think as a whole the nursing process is a very good tool in helping the nurses to provide better nursing care to our clients and our patients" (Participant 7, a 37-year-old male nurse)

"A tool for nurses to detect client problems and an organized process for addressing patient's needs. As a tool, it follows a well define procedures, whose ultimate goal is to bring excellent care service to clients at the hospitals" (Participant 2, a 35-year-old female nurse).

"It is a good method of rendering quality care to the client because it guides you on how to manage a client. My perception about it is that it is the best of methods in care for clients" (Participant 4, a 40-year-old female nurse).

"The nursing process is the best way for patient care. As we all see it, normally when we learn it and come back to the workplace, we tend to forget of it due to our issues with it, but that is the best care you can use for a patient" (Participant 8, a 34-year-old male nurse).

3.2.2 Used to identify needs and prioritize nursing care

Identification of the client's health care needs is of utmost importance to

achieve good outcomes of care. Assessment which is the first and most crucial step of the nursing process is dedicated to the identification of both actual and potential problems of the client as well as the client's potential for optimal wellbeing. A participant held the view that the nursing process is a guide to identifying client needs and enables nurses to understand the client.

Several participants view the nursing process as something that enables nurses to prioritize nursing care. Prioritizing care is essential if the quality of care and speedy recovery is to be achieved. A participant noted that when the nursing process is used as taught during pre-service training; it helps to prioritize nursing care so that in providing the care you know the area to tackle first.

"I think the nursing process is something that is a guide to help the nurse to able to identify some needs of the individual and this nursing process will also help the incoming staff to also be able to know what has been done for the patient from the beginning and where he or she also need to do for that particular patient" (Participant 6, a 36-year-old male nurse).

"It is good, that is if we can implement that in the ward setting. It is very good, at least you can prioritize care if we are using it" (Participant 5, a 40-year-old female nurse).

"When you use the nursing process, as we were all taught, it helps us to prioritize care. So when the patient comes, you know where to deal with the patient first before you go the next step" (Participant 11, a 43-year-old male nurse).

3.2.3 A scientific process with a series of steps

The nursing process is an organized sequence of problem-solving steps used to identify and manage the health problems of clients. It is the accepted standard for clinical practice globally employed to promote individualized quality and satisfactory nursing care. It was perceived by some respondents as a scientific process used to provide nursing care. The nursing process constitutes a series of steps that

guide nurses to provide care. This entails five phases i.e. assessment, nursing diagnosis, planning, implementation and evaluation. These steps though distinct, are highly interrelated in the process of care delivery. Most participants view the nursing process as a step by step approach nurses employ to identify clients' needs and render individualized care.

"The nursing process is a scientific process that nurses employ in rendering nursing care to clients and patients on admission"(Participant 1, a 35-year-old nurse).

"As the art and science of nursing, it is made up of several phases that nurses follow to ensure good recovery of their patients" (Participant 3, a 33-year-old female nurse)

"Generally, the nursing process is a scientific process that involves steps that are being taken by nurses to render care to clients" (Participant 2, a 35-year-old female nurse).

"Nursing process is a step by step guide used to identify client needs and then plan care and interventions to solve the problem" (Participant 12, a 44-year-old male nurse)

3.2.4 Dualistic perception (good and positive versus time-consuming and difficult)

Majority of the respondents perceived the nursing process as a good process that enhances the speedy recovery of patients. This perception is important because nurses are more likely to use it in providing care provided the right ambience is in place for its use. On whether the nursing process positively or negatively influences nursing care, most of the respondents perceived it as having a positive impact on nursing care. However some of the respondents expressed the opinion that the nursing process is time-wasting and owing to the understaffing situation in the hospital, its application is difficult and not motivating. These were some of the views expressed by some of the participants.

“I think the nursing process influences nursing care positively. This is because you have to assess your patient to know the needs of your patient, then you have to also make your nursing diagnosis, then you plan, implement and finally evaluate to see whether your goals in using the nursing process to take care of the patient has been met. So I think the nursing process is very positive and I encourage all nurses to continue using it” (Participant 7, a 37-year-old male nurse).

“Implementing the nursing process is very very effective and it is very good, so positively it affects nursing care” (Participant 11, a 43-year-old male nurse).

“its implementation is somewhat time-consuming such that certain times you want to render care to a patient and then you realize that if you want to apply the various steps in the nursing process is taking much time on one particular patient...Apart from the fact that it very difficult, it is time-consuming....” (Participant 1, a 35-year-old nurse)

A respondent added that;

“...it leads to burnouts as the nurse tries to as much as possible to implement the nursing process it requires a lot, so the nurse at the end of the day becomes overused. The nurse becomes tired” (Participant 2, a 35-year-old female nurse).

3.3 Utilization of the nursing process

From the interviews, most of the participants were of the view that in essence, they use the nursing process but in reality the evidence of usage of the nursing process nonexistent. The documentation which is usually associated with the utilization of the nursing process in the form of the care plan was absent in the hospital.

3.3.1 It is used unsystematically in the facility

The nursing process is globally regarded in nursing as a gold standard for nursing practice. If used as expected, it aids in the identification of both potential and actual problems of patients and provides a road map for the delivery of individualized, competent and quality nursing care. In using

the process, a nurse is expected to follow systematically the phases in the process to render care. Though the phases are fluid and flexible, it is required that care of the patient be approached systematically following assessment, nursing diagnosis, planning, implementation and eventually evaluation. Several responses from participants depicted that, the nursing process was not being used systematically in the facility. Notably, the non-documentation of nursing procedures using the nursing care plan was a major concern.

“honestly I must say it is not being implemented as expected though in our daily care to clients we may implement it unconsciously but in terms of documenting it to show we follow the nursing process from A to Z that is not being done but in rendering care obviously before you go to attend to a patient you might do some form of assessment to identify the patient problems” (Participant 1, a 35-year-old nurse).

“We do, but the problem that I normally encounter with the nursing process in the workplace is that we don’t follow the way it is being laid out even though we do. It may be that A must come before B, but in the actual sense when you are in the work you realize that C has come before B” (Participant 9, a 38-year-old nurse).

4.1 DISCUSSION

The study explored the perception of nurses in the nursing process in a district hospital in Ghana. Finding revealed that the nursing process is perceived as a tool used by nurses to assess their duties. It was seen as a method that promotes the provision of prioritized quality nursing care and aids in the identification of client’s needs. This finding is in line with that of a study on the Professional Nurses’ Perception and Utilization of the nursing process in Nigeria, where 79.1% of respondents view the nursing process as a working tool for nurses.^[9] The similarity of the findings may be attributed to the universal nature of the nursing process and the experiences of

nurses both in training and practice. This implies that the nursing process is vital to the nursing fraternity in the execution of their daily activities.

The nursing process was also perceived as a scientific process which entails an organized sequence of steps that nurses use to identify and manage patient's health problems. This implies that in using the nursing process, nurses follow a series of steps in an orderly manner to execute care. This agrees with related studies on the nursing process where the nursing process is regarded as a model on which nursing standards are based and remains the universally accepted as a scientific nursing process. [9, 10,22] Alternatively, other common perceptions of the nursing process are; a decision-making process, problem-solving and information procession process. [9]

The nursing process was also perceived as good and positive and favourably influence nursing care. This is important as it will be easy for nurses to adapt to changes towards the utilization of the nursing process. Other studies found that nurses had more favourable or positive positions towards the nursing process [3, 13,23] also found that participants in the study had a positive attitude towards the nursing process. The positive perception should aid nurses to apply the nursing process, however, in practice, its use is often lagging owing to challenges affecting its application.

Still, some participants perceived the nursing process as time-consuming and difficult to apply. This is probably because using the nursing process requires the nurse to do a comprehensive assessment to identify the needs of the client, formulate a diagnosis, determine the desired outcome, decide nursing intervention, implement nursing actions and finally evaluate the care rendered to see whether the goal of care have been achieved or not. Several studies on the nursing process equally view the nursing process as time-consuming and

difficult [11,12] in conformity with the findings of this study.

One of the objectives of the study was to explore the utilization of the nursing process in the facility. The use of qualitative method led to a rich description of the experiences of the participants on its use. It was found in the current study that, the nursing process is not used systematically or as expected in the facility. The participants were quick to attribute the non-systematic use of the nursing process to inadequate knowledge and staff shortage. Similarly, reports from some studies on the application of the nursing process are in line with the findings of the current study. Several studies indicated limited use of the nursing process, [3, 7, 12, 14, 15, 25-27] Similarly, a study on the implementation of the nursing process in Kenya, concluded that "though the nursing process has been initiated a district hospital, nurses use it in an incomplete and unsystematic manner." [24] This may be due to similarity in the context in terms of clinical settings and level of training of nurses. Also, the presence of similar challenges in the study settings may account for this. However, in contrast to the finding, an interventional study on Nurses knowledge, Perspectives and Practice of the nursing process in Two Public Hospitals in Kenya revealed that participants who reported that they utilized the nursing process in patient care increased from 71.9% during the pre-test to 86.5% during the post-test. [22] The present situation in the facility has the potential to impinge on the quality of nursing care and patient outcomes. The health care needs of clients may not be adequately identified and some client's problems may be overlooked. As such the overall progress of clients cannot be realistically tracked and needed outcomes may not be realized or noticed. More so the contributions of nurses in the care of clients will not be visible as most of the care activities are not systematically documented. A policy on costing nursing procedures in Ghana is possible but will

remain a mirage if the nursing process is not systematically implemented.

5.0 CONCLUSION

The nursing process is perceived as a tool and a scientific process that nurses employ to render care. It is equally seen as something good but difficult and time-consuming to apply. It is however poorly and unsystematically used and is not usually documented in the form of a nursing care plan hence no evidence of its use was found in the facility. The perceptions provide us with an opportunity to improve the utilization of the nursing process by targeting appropriate interventions. Challenges and barriers to the implementation of the nursing process should be explored.

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Data Availability

The qualitative data used to support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon request.

Authors' contribution

GT conceived the study and designed it. FA and VMD supervised the conduct of the data collection. GT and FA undertook recruitment of participating participants and managed the data, including quality control. ABB, PAA and AYL provided advice on the study design and analyzed the data; GT drafted the manuscript and all authors contributed substantially to its revision. GT takes responsibility for the paper as a whole.

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