

Long Paper

Beyond the Bedside: Experiences of Student Nurses in the Care of Terminally Ill Patients

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Abstract

Student nurses often provide care to terminally ill patients in hospital and community settings, embracing a holistic approach to address physical, emotional, and psychological needs. In the Philippines, the prevalence of terminal illnesses is increasing, yet little is known about the experiences of student nurses in caring for these patients. This study seeks to bridge that gap by exploring and understanding the experiences of student nurses in caring for the terminally ill. Using a descriptive phenomenology design, the study gathered data from eight student nurses through one-on-one interviews. Participants, who were second to fourth-year students from two nursing schools in Baguio City, had cared for terminally ill patients for at least three days. Colaizzi's seven-step method guided the analysis, revealing four major themes: (1) Facing Intrapersonal and Interpersonal Challenges, (2) Caring with Compassion, and (3) Gaining Personal and Professional Insight. These themes shed light on the challenges faced by student nurses, their empathy toward patients, the support exchanged with patients and healthcare professionals, and the personal and professional growth they achieved. The findings emphasize the profound impact of caring for terminally ill patients on student nurses. While they face significant challenges, they also develop empathy and resilience, gaining insights that enhance their professional identity. The study underscores the need for specialized training and robust support systems within nursing education to prepare students for the demands of palliative care. Further research is recommended to explore these experiences across diverse geographic locations and through longitudinal studies to understand better the lasting effects on student nurses' well-being and professional development. Nursing administrations should consider integrating comprehensive training and support mechanisms into curricula to equip future nurses for the multifaceted responsibilities of caring for terminally ill patients.

Keywords – terminally ill, student nurses, experiences, caring

INTRODUCTION

Jfleming (2020) defines terminal illnesses as the final stage of a fatal illness with a prognosis of six months or less. The dying phase in terminally ill patients marks the approach of death, characterized by health decline (Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care, 2018). Gelegjamts et al. (2023) describe terminally ill patients as those with limited life expectancy due to incurable conditions. Smlatic (2021) emphasizes that terminally sick care focuses on comfort and support for patients expected to die within a short time. WHO (2020) classifies terminally ill patients based on incurable conditions with limited life expectancy.

In the Philippines, terminal illness, particularly cancer, poses significant health challenges (World Health Organization: WHO, 2020b). Chronic kidney disease (CKD) is also prevalent, affecting a substantial portion of the population (Pajimna et al., 2023). Asthma-COPD overlap is another concern, affecting a notable percentage of patients (Jaen et al., 2019).

Student nurses play a crucial role in caring for terminally ill patients and providing holistic support (Ozdemir et al., 2022). Due to the nature of terminal care, they face emotional challenges, which impact their professional development (Laporte et al., 2020). Education on terminal care is essential in nursing programs, although specific courses may not always be dedicated solely to this aspect (WHO, 2020). Integrating palliative care principles throughout nursing education prepares students for these complex roles (Hardie et al., 2023).

In the Philippines, healthcare access for terminally ill patients is uneven, with rural areas often lacking adequate services (Ho et al., 2023). Nurses and student nurses globally find it challenging to cope with the emotional demands of terminal care, underscoring the need for comprehensive support and training (Ferri et al., 2021). Further research is needed to understand how student nurses in the Philippines navigate these challenges (Duran & Polat, 2022).

The primary aim of this study is to explore the experiences of student nurses in the care of terminally ill patients. This exploration seeks to identify the specific challenges they face, understand the coping mechanisms they employ, and examine the impact of these experiences on their professional development and personal growth. Additionally, the study aims to provide recommendations for nursing education and training programs to better support student nurses in managing the complexities and emotional demands of caring for terminally ill patients. By doing so, the study intends to contribute to improving nursing curricula and the overall quality of palliative care.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to inform nursing education and training programs by providing a detailed understanding of the challenges and experiences

student nurses face while caring for terminally ill patients. By identifying these challenges and the coping mechanisms employed by student nurses, educators can develop targeted interventions that enhance students' preparedness and resilience. Such improvements can lead to better quality care for terminally ill patients and support the emotional well-being of future nurses. Furthermore, this study contributes to the broader discourse on palliative and end-of-life care education, highlighting the need for a holistic approach that addresses technical skills as well as the emotional and psychological support necessary for healthcare providers. The findings can also inform policies and practices within healthcare institutions, creating supportive environments for student nurses and other healthcare providers involved in palliative care. Overall, this research aims to fill a critical gap in the literature by offering nuanced insights that can enhance nursing education, improve patient care, and support the well-being of future nurses.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Clinical practice is a crucial phase in nursing education where students apply theoretical knowledge to real-life situations, encountering various diseases and patients, including those in terminal cases, which poses significant emotional and professional challenges (Jiajia & Jiawen, 2022). Despite the importance of guidance from hospital supervisors and experienced nurses in learning to cope with patient illnesses and death and providing humanitarian support, nursing students currently receive insufficient assistance and guidance in school, hindering their performance in clinical settings (Jiajia & Jiawen, 2022).

Caring for terminally ill patients necessitates advanced skills and appropriate attitudes across biological, psychological, social, and spiritual dimensions, yet many nursing students feel unprepared due to insufficient training (Laporte et al., 2020). Y. Wang (2019) revealed that nursing students lack sufficient skills in symptom control, comfort supply, and therapeutic communication when caring for terminally ill patients while also advocating for greater support for patients' families. The study by Y. Wang (2019) also highlighted the importance of nursing preceptors in creating a supportive environment and helping students manage their negative emotions, leading to both professional and personal development.

Similarly, student nurses described their experiences in caring for dying patients as challenging due to the emotional and practical difficulties involved in caring for terminally ill patients and their families. Despite these challenges, they developed into compassionate practitioners by learning to navigate and manage their emotions, enhance their communication skills, and provide holistic care that addresses both physical and emotional needs (Jones et al., 2023).

As healthcare evolves and the global population ages, nurses are encountering and caring for more individuals who are terminally ill and nearing the end of life (Pereira et al., 2021). However, a significant number of nurses lack sufficient understanding of palliative and end-of-life care, emphasizing the urgent requirement for improved education and

training in this field. This is essential to ensure that patients receive quality care that addresses principles of palliative care, effective symptom management, and comprehensive psychosocial and spiritual support (Worldwide Palliative Care Alliance, 2020).

Furthermore, student nurses frequently encounter challenges in managing the emotional burden and communicating effectively with patients and families in palliative and terminally ill care contexts (Cheon & You, 2022). This is aligned with the study of Alshammari et al. (2022), which reveals that student nurses often experience anxiety and a sense of unpreparedness when confronted with the complexities of caring for terminally ill patients and their families. This challenge is exacerbated by the unique skills required in palliative and end-of-life care, which are not always adequately addressed in traditional nursing education and simulation-based learning. As a result, there is a critical need for nurse educators who are proficient in these specialized areas to help students navigate and gain confidence in managing the multifaceted needs of terminal care (Alshammari et al., 2022).

Those difficulties can significantly impact care quality and contribute to heightened stress levels among nurses, prompting some to avoid assignments involving terminally ill patients and their families (Puente-Fernández et al., 2020). Therefore, integrating comprehensive education on palliative and end-of-life care into undergraduate nursing programs is essential. Such education aims to improve students' confidence, refine their skills, and enrich their clinical experience, ultimately enhancing the delivery of person-centered care (Wang et al., 2022).

Merrilliana (2024) studied patient safety practices among operating room nurses in Eastern Pangasinan, emphasizing the importance of continuous education and professional development, including attending seminars and staying updated through organizational memberships. These practices are crucial for nursing students, who must also engage in ongoing learning to effectively care for terminally ill patients, ensuring both competence and compassion in end-of-life care.

Similarly, Tablada (2023) highlighted the importance of continuous training for ACLS nurses in the ICU, revealing that those with more experience and relevant training exhibited better competencies. This underscores the need for nursing students to gain practical, hands-on experience alongside theoretical learning, preparing them to manage the complex needs of terminally ill patients with skill and confidence.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The methodology for this study involved a structured approach to ensure the collection of comprehensive and reliable data. Researchers adopted a descriptive

phenomenology methodology to explore the experiences of student nurses in caring for terminally ill patients.

Participants of the Study

Participants were recruited through referrals, primarily from the researchers' clinical groupmates and friends. Consent forms detailing the study's purpose, methodology, and potential impact were provided to ensure informed participation. The study, conducted across two nursing schools in Baguio City, aimed to explore the experiences of student nurses in caring for terminally ill patients. Including participants from different educational settings allowed for a comprehensive understanding of these experiences, considering varied clinical placements, teaching methods, and nursing approaches. This approach facilitated the identification of common themes and patterns, acknowledging diverse perspectives and fostering inclusivity in the research environment. Interviews were conducted in participant-selected settings, typically unoccupied classrooms within the nursing department, ensuring comfort and privacy. Participants, predominantly from third and fourth-year levels with clinical duties involving terminally ill patients for at least three days, provided insights into their caregiving experiences amidst varied patient prognoses and disease conditions.

Data Collection

Interviews were scheduled at convenient times and locations for participants, with audio recordings and field notes used to collect data. The data-gathering process concluded upon reaching saturation, where no new data emerged from subsequent interviews, confirming the comprehensiveness of the analysis.

Data Analysis

Data management and analysis followed Colaizzi's method, a rigorous and robust qualitative approach (KR & S, 2021). This involved a seven-step process: familiarization with interview transcripts, extraction of significant statements, coding, theming, clustering derived meanings, organizing these into main and subthemes, and constructing a comprehensive description of the experiences. Data analysis occurred concurrently with data collection to identify potential follow-up interviews.

The study ensured credibility by employing strategies relevant to student nurses' experiences in caring for terminally ill patients. Prolonged engagement was achieved through in-depth discussions and reflections within clinical settings to fully understand participants' perspectives. Peer debriefing with researchers and research promoters helped validate findings and identify potential biases.

Moreover, reflexivity was addressed through journaling, where researchers documented personal thoughts and assumptions to separate their own experiences from the data. Member checking also allowed participants to review and confirm the accuracy of findings, ensuring authenticity. Lastly, an audit trail was maintained to document key decisions, challenges, and reflections, enhancing transparency and trustworthiness.

RESULTS

Theme 1: Facing Intrapersonal and Interpersonal Challenges

Sub-theme 1: Overwhelming Emotions. Overwhelming emotions are feeling multiple emotions like shock, relief, sadness, fear, hope, satisfaction, empathy, and such during a situation. In this study, these are the different emotions felt by student nurses during their care of terminally ill patients. The presence of more than one emotion impairs their ability to process what they feel and the ability to act rationally. This sheds light on the impact of caring for terminally ill patients on the emotional experiences of student nurses.

The findings of the study by Abelson and Willman (2020) explored the intricate emotional journey experienced by undergraduate student nurses when providing care for terminally ill patients. Their study states that while undergraduate student nurses view this responsibility as a privilege, it also stresses them, especially when faced with time constraints due to heavy workloads. This thorough discussion shows the complex emotional terrain that student nurses navigate in providing care for the terminally ill, underscoring the importance of adequate support and coping mechanisms to manage the intense emotions involved (Abelson & Willman, 2020). Additionally, nurses feel that care from a nursing perspective has a sensitive dimension beyond the patient's healing, and also reveals that the engagement between the nursing practice and patients in vulnerable situations possesses a vital emotional element (Jiménez-Herrera et al., 2020).

Sub-theme 2: Conflicting Emotions. Conflicting emotions are having two opposing feelings occurring at the same time. In this study, these are the contradicting emotions felt by student nurses during their care of terminally ill patients. Student nurses are allowed to be designated in critical areas of the hospital. While this provides opportunities for developing knowledge and skills, it also brings about new emotions to experience, which are sometimes opposing. This theme covers the clash of emotions and the desire to embody the strength student nurses encounter during their care for terminally ill patients.

These experiences of student nurses in caring for terminally ill patients resonate with the Interpersonal Relations in Nursing Theory by Peplau (1988), which suggests that conflicts arising from cultural influences can complicate interpersonal dynamics. Martinez (2019) further notes that Filipinos emphasize concern for others' welfare in nursing relationships. Such interactions shape nurses' self-perceptions and impact their personal and professional growth, acting as transformative experiences that require emotional

regulation. Student nurses engage in practical care experiences that expose them to diverse patient interactions, fostering both positive and negative emotions. As they navigate these emotions, students must develop strategies to manage their responses effectively while maintaining professionalism and providing quality care (Abelsson & Willman, 2020).

Sub-theme 3: Fear in the Care of Terminally Ill. Student nurses confront numerous concerns when caring for terminally ill patients, which can lead them to feel anxious. These worries are primarily centered on the emotional toll, as witnessing suffering and death can bring about intense emotions such as sadness and grief, leading to concerns about their emotional well-being. Fear, in this context, is defined as a reaction to a specific threat, whereas anxiety stems from fear of the unknown. Additionally, their limited experience in managing terminally ill patients can produce fears of making mistakes or inadequately addressing patients' complex needs.

Fernández-Martínez et al. (2021) found that nursing students consistently experience significant apprehension about providing care for terminally ill patients throughout their academic years, reflecting broader trends in similar demographic groups. Their fears primarily center around the death of others, followed by anxiety related to the dying process and, to a lesser extent, their mortality. These concerns likely stem from personal experiences of loss and the emotional impact of encountering death and deceased bodies, leading to feelings of fear, uncertainty, and discomfort. Harrington et al. (2019) further highlight a direct correlation between initial fears of death in nursing students and their progression through academic years, emphasizing a persistent need for improved terminal care training within nursing education. Additionally, a study by Kostka et al. (2021) underscores the significant emotional toll of patient death on nurses worldwide, revealing common sentiments of compassion, sadness, and helplessness influenced by factors such as patient age and cause of death. Juvet et al. (2021) explored how educational approaches impact student nurses' attitudes toward terminal care, revealing widespread feelings of inadequacy due to limited training and practical exposure. These findings underscore the universal need for enhanced theoretical instruction and hands-on experience to bolster students' confidence and preparedness in caring for terminally ill patients, addressing gaps in knowledge and skill development during their training.

Sub-theme 4: Showing Sympathy. In the care of terminally ill patients, student nurses often develop a sense of sympathy characterized by recognizing the patient's emotions, fears, and challenges. Thus, when caring for terminally ill patients, feelings of pity and sorrow for someone else's medical situation often emerge as a response to witnessing the challenges and struggles faced by terminally ill individuals. These emotions may arise from recognizing the patient's deteriorating health, the impact of their illness on their quality of life, or the inevitability of their impending death.

Sympathy among student nurses caring for terminally ill patients can lead to emotional strain, potentially contributing to burnout or compassion fatigue as they manage the distress of patients and families (Guerrero, 2019). While sympathy involves understanding patient emotions, it may overshadow the necessity for empathy, which includes active listening and validation of the patient's journey. Nursing practice emphasizes the importance of balancing empathy with professional boundaries to provide effective care during the transition from curative to palliative treatments. Nurses must employ therapeutic communication skills to facilitate open expression of feelings and advocate for patients amidst familial and healthcare provider disagreements. These challenges underscore the need for ongoing training and support programs to equip nurses with the skills to navigate emotional complexities and deliver compassionate care (Atta et al., 2024).

Sub-theme 5: Doubting Own Capabilities. Self-doubt among student nurses caring for terminally ill patients encompasses a range of emotions, perceptions, and challenges inherent in providing care for the terminally ill. They may grapple with feelings of uncertainty, inadequacy, and anxiety regarding their ability to meet patients' and families' physical, emotional, and spiritual needs, influenced by factors such as lack of experience, fear of errors, and the emotionally charged nature of terminal care situations. This self-doubt extends to questioning their clinical skills, communication effectiveness, and ethical decision-making abilities, compounded by comparisons with seasoned healthcare professionals.

The attitudes of nursing students toward caring for terminally ill patients vary widely, as highlighted by Ferri et al. (2021b); negative attitudes include discomfort with discussing impending death, comforting grieving patients, and managing patients who have lost hope despite a general interest in palliative care. This sentiment is echoed in the findings of Zhou et al. (2020), indicating a sense of unpreparedness among students in handling end-of-life scenarios. Positive attitudes among students varied and were influenced by cultural and social factors, emphasizing the need for comprehensive education on ethical and medical aspects of terminal care (Zhou et al., 2020). Kostka et al. (2021) discuss the profound emotional impact of patient deaths on nursing students, highlighting feelings of fear, sorrow, helplessness, and guilt. These emotional challenges underscore the necessity for support and training programs to enhance students' emotional resilience and capacity for compassionate care. Integration of extensive palliative care training into nursing education is crucial to foster positive attitudes and equip students with coping strategies for the emotional demands of caring for terminally ill patients, ultimately improving the quality of care provided (Kostka et al., 2021)

Sub-theme 6: Communication Barriers. Some obstacles can interrupt the flow of information between individuals, leading to misunderstandings or confusion. These obstacles include language barriers and absent verbal and nonverbal cues. Participants describe the various communication barriers they encountered during their care for the terminally ill, highlighting the challenges they faced in rendering nursing interventions.

These experiences highlight the intricate nature of caregiving when communication barriers arise, whether due to patients' conditions or language differences with their families.

Effective communication is paramount in nursing, especially when caring for terminally ill patients, as articulated by the Transactional Model of Communication proposed by Barnlund (1970). This model provides a robust framework for understanding communication as a dynamic exchange between senders and receivers, where both parties actively shape the interaction process. Nurses must adeptly navigate this process, adjusting their strategies based on patient feedback and situational context to effectively convey information, provide support, and gather insights from patients, caregivers, and healthcare team members. This interactive approach is crucial in addressing the inherent challenges of caring for terminally ill patients, including navigating communication barriers and tailoring nursing interventions to individual needs. Research by Nasmil and Seneviratne (2020) underscores the persistent challenges in clinical settings, particularly concerning communication barriers exacerbated by severe patient conditions and complex medical processes in terminal illness.

Sub-theme 7: Unforeseen Situations. When individuals face scenarios they have not encountered before, they lack the necessary knowledge or training or are thrown into high-pressure situations unexpectedly. Thus, this can lead to uncertainty about how to proceed, impacting their ability to provide adequate care and make confident decisions. They shared their experiences with unexpected obstacles while caring for the terminally ill, revealing unprepared moments in their practice.

The challenges faced by nursing students in caring for terminally ill patients, including uncertainty, lack of preparedness, and high-pressure scenarios, align closely with Cognitive Load Theory by Sweller et al. (2011). This theory posits that encountering situations beyond one's current knowledge or experience can lead to cognitive overload, impairing decision-making and information processing. Examples such as Hydrangea's sudden exposure to high-stress scenarios and Daffodil's feeling of inadequacy during initial clinical experiences illustrate how cognitive overload manifests in unfamiliar healthcare settings. Studies by Juvet et al. (2021) and Fristedt et al. (2021) support these experiences, revealing that many nursing students feel unready to manage terminally ill patients due to insufficient practical training, despite formal education in end-of-life care. Foster and McCloughen (2020) highlight the consequences of this unpreparedness, emphasizing increased stress for patients and caregivers, compromised care quality, and missed opportunities for effective symptom management and end-of-life discussions. These findings underscore the urgent need for enhanced training programs that provide nursing students with the practical skills and confidence needed to navigate the complexities of caring for terminally ill patients effectively.

Sub-theme 8: Overwhelming Responsibilities. This is defined as facing a significant workload or task demands that exceed the student nurses' perceived capacity to manage

them effectively. This requires adaptability, quick decision-making, and a deep understanding of medical protocols to ensure patient safety and well-being upon encountering complex patient care scenarios, such as overseeing multiple patients, ensuring proper medication administration, and preparing for emergencies like patient codes. There is also a need to lead and supervise their peers, balancing their patient load with the additional responsibility of monitoring and guiding others.

The Neuman Systems Model, by Hannoodee and Dhamoon (2023), focuses on how individuals respond to stressors in their environment and emphasizes the importance of maintaining optimal well-being through adaptable adjustment. This framework illuminates how stressors, coping mechanisms, and the overarching goal of ensuring patient well-being dynamically interact. The study by Juvet et al. (2021) highlights the profound responsibilities and psychological toll experienced by student nurses when caring for terminally ill patients. It underscores the substantial demands arising from patients' intense pain and the multitude of caregiving responsibilities, including addressing emotional and psychological needs. Similarly, Harrad et al. (2019) underscore the comprehensive care required in end-of-life situations, where nurses must attend to not only physical ailments but also the psychological, spiritual, and social needs of both patients and their families. This holistic approach underscores the significant responsibilities nurses bear in providing comprehensive care to terminally ill patients, highlighting the multifaceted challenges they navigate in clinical practice.

Theme 2: Caring with Compassion

Sub-theme 1: Showing Empathy. Showing empathy is all about understanding how patients feel, listening to their worries, and genuinely caring about them. For student nurses, it's about learning to connect with patients, recognizing their feelings, and making sure they feel important and supported. This sub-theme is about putting empathy at the forefront of nursing practice. It means truly understanding what patients are going through, listening to their concerns, and showing that we genuinely care about them. As student nurses, it's about learning to connect with patients on a deeper level, acknowledging their emotions, and making them feel valued and supported. By practicing empathy, student nurses can build trust with patients, strengthen our relationships with them, and ultimately provide better care that addresses their medical and emotional needs.

In healthcare education and practice, empathy plays a crucial role in fostering patient-centered care and professional development among student nurses, as highlighted by Nembhard et al. (2022) in their systematic review. Their findings underscored empathy as integral to nursing education, emphasizing its ability to enhance care quality through improved trust, communication, and patient understanding, leading to better outcomes and satisfaction. Moudatsou et al. (2020) further emphasized the pivotal role of clinical exposure in shaping student nurses' comprehension and application of empathy in patient care, advocating for practical experiences to cultivate empathetic practices. Additionally,

Winter et al. (2022) explored the development of empathy in student nurses, identifying personal experiences, educational interventions, and clinical exposure as key factors influencing empathy formation. Their research underscored the intricate balance of individual traits and external factors in nurturing empathetic and compassionate care practices among future nurses.

Sub-theme 2: Maintaining Personal and Professional Boundaries. This sub-theme represents the resulting recognition of professional and personal boundaries of student nurses when faced with distressing situations. In the field of healthcare, nursing students are often met with the emotional demands involved in caring for patients and their families. Consequently, individuals recognize the need to set an emotional boundary between their personal and professional lives to react to certain situations appropriately.

The interpersonal relationships forged between healthcare professionals and their patients and families are pivotal in establishing effective care practices. Providing care in clinical settings demands emotional competence from caregivers, as interactions with diverse patients and families can be emotionally taxing. Font-Jimenez et al. (2020) highlight emotion as a significant factor influencing nurses' relationships, revealing that nurses often experience emotional resonance with patients' suffering, which underscores the need for professional boundaries to mitigate the impact on caregivers. Foster et al. (2020) found that some student nurses employ emotional detachment and behavioral strategies like taking breaks to manage their emotions, suggesting these tactics help balance emotional involvement with patient care. Similarly, Kim et al. (2020) discuss emotional distancing as a self-regulated strategy among healthcare workers to maintain professional neutrality while providing compassionate care, emphasizing the importance of preserving emotional well-being while fulfilling caregiving responsibilities.

Sub-theme 3: Caring for the Carers. The sub-theme underscores the importance of supporting individuals who selflessly dedicate themselves to caring for others. It emphasizes the essential recognition of the emotional and physical challenges confronted by caregivers for offering practical assistance and resources to alleviate their burdens. Caregivers are crucial who consistently offer support and aid others. Therefore, supporting caregivers encompasses extending kindness, tangible assistance, and access to resources to alleviate their challenges and strengthen their well-being. By prioritizing the well-being of caregivers, student nurses ensure that these invaluable individuals receive the necessary support to effectively continue their indispensable role in caregiving.

Katharine Kolcaba's Theory of Comfort by Smith (2019) provides a foundational framework in nursing literature, emphasizing holistic approaches to caregiving that extend beyond physical comfort to include psycho-spiritual and environmental dimensions. This perspective resonates with Lily's proactive support for caregivers and Hydrangea's commitment to easing family suffering, highlighting the theory's relevance in improving the healthcare experience for all involved. Alimohammadi et al. (2023) underscore the significant challenges faced by family caregivers of terminally ill patients in hospitals,

emphasizing the need for tailored care and support to alleviate their burdens and enhance overall care quality. Thakur et al. (2019) further contribute insights by demonstrating the efficacy of individual counseling interventions in managing caregiver distress and improving their well-being. Integrating these findings into nursing practice enables students to adopt proactive strategies that address caregiver needs effectively within Kolcaba's holistic comfort framework, thereby enhancing both patient and caregiver outcomes in healthcare settings.

Sub-theme 4: Preventing Further Harm. Providing care with integrity and concentrating on preventing complications can improve a patient's quality of life. Student nurses shared their approaches to preventing harm in patient care, highlighting the significance of avoiding further complications and boosting the patient's quality of life. These methods involve taking necessary precautions to reduce or prevent additional health problems. This includes closely monitoring patients, particularly those who cannot express themselves verbally, and paying close attention to non-verbal cues. These measures ensure safe and compassionate care while focusing on the safety and well-being of the patients.

In the Human-to-Human Relationship Model by Travelbee (1971), the focus lies on enhancing the quality of life for patients and their families confronting life-threatening illnesses. This is achieved through proactive measures to prevent and alleviate suffering, encompassing physical, psychosocial, and spiritual dimensions. Botchwey et al. (2024) reinforce the importance of fostering a culture of patient safety to mitigate adverse events and uphold care standards, echoing Carnation's emphasis on preventive care and patient well-being. Furthermore, Parola et al. (2020) highlight the critical role of preventing harm in promoting patient well-being, building trust, and optimizing healthcare outcomes. By integrating Travelbee's model into practice, student nurses can uphold ethical standards and prioritize patient safety to deliver compassionate and effective care.

Theme 3: Gaining Personal and Professional Insights

Sub-theme 1: Learning Through Experiences. Within the broader context of student nurses' experiences in caring for terminally ill patients, the sub-theme of "learning through experiences" emerges as a crucial aspect. It encompasses how student nurses acquire new knowledge, skills, and insights while interacting with terminally ill patients. As student nurses experienced extensive and intensive exposure to palliative care, they gained new learnings that aided them in their nursing careers. These experiences made them better clinicians in different aspects of nursing practice.

Exposure to terminally ill patients is pivotal in enhancing caregivers' confidence, competence, and skill development, aligning closely with Experiential Learning Theory by Kolb and Plovnick (2022), which emphasizes abstract conceptualization from practical experiences. Through direct interaction, observation, and participation in patient care,

learners in healthcare settings engage in concrete experiences that form the basis for reflection and learning. This reflective process allows caregivers to extract principles of patient care, refine their skills, and develop theoretical frameworks that guide future actions and decision-making. Laporte et al. (2020) affirm that such exposure demystifies terminal illness care, fostering knowledge, practical skills, and personal growth while positively shaping attitudes towards end-of-life care and enhancing empathy and confidence in providing critical support. Similarly, Juvet et al. (2021) underscore that prior experience significantly influences caregivers' self-competence in caring for terminally ill patients, highlighting the role of exposure and training in fostering improved attitudes, skills, and overall competence in this specialized area of healthcare. Ultimately, repeated exposure and deliberate practice enable caregivers to become more adept and compassionate in caring for terminally ill patients, enhancing their ability to deliver effective care and support.

Sub-theme 2: Supportive Mentorship. This sub-theme encompasses the nurturing and collaborative environment fostered within the clinical setting, where nursing students receive guidance, mentorship, and encouragement from experienced healthcare professionals. It encompasses the acknowledgment and appreciation expressed by students towards staff nurses and clinical instructors for their hands-on support and comprehensive guidance. This highlights the significance of mentorship relationships in facilitating learning and professional development and the importance of effective communication and collaboration among clinical staff and student nurses. This sub-theme expresses appreciation of nursing students towards staff nurses and clinical instructors for their hands-on support and comprehensive guidance. Through supportive interactions and modeling behaviors, students are empowered to enhance their communication skills, build self-confidence, and provide quality patient care, ultimately contributing to their growth and success in nursing.

According to Tuomikoski et al. (2019), developing mentoring competence significantly enhances the guidance provided to nursing students during their traineeship, thereby boosting their overall competence in nursing. This development also positively impacts patient safety and care quality by fostering an environment where mentors can effectively give and receive feedback. Constructive criticism, as noted by Tulip's narrative, plays a crucial role in boosting students' self-esteem, motivation, and confidence while improving their clinical practice. Tulip's experience underscores the importance of having competent clinical instructors who actively guide students through their rotations, ensuring they gain foundational knowledge in patient care and deliver holistic quality care. Additionally, Zhang et al. (2022) emphasize that improved interaction and coordination between clinical staff and student nurses create a supportive and productive learning environment. This collaboration enables students to provide necessary interventions and quality care, gain valuable insights from their mentors and peers, and apply these learnings to future clinical experiences.

Sub-theme 3: Improving Quality of Care. Participants state how they have improved their ability to provide compassionate care, specifically focusing on terminally ill individuals. They acknowledge the continuous development of their skills, enriched by the abundance of learning experiences they encounter. As the student nurses cared for the terminally ill, they expressed the opportunities they encountered where they were able to improve their skills.

The pursuit of professional growth and specialization within nursing underscores a commitment to excellence in patient care, a concept central to the Theory of Human Caring by Watson (2011). Caring is fundamental in nursing practice, and essential for promoting health, preventing illness, and restoring well-being. These principles align with findings from Farfán-Zúñiga and Jaman-Mewes (2021), revealing significant improvements in nursing students' professional knowledge and attitudes toward caring for terminally ill patients following practical experiences. The study highlighted a crucial shift from theoretical understanding to practical application, emphasizing the limitations of classroom learning alone in comprehending the complexities of end-of-life care. Similarly, research by Jiajia and Jiawen (2022) illustrated that simulated scenarios and direct exposure to terminally ill patients in hospital settings enhanced students' competence and knowledge in palliative care nursing. This hands-on experience not only improved their skills but also fostered a proactive attitude toward continuous learning and self-improvement. Integrating these insights underscores the importance of incorporating practical, experiential learning components into nursing education to adequately prepare students for the challenges and responsibilities of caring for terminally ill patients with compassion and effectiveness.

Sub-theme 4: Growing as a Person. As the participants reflect on their journey, “growing as a person” surfaces as one of the sub-themes, as they mention coming to realizations beyond patient care that focus on personal growth. These lessons teach them the importance of lifelong learning and a healthy lifestyle through forming healthier practices. Growing as a person focuses on the realization of the role and process of lifelong learning and healthier practices not only in the nursing field but also in impacting personal lives. In lifelong learning, student nurses recognize the dynamic nature of acquiring knowledge and our ever-growing perspective as humans from contemplating their progressive journey as student nurses. Forming healthier practices, on the other hand, explores how the exposure of student nurses affects the way they see their current lifestyle and decide to develop better habits to achieve and maintain optimal well-being.

The experiences of student nurses in confronting challenging and complex cases, particularly in palliative care, leave lasting impacts that shape their attitudes toward lifelong learning and personal health. Lifelong learning is identified as a cornerstone of nursing professionalism, essential for adapting to evolving healthcare demands and improving patient care quality (Mlambo et al., 2021). Aljarboa et al. (2022) underscore how continuous learning fosters personal growth and resilience among healthcare workers, paralleling the journey of student nurses who navigate emotional intelligence and practical

learning in their educational journey. Reflecting on practice readiness, Mirza et al. (2019) highlight the gap between education and real-world practice, advocating for a balanced approach that integrates technical proficiency with humanistic qualities crucial for patient-centered care. Student nurses' exposure to terminally ill patients also influences their health behaviors, as seen in studies like Keele (2019) and Abrams et al. (2020), where these experiences prompt a renewed commitment to health and wellness. Bak et al. (2020) further advocate reshaping healthcare environments and curricula to support nurses in fostering healthier lifestyles and better preparing them to meet the diverse challenges of healthcare practice. These insights underscore the profound impact of clinical experiences on both professional development and personal well-being among student nurses.

Sub-theme 5: Fulfillment in Nursing. Fulfillment in nursing is the deep satisfaction student nurses feel after caring for terminally ill patients. Despite exhaustion, it's the knowledge that their efforts have brought comfort and dignity, making a meaningful difference. This fulfillment goes beyond job satisfaction, driving their dedication to providing compassionate care despite challenges. Despite the challenges and exhaustion, student nurses find fulfillment in providing care to those in need. Whether it's meeting a patient's needs after long hours or offering support during their final moments, there's a deep sense of satisfaction and purpose in making a difference in someone's life.

The experiences of Lily, Calalily, Carnation, and Tulip in their caregiving roles resonate strongly with the Hierarchy of Needs by Maslow (1954), which posits that individuals strive to fulfill basic physiological needs and progress towards higher-level needs like belongingness, self-esteem, and self-actualization. In their interactions with patients, these student nurses not only address patients' physical needs but also foster a sense of belonging and connection through compassionate care, thus fulfilling higher-order needs. This sense of fulfillment aligns with Maslow's concept of self-esteem, where individuals derive satisfaction from their competence, achievements, and contributions to others. Karaca and Durna (2019) affirm this by highlighting how witnessing patient improvement and healing enhances nurses' sense of satisfaction and underscores their role in making a positive impact on patients' lives. Similarly, Franco et al. (2021) emphasize that despite the challenges, hospital work provides profound personal fulfillment and contributes to social integration, reflecting the rewarding nature of nursing and the joy derived from promoting health and well-being in others.

DISCUSSION

The following are the results of participants' statements regarding their experiences caring for terminally ill patients. The findings are presented in Figure 1, which outlines three main theme clusters along with their respective sub-themes.

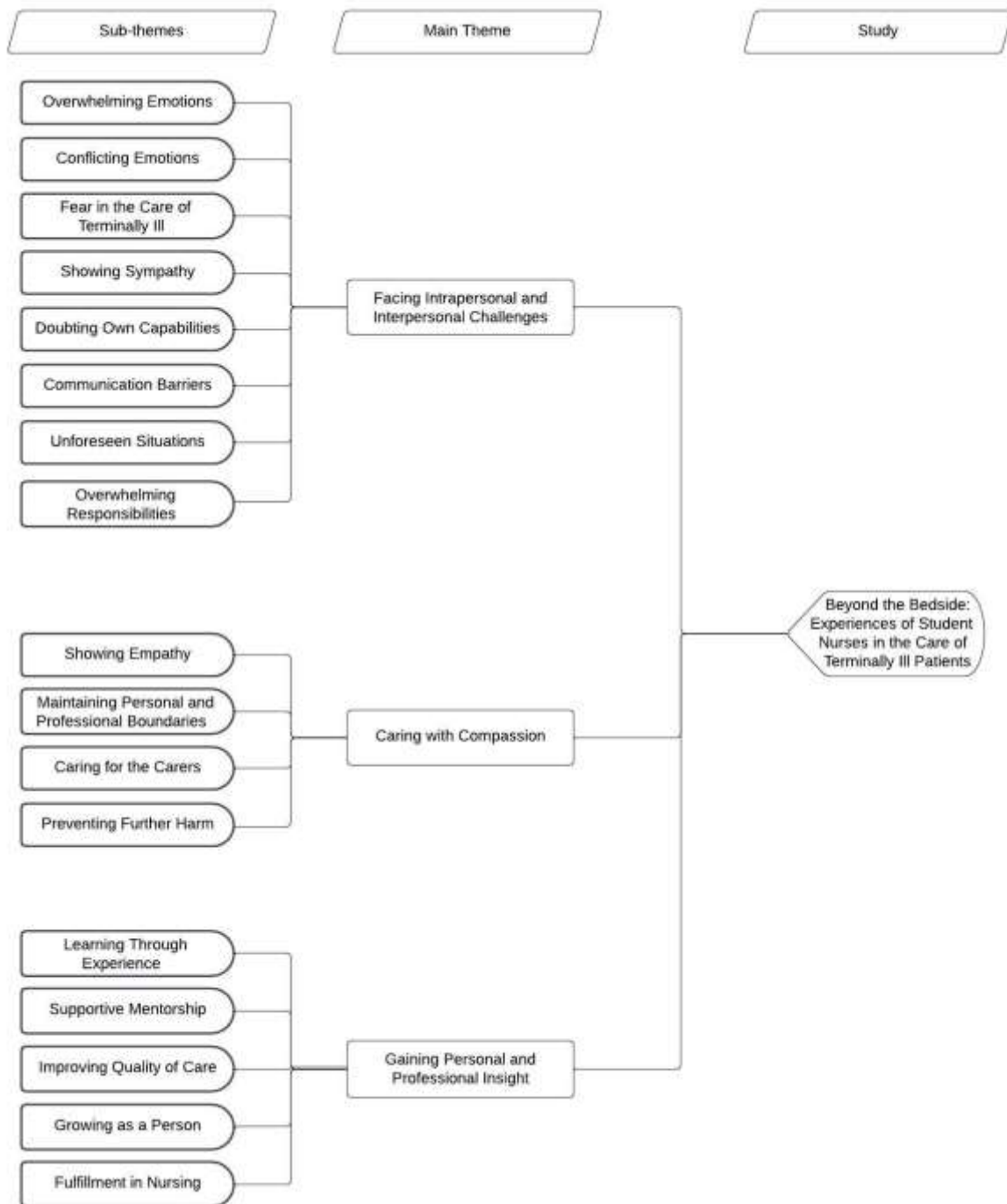


Figure 1. Beyond the Bedside: Experiences of Student Nurses in the Care of Terminally Ill Patients

The study revealed that student nurses caring for terminally ill patients face major intrapersonal and interpersonal challenges or Major Theme 1 comprising eight sub-themes. These sub-themes include overwhelming emotions, where nurses experience a range of powerful feelings such as sadness, grief, and frustration that can be difficult to manage. Conflicting emotions arise as they balance professional duties with personal emotional responses. Fear in the care of terminally ill patients is prevalent due to the uncertainty and gravity of end-of-life care. Despite this fear, showing sympathy is common, as nurses strive to provide comfort and support to their patients. Many student nurses doubt their capabilities, feeling unprepared for the complexities of terminal care, which can hinder effective communication. Communication barriers further complicate their roles, sometimes due to language differences or the sensitive nature of necessary conversations. They also face unforeseen situations that add to their significant responsibilities, requiring quick thinking and adaptability. Lastly, the overwhelming responsibilities associated with terminal care test their abilities to manage multiple demanding tasks simultaneously.

In terms of Major Theme 2: Caring with Compassion, student nurses strive to show empathy while maintaining personal and professional boundaries. They also face the challenge of ensuring their well-being and preventing harm to patients. Support systems and self-care practices are crucial for them to cope with the emotional toll of their work.

The experience of caring for terminally ill patients also offers substantial opportunities for personal and professional growth or the Major Theme 3. Student nurses gain practical skills, emotional resilience, and insights into best practices. Mentorship plays a vital role in their development. Despite the challenges, many find a deep sense of fulfillment and purpose in their work, reinforcing their commitment to the nursing profession.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Engaging in patient care prompts student nurses to consider their own well-being and lifestyle choices. They recognize the importance of maintaining their health and adopting healthy habits to sustain their resilience in the healthcare environment. Additionally, student nurses develop empathy and give support not only to patients but also to their caregivers and fellow healthcare professionals. They also receive support, including from clinical instructors, staff nurses, and other healthcare professionals, for which they are very thankful. This support has not only enhanced their skills and competence but also provided emotional reinforcement, enabling them to navigate through challenging situations with greater resilience. Moreover, they gain insights into the challenges faced by those involved in patient care and strive to provide support wherever possible. They learn how to relieve stress and emotional fatigue, enhancing their overall well-being and effectiveness as healthcare providers. These experiences lead to personal and professional growth and self-reflection, inspiring them as student nurses to pursue meaningful goals aligned with their values. Overall, their experiences enhance their skills, competence, adaptability, and emotional resilience through personal and

professional growth, while also highlighting the need for nursing educational institutions to incorporate improved support systems and specialized training programs to better equip student nurses with the unforeseen situations that come along with real-life care of the terminally ill.

Recommendations include improving educational support with specialized training and curriculum integration for terminal care. Research should focus on evidence-based interventions and longitudinal studies to understand long-term impacts. In practice, creating supportive environments and fostering teamwork among healthcare professionals is crucial for effective patient care and student nurse development.

IMPLICATIONS

This study significantly enhances nursing practice by integrating student nurses' real-life experiences into caring for terminally ill patients, thereby promoting more compassionate and effective care. It also informs nursing education by guiding the development of a curriculum that better prepares students for the complexities of end-of-life care, fostering empathy and resilience. Furthermore, it identifies crucial research areas, such as the psychological impact on student nurses, prompting further studies to improve support systems and interventions in terminal care. Overall, the study contributes to advancing both practical care and educational strategies in the field of terminal patient management.

DECLARATION

Conflict of Interest

No conflicts of interest exist between the authors that might be deemed significant to the article's content.

Informed Consent

Informed consent was obtained from all participants involved in the study.

Ethics Approval

Approval to conduct the study was obtained.

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Author's Biography

Maria Tessalonika B. Cansino is a dedicated nursing student and soon-to-be graduate, deeply passionate about the intersection of clinical practice and research. With a strong commitment to improving patient outcomes, she strives to enhance nursing care through evidence-based solutions that address real-world challenges. Her journey in nursing has been shaped by a deep respect for the profession, and she is eager to contribute to the field by advancing practices that improve the quality of care and patient experiences. As an aspiring nurse researcher, Maria Tessalonika is determined to publish impactful work that bridges the gap between theory and practice in healthcare. With a heart for service and a lifelong commitment to learning, she is excited to continue her nursing journey and make a meaningful difference in the lives of patients and the profession.

Angely Elaine Acosta is a dedicated student nurse committed to delivering patient-centered care with empathy, integrity, and professionalism. Guided by her passion for nursing, she strives to enhance the quality of life for terminally ill patients through holistic and compassionate approaches. With a proactive mindset and focus on excellence, Angely embraces challenges, refines her skills, and advocates for her patients' well-being. She embodies the values of commitment and care, inspiring her peers through her leadership and determination to make a lasting impact on the nursing profession.

Eliezer Ever N. Basatan is the kind of student just about to finish school and enter the field of nursing. With an inclination toward compassionate and holistic care, he continues to develop his clinical skills and enhance his learning about patient care. Blessed with the entourage of virtues such as justice, love, and pakikipagkapwa, these are dynamics within which he dreams of embodying these values as a nurse someday. He is inspired by what faith and family can achieve; and the impact it can make on the lives of patients and ultimately into the industry of healthcare.

Charlie Faith Dilangsoy is a compassionate student nurse who believes she can make people's lives better. She is a bright student who strives for big things and is motivated by a desire to help others. A lasting positive impression is always remembered by her, and anything outside of academics is equally appreciated. She has embarked on a quest for both self-improvement and community involvement. Her mission is clear: she wants to inspire others with her motivational speech and fortitude. Charlie also aspires to be a memorable name in the history of health care.

Arvin Jaymes Fajardo is a driven student nurse dedicated to providing compassionate, patient-centered care while promoting health and wellness. With a commitment to lifelong learning, Arvin integrates evidence-based practices to enhance patient outcomes and professional growth. Beyond nursing, he values collaboration and strives to make a positive impact in his community.

Erycalein Gutierrez is a persevering student nurse who consistently strives to overcome challenges with unwavering determination. Her compassionate nature shines through in her genuine care for others, as she prioritizes empathy and understanding in every interaction. Eager to acquire new knowledge, she approaches learning and professional growth with enthusiasm and proactivity. With a kind-hearted disposition, she fosters meaningful connections and positively influences those around her. Deeply committed to patient-centered care, she ensures that the needs, preferences, and dignity of her patients remain at the core of her practice. She upholds the highest standards of professionalism, embodying the values and qualities of an exemplary nursing professional.

Rezel Ann Ligot is a dedicated student nurse-driven by a passion for delivering high-quality, patient-centered care. Guided by the values of compassion, commitment, excellence, and faith, she is devoted to continuous personal and professional growth. Rezel strives to serve with integrity, aiming to make a meaningful impact in healthcare while inspiring others through her dedication and example.

Angelo James Molano is a devoted student nurse-driven by a passion for delivering high-quality, patient-centered care. Guided by the core values of compassion, commitment, excellence, and integrity, he is dedicated to continuous personal and professional growth. Angelo aspires to serve with unwavering dedication, aiming to make a meaningful difference in the healthcare field while inspiring others through his perseverance, faith, and exemplary service.

Yvonne Nicole Peduca is a passionate student nurse dedicated to making a difference in the lives of her patients. She prioritizes learning and applying innovative approaches to enhance her skills and improve patient outcomes. With a strong sense of responsibility, she is driven to uphold the values of empathy, professionalism, and excellence in nursing practice. She envisions a future where she can contribute to shaping innovative healthcare solutions through commitment and expertise.

Klariz Gayl S. Sardido is a driven and devoted nursing student who is deeply committed to providing compassionate, patient-centered care with integrity and professionalism. She focuses on improving the quality of life for terminally ill patients through holistic, empathetic care. With a proactive attitude and a commitment to excellence, Klariz approaches each challenge as an opportunity to grow and refine her skills. She views nursing as a profession that goes beyond patient care, recognizing the importance of advocacy, education, and leadership in driving meaningful improvements in healthcare.

Kyle Ivy Villacentino is a dedicated student nurse dedicated to delivering holistic and compassionate patient-centered care. Driven by a strong commitment to the field of nursing, she upholds compassion and professionalism in providing care. With a commitment to life-long learning and personal development, she embraces challenges as opportunities for growth as she continues to hone her clinical skills. Kyle aims to make a

meaningful difference in the lives of those she serves. She believes that the field of nursing extends beyond the bedside, encompassing advocacy, education, and leadership to create meaningful changes in healthcare.

Ms. Rosario Agnes M. Basat is a former Clinical Instructor from Saint Louis University in Baguio City, Philippines, where she dedicated 19 years to teaching and clinical nursing duties. A graduate of Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) and a Master of Science in Nursing (MSN), she specialized in psychiatric nursing and was deeply involved in teaching psychiatric courses. Her clinical responsibilities included supervising nursing students in various healthcare settings, while also imparting her expertise in mental health to shape future professionals. Known for her compassionate approach, Ms. Rosario Agnes effectively combined theoretical learning with hands-on clinical experience, particularly in the psychiatric field. Even after retirement, she remains a respected figure for her contributions to both nursing education and mental health care.

Mr. Ronald Paul C. Valera is a Clinical Instructor in Nursing at Saint Louis University in Baguio City, Philippines, where he has taught and supervised clinical duties since 2007. A graduate of Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN), he later earned a Master of Public Health (MPH), expanding his expertise in healthcare and public health education. Passionate about nurturing future healthcare professionals, he integrates hands-on clinical experience with academic learning. Mr. Ronald Paul is known for his patient-centered approach to teaching and his commitment to continuous professional development. His dedication to both nursing and public health education has earned him respect within the academic and healthcare communities.