
Culturally Responsive Nursing in the Middle East (UAE): Exploring the Level of Communication and Emotional Well-Being Through Holistic Care

Brandy Buguina Caronan

<https://orcid.or//0009-0008-3585-5056>

St. Bernadette of Lourdes College,

bcaronan@sblc.edu.ph

ABSTRACT

This qualitative study was conducted in multicultural urgent care clinics in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, to explore how culturally responsive nursing practices influence nurse–patient communication and emotional well-being through holistic care. The study revealed meaningful improvements in patient trust, comfort, and emotional security when nurses practiced culturally sensitive communication. Nurses used simple and clear language, active listening, empathy, and respectful nonverbal behaviors to foster understanding. The use of interpreters, translation tools, visual aids, and teach-back methods helped overcome language barriers. Patients reported that holistic care addressing emotional, cultural, spiritual, and physical needs enhanced their sense of safety and well-being. Respect for cultural and religious practices, such as prayer and fasting, strengthened nurse–patient relationships. Despite positive outcomes, challenges related to language differences and cultural misunderstandings persisted. Overall, culturally responsive communication and holistic nursing care were found to be vital in promoting emotional well-being in multicultural healthcare settings.

Keywords: - Culturally responsive nursing, holistic care, communication, emotional well-being, multicultural healthcare

INTRODUCTION

In today's globalized healthcare environment, nurses are increasingly caring for patients from diverse cultural, linguistic, and religious backgrounds. The United Arab Emirates (UAE), in particular, is home to one of the most diverse healthcare settings in the world, with healthcare professionals and patients from various nationalities. In such settings, culturally responsive nursing has become an essential component of safe, high-quality, and compassionate care. Nurses serve not only as caregivers but also as primary communicators who bridge patients with the healthcare system, making effective communication vital to patient trust and emotional well-being.

Culturally responsive nursing emphasizes respect for patients' cultural values, beliefs, and practices while delivering holistic care that addresses physical, emotional, social, and spiritual needs. However, differences in language, communication styles, cultural norms, and health beliefs often pose challenges that may lead to misunderstandings, emotional distress, and reduced patient satisfaction. While previous studies have examined cultural competence,

communication, or holistic care separately, limited research has explored how these elements interact to influence emotional well-being in the UAE context.

This study seeks to address this gap by exploring the lived experiences of nurses and patients in multicultural urgent care settings in Abu Dhabi. Specifically, it examines how culturally responsive communication and holistic nursing care contribute to patients' emotional comfort, trust, and well-being, while identifying challenges and effective strategies to support culturally safe nursing practice.

From my professional experience as a registered nurse working in a highly multicultural healthcare environment in Abu Dhabi, I was motivated to conduct this study. It highlighted the complexities of communication and the importance of emotional sensitivity in urgent care settings, with daily clinical encounters involving diverse patients in terms of culture and language. It has inspired the researcher to explore these experiences systematically with observations of improved patient trust, cooperation, and emotional comfort when culturally responsive communication was practiced. This study was therefore undertaken to understand how culturally responsive nursing practices influence communication and emotional wellbeing, with the aim of contributing evidence to enhance holistic and culturally safe nursing practice in the UAE.

Statement of the Problem

The study explored how culturally responsive nursing practices in the Middle East (UAE) influence nurse-patient communication and enhance emotional wellbeing, with the aim of nurturing a more empathetic and inclusive healthcare environment for diverse patient populations.

Theoretical Framework

This study is congruent with Leininger's Culture Care Diversity and Universality Theory, which emphasizes providing care that aligns with patients' cultural values and beliefs. It is supported by Watson's Theory of Human Caring, highlighting empathy and compassion in nursing practice, and Peplau's Interpersonal Relations Theory, which explains the role of therapeutic communication in promoting emotional well-being. These theories guided the interpretation of nurses' communication practices and patients' emotional experiences.

METHODOLOGY

This study examined culturally responsive nursing practices and their influence on nurse-patient communication and emotional well-being in multicultural urgent care settings in the UAE. A qualitative descriptive design was employed. Semi-structured online interviews via Google Forms were conducted with 9 nurses and 9 **patients**. Data were analyzed using **thematic analysis**

Research Design

A qualitative descriptive research design was employed to explore the lived experiences of nurses and patients regarding culturally responsive communication and holistic care. This method allowed for rich descriptions grounded in participants' viewpoints in real clinical settings.

Research Steps

The study began with a review of existing literature, followed by the development of a semi-structured online interview through Google Forms, aligned with the research objectives. Ethical approval was secured before data collection. Interviews were conducted, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed systematically to identify themes related to communication, holistic care, and emotional well-being.

Data Collection and Sample Selection

Purposive sampling was used to select nine (9) nurses and nine (9) patients from Oil and Gas Urgent Care Clinics in Abu Dhabi. Semi-structured interviews through Google Link lasting 05-10 minutes were conducted with consent. Interviews focused on communication strategies, cultural sensitivity, and emotional experiences of care

Data Analysis Methods

Data were analyzed using **Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis**. Transcripts were coded, categorized, and reviewed to identify recurring themes. Credibility and trustworthiness were ensured through careful cross-checking and consistent theme verification.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical protocols were strictly observed, including informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality, voluntary participation, and compliance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that culturally responsive communication and holistic nursing care play a crucial role in enhancing patients' emotional well-being in multicultural healthcare environments. Nurses demonstrated cultural sensitivity by using simple, clear language, avoiding medical jargon, practicing active listening, and maintaining respectful nonverbal behaviors, such as appropriate eye contact and body language. These strategies helped establish understanding and foster trust between nurses and patients.

To overcome language barriers, nurses frequently utilized professional interpreters, translation tools, visual aids, and teach-back methods. These approaches ensured patient comprehension and reduced anxiety, particularly among patients with limited English proficiency. Patients expressed that being understood and included in communication made them feel safe, respected, and emotionally supported.

Holistic care emerged as a central factor in emotional well-being. Patients reported positive emotional experiences when nurses addressed not only physical symptoms but also emotional

concerns, cultural preferences, and spiritual needs. Respect for religious practices such as prayer, fasting, and privacy significantly strengthened nurse–patient relationships and enhanced emotional comfort. Despite these positive practices, persistent challenges related to language differences and cultural misunderstandings remained, underscoring the need for ongoing development of cultural competence.

These findings align with established nursing theories that emphasize culturally congruent care, therapeutic communication, and emotional presence as foundations of effective nursing practice.

CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that culturally responsive communication and holistic nursing care significantly contribute to patients' emotional well-being in multicultural healthcare settings. Clear and respectful communication, empathy, active listening, and cultural sensitivity foster trust and reduce emotional distress among patients. Addressing patients' cultural and spiritual needs alongside physical care strengthens therapeutic relationships and enhances patient satisfaction.

The findings highlight that culturally responsive nursing is not optional but fundamental to quality healthcare in diverse settings such as the UAE. Nurses who integrate cultural awareness with holistic, patient-centered communication are better equipped to support emotional security, dignity, and meaningful engagement in care. Continued attention to cultural competence and communication practices is essential to improving patient outcomes in multicultural clinical environments.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that healthcare institutions strengthen cultural competence training for nurses, with a focus on communication skills, cultural sensitivity, and holistic care approaches. Hospitals should ensure access to professional interpreter services, visual communication aids, and standardized patient-centered strategies such as teach-back methods.

Healthcare administrators are encouraged to implement policies that support flexible, culturally respectful care while maintaining patient safety. The incorporation of emotional and spiritual support into routine nursing practice should be emphasized. Future research may explore culturally responsive nursing practices in other healthcare settings or examine intervention-based approaches to further enhance emotional well-being among diverse patient populations.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors extend their gratitude to all participants, colleagues, and families for their support in completing this study.

AI DECLARATION STATEMENT

AI tools were used only for grammar and formatting support. All data collection, analysis, and interpretation were conducted solely by the authors.

REFERENCES

- Alkhaibari, R. A., Smith-Merry, J., Forsyth, R., & Raymundo, G. M. (2023). Patient-centered care in the Middle East and North African region: a systematic literature review. *BMC Health Services Research*, 23(1), 135.
<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1186/s12913023-09132-0>
- Alkhamees, M., & Alasqah, I. (2023). Patient-physician communication in intercultural settings: An integrative review. *Heliyon*, 9(12).
[https://www.cell.com/heliyon/fulltext/S2405-8440\(23\)09875-4](https://www.cell.com/heliyon/fulltext/S2405-8440(23)09875-4)
- Al-Yateem, N., Hijazi, H., Saifan, A. R., Ahmad, A., Masa'Deh, R., Alrimawi, I., & Ahmed, F. R. (2023). Quality and safety issue: language barriers in healthcare, a qualitative study of non-Arab healthcare practitioners caring for Arabic patients in the UAE. *BMJ open*, 13(12), e076326. <https://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/13/12/e076326.abstract>
- Badanta, B., Rivilla-García, E., Lucchetti, G., & de Diego-Cordero, R. (2022). The influence of spirituality and religion on critical care nursing: An integrative review. *Nursing in Critical Care*, 27(3), 348-366.
<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/nicc.12645>
- Cai, D., He, W., & Klug, D. (2021). Cultural competence among nurses and its influencing factors: A cross-sectional study. *Nursing & health sciences*, 23(2), 411-418.
<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/nhs.12821>
- Cipta, D. A., Andoko, D., Theja, A., Utama, A. V. E., Hendrik, H., William, D. G., ... & Lumbuun, N. (2024). Culturally sensitive patient-centered healthcare: a focus on health behavior modification in low and middle-income nations—insights from Indonesia. *Frontiers in Medicine*, 11, 1353037.
<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fmed.2024.1353037/full>
- Dillard, V., Moss, J., Padgett, N., Tan, X., & Kennedy, A. B. (2021). Attitudes, beliefs and behaviors of religiosity, spirituality, and cultural competence in the medical profession: A cross-sectional survey study. *PLoS One*, 16(6), e0252750.
<https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0252750>
- Elam, K. (2023). Evaluation of the Effectiveness of a Cultural Competence Program Implemented as Standard Practice to Improve Nurses' Cultural Competency (Cultural

- Awareness, Cultural Knowledge, Cultural Skill), Improving Patient Care in a Community Hospital. <https://dsc.duq.edu/dnp/42/>
- Hussein, M. M. A. M. (2023). *An Integrative Model of Cultural Intelligence and Empathy for Intercultural Communication with Recent Immigrants in Healthcare Contexts* (Doctoral dissertation, Université d'Ottawa/University of Ottawa). https://ruor.uottawa.ca/bitstream/10393/45612/3/Hussein_Mariam_Mohamed_Ahmed_M_agdy_2023_thesis.pdf
- Kuzemski, D., Thirlwall, A., Brunton, M., & Brownie, S. (2022). I speak a little Arabic: Nursing communication in a cross-cultural context. *Journal of Clinical Nursing*, 31(1-2), 145-157. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/jocn.15891>
- Nashwan, A. J. (2023). Culturally competent care across borders: Implementing culturally responsive teaching for nurses in diverse workforces. *International Journal of Nursing Sciences*, 11(1), 155. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10859572/>
- Organi, Z. K., Nazarenia, M., & Aghaee, F. (2024). Understanding the Challenges of Language Barriers in Healthcare. *Interdisciplinary Studies in Society, Law, and Politics*, 3(3), 28-35. <http://193.36.85.187:8089/index.php/isslp/article/view/56>
- Thirlwall, A., Kuzemski, D., Baghestani, M., Brunton, M., & Brownie, S. (2021). 'Every day is a challenge': Expatriate acculturation in the United Arab Emirates. *International Journal of Cross Cultural Management*, 21(3), 430-451. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/14705958211039071>
- Vaismoradi, M., Fredriksen Moe, C., Ursin, G., & Ingstad, K. (2022). Looking through racism in the nurse–patient relationship from the lens of culturally congruent care: A scoping review. *Journal of advanced nursing*, 78(9), 2665-2677. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/jan.15267>
- 9(1), 11-25. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2352013221001216>
- World Health Organization. (2022). *Global competency and outcomes framework for universal health coverage*. World Health Organization. [https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=eXZyEAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PR5&dq=World+Health+Organization+\(WHO\),+promote+culturally+respectful+care+a+s+essential+to+health+equity+and+quality+outcomes&ots=HQxC07cfqm&sig=BBrrmCGY52myxmuUKMSGMiSvvGA](https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=eXZyEAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PR5&dq=World+Health+Organization+(WHO),+promote+culturally+respectful+care+a+s+essential+to+health+equity+and+quality+outcomes&ots=HQxC07cfqm&sig=BBrrmCGY52myxmuUKMSGMiSvvGA)