

Interculturality as a foundation for therapeutic nursing communication

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ABSTRACT

Objective: To explain the importance of therapeutic communication in nursing professionals with patients from different cultural backgrounds. **Materials and methods:** Literature review study. Bibliographic sources were searched in the meta-search engines PubMed, SciELO, Refseek, Dialnet and Google Scholar, in Spanish and English. Selection criteria included review articles, original articles, theses, books and web pages, published between 2019 and 2024, were considered to finally select 40 sources. **Results:** The findings were organized into three thematic areas: i) importance of intercultural competence in nursing professionals; ii) strategies to improve intercultural communication; and iii) challenges and barriers in intercultural communication. **Conclusion:** From an intercultural perspective, therapeutic communication between nurses and patients is fundamental, although it is frequently ignored by health professionals. Understanding the patient's cultural context improves the relationship and allows the patient's needs to be identified, contributing to a more effective recovery.

Keywords: interculturality; therapeutic communication; nursing.

INTRODUCTION

The goal of the nursing profession is focused on the humanized care of individuals, families and communities. Therefore, it is important to understand the cultural differences that arise during health care, a concept addressed by Madeleine Leininger's transcultural nursing theory (1). Nursing professionals require therapeutic communication to provide effective care (2). This is an essential process that involves not only being a good communicator, but also actively observing and listening in order to reflect appropriately. In this way, the professional can communicate clearly and comprehensibly, promoting the patient's recovery (3).

In the theory of interpersonal relations, Hildegard Peplau emphasizes that nursing professionals must develop effective communication with their patients, allowing them to focus on the patients' perceptions and needs during care. This approach facilitates the identification and improvement of weaknesses in healthcare (4).

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Globally, it is estimated that there are around 28 million nursing professionals, 30% of whom work in the Americas. However, the exact number of nursing professionals trained to provide culturally competent care remains unknown (5). Interculturality in healthcare is a developing concept that requires openness toward the acceptance of other cultures, so that professionals feel encouraged to consider their relationship with others and the health practices associated with these interactions (6).

Peru stands out as one of the countries with the greatest ethnic diversity. This cultural richness can pose a disadvantage in the healthcare field due to factors such as illiteracy and language barriers (7), which hinder effective therapeutic communication. Therefore, culturally congruent care involves understanding values, beliefs, practices, meanings and symbols. From a cultural perspective, this is relevant for individuals as they will receive individualized, sensitive and appropriate care based on their context and health status (1).

Therapeutic communication promotes comfort and pain relief, not only for ethical and humanitarian reasons, but also due to its proven impact on the patient's physical, social and mental well-being (2). However, this goal of care is disrupted in national settings. This is evidenced by a study on transcultural care conducted at Hospital de Ferreñafe, which indicates that language and cultural background act as barriers to communication, often requiring an interpreter to facilitate transcultural care (7). In light of these circumstances, the following question arises: Is interculturality important in therapeutic communication between nurses and patients? As healthcare professionals, we must educate ourselves to contribute to society, and research plays a crucial role in achieving this. Therefore, the objective of this study was to explain the importance of therapeutic communication between nursing professionals and patients from different cultural backgrounds.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The type of review conducted for this article corresponds to a bibliographic review, characterized by a documentary analysis to select existing information on the topic (8) of interculturality in therapeutic communication between nursing professionals and patients. The articulation of all this content was developed between August and October 2024. The PICO strategy was used. It defines the population, indicator, comparison and outcomes (9),

thus obtaining the following format for our research question: (P) nursing professional and patient, (I) therapeutic communication, (C) interculturality, (O) importance of interculturality.

Table 1. Search strategies in databases.

Database	Search strategy
PubMed	([interculturality] AND [nurse]); ([interculturality] AND [communication])
SciELO	([comunicación terapéutica] AND [interculturalidad] AND [enfermería])
Refseek	([enfermería] AND [interculturalidad]); ([comunicación terapéutica] AND [interculturalidad])
Dialnet	([comunicación terapéutica] AND [interculturalidad]); ([enfermería] AND [interculturalidad])
Google Scholar	([interculturalidad en enfermería] AND [comunicación terapéutica])

The revised literature was chosen with the following selection criteria: publications from the last five years, the languages considered (Spanish and English), and the types of documents (articles, theses, books and web pages).

DEVELOPMENT AND DISCUSSION

Importance of intercultural competence in nursing professionals

Interculturality can be defined as the bond of respect and recognition that exists within society, which is established in relation to various factors such as culture, language, religion, nationality, and ethnicity (10). In the field of nursing, interculturality involves promoting interaction, reflection and empathy through coexistence with individuals from different cultures (11). Apart from that, it advocates for mutual respect to enable harmonious coexistence, thereby preventing any form of discrimination. This recognition of cultural and ethnic diversity fosters a deeper and more enriching understanding of the differences that define us (12).

The interaction between the nurse and the patient begins with the first meeting, where both verbal and non-verbal communication are established (13). Therapeutic communication is developed through a conversation that facilitates the understanding of key aspects that go beyond the biophysical and

pharmacological aspect, exploring the experiences that the person has had during their stay in the hospital and considering how they perceive these experiences, whether positive or negative (14).

Intercultural therapeutic communication in nursing professionals is important because it facilitates interaction with culturally diverse groups. This promotes attitudes of respect, tolerance, dialog and mutual enrichment, which in turn contributes to providing humanized care with high-quality attention (15), positively impacting the patient's recovery and promoting their well-being (16). Through this interaction, the nursing professional can better identify and understand the patient (17). It is crucial to remember that, through communication, individuals can express who they are, establish connections, and meet some of their needs (18). By maintaining constant and direct contact with the patient, the nursing professional can ensure clearer, simpler and more personalized communication. This relationship must be characterized by being optimal, empathetic, authentic, appropriate and assertive (19).

Strategies to improve intercultural communication

Therapeutic communication across cultures plays a crucial role in how healthcare professionals and patients perceive health, disease, treatment outcomes, and the care received (20). Each individual, based on their cultural heritage, develops a unique perspective that guides their decisions, which are often based on subjective beliefs about what they consider right. The encounter of cultures between the nursing professional and the patient generates internal tensions that affect the quality of care. In this regard, the professional must show a genuine sensitivity toward the patient's culture, as well as adapt to their way of thinking and their basic needs to achieve positive outcomes in the recovery process (20-25).

Madeline Leininger, in her theory of transcultural nursing, emphasizes the importance of training nursing professionals with a solid knowledge of cultural diversity to ensure high-quality care for patients from different ethnic backgrounds (20, 21). For this reason, we propose that universities integrate into their curricula a course dedicated to cultural care, in which intercultural competence in health is integrated (22, 23). It is also expected that these institutions implement flexible and dynamic teaching methodologies that motivate students to learn about and understand the diverse cultures that surround each

individual. Clinical instructors, in their educating role, should guide students in understanding interculturality as a key pillar of therapeutic communication (23), thus promoting holistic nursing care that effectively addresses patients' needs.

The creation of a healthcare workforce that is multicultural and multilingual, with cultural experience and intercultural communication skills within healthcare institutions, is an effective strategy to enhance therapeutic communication between healthcare personnel and culturally diverse patients during their hospitalization (24). This approach will help in the patients' recovery process by enabling a better understanding of their needs according to their cultural background. Public concern about health has led patients to become more involved in improving the relationship with healthcare personnel (25), providing meaningful suggestions to ensure that more individuals are healthy, well cared for, and satisfied when their culture and customs are respected by the medical staff. Among these suggestions, the importance of maintaining relationships based on mutual respect and fostering two-way communication is emphasized (26, 27).

Implementing training programs in transcultural communication for nursing staff is essential to strengthen the therapeutic relationship between nurses and patients. Professionals must understand their own culture to accept and value the cultural diversity of their patients, fostering attitudes of respect, sensitivity, impartiality, honesty, tolerance, and a positive attitude in care (20). These training sessions can be developed using digital platforms such as Zoom, which will facilitate the participation of nurses from different locations (28). In Argentina, to facilitate communication between patients and healthcare professionals, cell phone translation applications were used (29). However, this approach reduced the quality of patient care and increased discrimination based on ethnic differences (30). Therefore, implementing this program will demonstrate to patients that understanding and respecting their culture is very important for healthcare personnel.

Challenges and barriers in intercultural communication

In an increasingly globalized and diverse society, establishing effective communication among individuals from different cultures is essential (24). However, there are barriers that hinder successful intercultural communication (31). Language, one

of the barriers, is a central and evident element of communication, but it can also be one of the most challenging obstacles (32). Each language has its own rules, structures, idioms and expressions that complicate translation and understanding. Even among speakers of the same language, variations in accents, dialects or terminology can lead to confusion or misunderstandings (24). Cultural differences are a broad concept that encompasses various aspects of human behavior, values, norms and beliefs. To overcome these differences, it is essential to be aware of one's own cultural assumptions and prejudices, as well as those of the other culture. In addition, it is essential to show respect, curiosity and an open attitude toward the other culture, avoiding stereotypes or judgments. Getting informed beforehand about the history, customs, values, and preferences of the other culture can also be useful before entering (33).

Stereotypes are generalized and simplified perceptions or ideas about a group of people, often based on incorrect or incomplete information (34). Prejudices, on the other hand, are negative attitudes or feelings toward a group, typically based on stereotypes or unfounded fears. Both stereotypes and prejudices can hinder intercultural communication by generating distrust, hostility or resentment (35). Moreover, they will prevent the recognition of individuality and diversity within a group. To overcome these obstacles, it is essential to question one's own beliefs and assumptions about the other culture, seeking accurate and reliable information. It is also important to interact personally with people from other cultures, and hear their stories, experiences and perspectives, which fosters empathy and greater appreciation (24).

The debate on interculturality is strongly marked by racism due to the existence of ethnic and cultural discrimination (36). Discrimination in these cases arises from unrecognized or even rejected cultural influences, which are undervalued when projected onto people who represent them. Therefore, an important approach to work on is the recognition in oneself of the diverse cultural influences we have inherited (37). Cultural inequality refers to differences in participation, production, and decision-making that are systematically linked to certain factors and social dynamics, generating a situation perceived as unfair (38). These inequalities are also relevant to understanding why our societies are unequally structured, as they influence the distribution of power and government (39).

CONCLUSIONS

Therapeutic communication between nurses and patients from an intercultural perspective is fundamental, although often ignored by healthcare professionals. Understanding the patient's cultural context enhances the relationship and allows for the identification of their needs, contributing to a more effective recovery. However, there are various barriers, such as racism, stereotypes and language problems, that hinder quality care. To overcome these limitations, it is necessary to implement strategies that improve intercultural communication, such as including cultural care courses in nursing curricula. At the same time, forming teams with experience in intercultural communication skills within healthcare institutions can help professionals provide humanized care to patients from diverse cultures.

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LCG: conceptualization, formal analysis, research, methodology, validation, visualization, writing of the original draft, writing - review & editing.

LCP: conceptualization, formal analysis, research, methodology, project management, validation, visualization, writing of original draft, writing - review & editing.

KPCG: conceptualization, data curation, formal analysis, research, methodology, validation, visualization, writing of original draft, writing - review & editing.

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