

Roles of nursing and healthcare educators in the management processes for sleep apnea and narcolepsy: Review

Hanin mohammed hassan sanani¹

Shahad numan abdulsamad qusty²

Dalal hussain almuwaled³

Fahad owid alsubhi⁴

Ali Mohammed Ali Sahli⁵

sahal samih alotibi⁶

Laila mousa Hassan Bakri⁷

Areej saleh alzahrani⁸

Maryam soulem Hammad Alhawiti⁹

Rashed Saleh Basha Alharthi¹⁰

Faisal Ghurmullah Rashed Alzahrani¹¹

BADR KHALAF M ALHASANI¹²

MOHAMMED ABDULLAH A AIQARNI¹³

Amjd Hasin Alsulami¹⁴

Mashear yaseen sawidi alsalami¹⁵

1. Nursing technician, Eradah & mental health complex
2. Nursing specialist, Eradah & mental health complex
3. Nurse, Aljamea primary health care
4. Nurse, Aljamea primary health care
5. Nurse, Health community in Makkah Executive Directorate of health care zima Health Center
6. nurse, Health community in Makkah Executive Directorate of health care zima Health Center
7. Technician Nursing and Midwif, Al ardha primary health care
8. Nurse, Jeddah first health cluster
9. Nursing technician, Medical Rehabilitation Hospital, Al madinah Al munwarah
10. Health Education Specialist, Alrashediya PHC
11. Health Education Specialist, MOH MAKKAH
12. Health Education Specialist, MOH MAKKAH
13. patient experience, health education
14. Health Education Specialist, King Abdulaziz hospital - Makkah
15. BSN , Alazizia children hospital

Abstract

Sleep apnea and narcolepsy are chronic sleep disorders with profound impacts on health, quality of life, and productivity. Sleep apnea, characterized by repeated interruptions in breathing during sleep, is associated with cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and cognitive impairment. Narcolepsy, a neurological disorder affecting sleep-wake regulation, causes excessive daytime sleepiness, cataplexy, and disrupted nighttime sleep. Effective management of these conditions necessitates a multidisciplinary approach where nurses and healthcare educators play pivotal roles. Nurses ensure the accurate diagnosis, treatment adherence, and management of associated conditions. They provide patient-centered care, education on lifestyle modifications, and emotional support to address the psychological burden of these disorders. Healthcare educators complement these efforts by enhancing patient and family understanding, promoting adherence to treatment regimens, and advocating for policy changes to improve access to care. This review explores the comprehensive roles of nurses and healthcare educators in managing sleep apnea and narcolepsy, emphasizing their contributions to treatment adherence, patient education, and overall care delivery. The review also highlights challenges, future directions, and the potential of innovative approaches such as telehealth and artificial intelligence to optimize care delivery.

Introduction

Sleep disorders affect millions of individuals worldwide, with sleep apnea and narcolepsy being two of the most common and debilitating conditions. According to the American Academy of Sleep Medicine (AASM), obstructive

sleep apnea (OSA) affects nearly 30 million adults in the United States alone, while narcolepsy, though less common, significantly impacts patients' physical, emotional, and social well-being [1,2]. Both conditions are underdiagnosed and undertreated, leading to significant public health implications.

Sleep apnea involves recurrent episodes of partial or complete obstruction of the airway during sleep, resulting in fragmented sleep and intermittent hypoxia. Left untreated, it is associated with increased risks of cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and neurocognitive dysfunction [3]. Narcolepsy, characterized by excessive daytime sleepiness (EDS), cataplexy (sudden loss of muscle tone), and sleep paralysis, is a lifelong condition that disrupts daily functioning and poses safety concerns, such as an increased risk of accidents [4].

Nurses and healthcare educators are integral to the management of these conditions. Nurses provide direct patient care, including support for diagnostic procedures, treatment initiation, and monitoring of therapy. Healthcare educators focus on empowering patients and caregivers with knowledge about these disorders, fostering adherence to treatment, and advocating for broader access to care. Together, these professionals play essential roles in addressing the medical, behavioral, and emotional aspects of sleep apnea and narcolepsy, contributing to improved outcomes and quality of life.

Review:

1. Role of Nursing in Managing Sleep Apnea and Narcolepsy

1.1 Sleep Apnea Management

1. Diagnosis and Screening

Nurses are crucial in identifying individuals at risk of sleep apnea, particularly in primary care settings, where they assess symptoms such as loud snoring, excessive daytime sleepiness, and observed apneas during sleep [5]. During polysomnography (PSG) or home sleep apnea testing (HSAT), nurses prepare patients by explaining the process, attaching monitoring equipment, and ensuring accurate data collection.

2. Treatment Initiation and CPAP Management

Continuous Positive Airway Pressure (CPAP) therapy is the gold standard treatment for obstructive sleep apnea (OSA). Nurses help patients adapt to CPAP devices by [6]: Conducting mask fittings to ensure comfort and minimize air leaks. Teaching proper usage and cleaning of CPAP equipment. Addressing common barriers to adherence, such as discomfort, claustrophobia, or perceived inconvenience.

3. Lifestyle Modification Counseling

Weight reduction, physical activity, and avoidance of alcohol and sedatives are critical in managing OSA. Nurses provide individualized guidance to patients on incorporating these changes into their daily lives [6].

4. Monitoring Comorbidities

Nurses monitor and manage conditions commonly associated with sleep apnea, including:

Cardiovascular diseases: Hypertension, atrial fibrillation, and heart failure.

Metabolic disorders: Type 2 diabetes and metabolic syndrome.

1.2 Narcolepsy Management

1. Symptom Assessment and Documentation

Nurses evaluate the frequency and severity of narcolepsy symptoms such as excessive daytime sleepiness (EDS), cataplexy, sleep paralysis, and disrupted nocturnal sleep. Detailed symptom tracking is crucial for tailoring treatment plans [7].

2. Medication Management

Nurses educate patients on the proper use of medications, including:

- **Stimulants (e.g., modafinil, armodafinil):** To manage daytime sleepiness.
- **Sodium oxybate:** For cataplexy and disrupted sleep.
- **SSRIs or SNRIs:** To reduce cataplexy episodes.
- They monitor for side effects, such as headache, nausea, or insomnia, and ensure adherence to prescribed regimens.

3. Sleep Hygiene Education

Nurses emphasize the importance of maintaining regular sleep-wake schedules and creating a conducive sleep environment (e.g., dark, quiet rooms). They educate patients about avoiding stimulants and heavy meals before bedtime [7].

4. Psychosocial Support

Nurses address the emotional and social challenges faced by patients with narcolepsy, such as stigmatization or difficulty maintaining employment. They provide access to resources like support groups or vocational counseling [7].

2. Role of Healthcare Educators in Managing Sleep Apnea and Narcolepsy [8,9]

2.1 Patient Education and Advocacy

1. Understanding the Disorders

Healthcare educators simplify complex medical information, helping patients and caregivers understand:

- The pathophysiology of sleep apnea and narcolepsy.
- Long-term complications if left untreated, such as cardiovascular risks in sleep apnea or safety concerns in narcolepsy (e.g., falling asleep while driving).

2. Training on Treatment Modalities

Educators provide hands-on training for:

Sleep Apnea: CPAP usage, maintenance, and troubleshooting common issues like nasal congestion or mask discomfort.

Narcolepsy: Managing medication schedules and recognizing side effects.

3. Adherence Promotion

Educators work with patients to overcome adherence barriers by, offering strategies to integrate CPAP use into nightly routines. Addressing fears about medication dependency or stigmatization.

2.2 Community Engagement and Policy Advocacy

1. Raising Awareness

Healthcare educators lead community programs to increase awareness about sleep disorders, highlighting symptoms and encouraging early evaluation. Workplace campaigns address the impact of narcolepsy and sleep apnea on productivity, promoting accommodations such as scheduled naps or flexible hours [8].

2. Professional Development

Educators train healthcare teams on recognizing and managing sleep disorders, emphasizing an interdisciplinary approach. They provide updates on advancements in diagnostic tools and treatments, ensuring that care practices remain evidence-based [9].

3. Advocating for Policy Reforms

- Healthcare educators advocate for:
 - Broader insurance coverage for CPAP devices, medications, and sleep studies.
 - Increased funding for sleep disorder research and community outreach programs.

3. Collaborative Efforts Between Nurses and Healthcare Educators [10,11]

3.1 Integrated Care Models

Collaborative care models involve shared responsibilities between nurses and educators, ensuring holistic patient management. Nurses focus on treatment implementation and symptom monitoring. Educators provide in-depth patient and family education, ensuring understanding and adherence.

3.2 Technology Integration

Both nurses and educators leverage technology to enhance care:

Telehealth: Enables remote CPAP adherence monitoring, medication consultations, and virtual education sessions.

Wearable Devices: Track sleep patterns and adherence to therapies, providing real-time data for personalized interventions.

3.3 Patient-Centered Care

Jointly, nurses and educators develop individualized care plans addressing, medical needs, such as symptom management and comorbidity prevention. Emotional and social challenges, ensuring patients feel supported and empowered.

Conclusion

The management of sleep apnea and narcolepsy is complex, requiring a multidisciplinary approach that integrates medical, behavioral, and educational interventions. Nurses and healthcare educators play complementary roles in addressing the multifaceted challenges posed by these chronic conditions. **Nurses** are instrumental in ensuring the successful implementation of diagnostic procedures and treatment plans. They educate patients on CPAP use, medications, and lifestyle changes while monitoring for complications and comorbidities. Their direct involvement in care delivery ensures adherence and early identification of issues that may hinder treatment success. **Healthcare educators** enhance the overall effectiveness of management by empowering patients and families with knowledge about these conditions. Their role extends to advocacy and awareness, fostering a better understanding of sleep

apnea and narcolepsy in both healthcare settings and the community. Educators also provide essential training to healthcare professionals, ensuring a cohesive and informed approach to patient care.

Collaboration between nurses and healthcare educators is essential in creating a patient-centered care framework. This partnership enables the development of tailored care plans that address medical needs, psychosocial challenges, and treatment barriers. The integration of innovative tools like telemedicine and wearable devices further enhances the ability to monitor and support patients remotely, expanding access to care for underserved populations. Despite advances in treatment and technology, challenges such as low adherence rates, limited access to diagnostic tools, and a lack of awareness persist. Addressing these challenges will require sustained efforts to expand telehealth, increase funding for research and community programs, and advocate for policy changes that support accessibility and affordability.

In conclusion, the roles of nurses and healthcare educators are indispensable in the management of sleep apnea and narcolepsy. By fostering collaboration, leveraging technology, and addressing barriers to care, these professionals contribute significantly to improving patient outcomes, enhancing quality of life, and reducing the broader societal burden of sleep disorders.

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