

The Role of Health Assistance in Enhancing Patient Care

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Abstract

Background

Health assistance plays a crucial role in improving the health outcome of patients and providing adequate care by helping them access high quality healthcare services so that both their health and care outcome can be improved. This paper has explored the role of health assistance in enhancing patient care.

Methods

This paper followed a mixed method study design which used a combination of primary surveys as quantitative methods and systematic literature review of articles as secondary qualitative methods.

Results

The results have shown that health assistance provision by health care assistants have positive correlation with improved patient care and experiences. It has also been found that provision of health assistance can be impacted due to a range of barriers such as lack of resources, peer support and administrative workload.

Conclusion

Health assistance plays a positive role in improving the patient experience as well as the care process by improving patients' access to healthcare services and it is mainly the healthcare assistance who offer high-quality healthcare assistance to patients.

Introduction

Within the healthcare sector, health assistance plays an important role in improving patients' care by offering them the necessary support and access to medical professionals to help patients lead a better quality of life. A healthcare assistant ensures that the patients are provided with effective health assistance so that their care and needs can be met. A health assistant also known as a healthcare assistant is someone whose job is to help and care for people who are ill or disabled and are usually under care in a hospital or special home (1). One of the major roles of a health assistant is to ensure that the experience of the patients while receiving care and support is stress-free and comfortable (6). With the help of health assistance, healthcare professionals such as nurses and GPs, and healthcare assistants support patients with their daily living activities, monitoring their regular health status and communicating information to healthcare providers to provide all types of support to patients.

Health assistants are important members of the healthcare workforce and they are responsible for meeting the needs of the patient population by working with care teams across various social and healthcare settings by offering accurate and timely assistance (4). Health assistants within the healthcare sector are responsible for maintaining professional relationships through open communication, commitments to teamwork and rapport building with a goal of offering effective and patient-centred care (4). However, despite the significant contribution of healthcare assistants within the healthcare setting often they are unrecognised and undervalued in terms of enhancing patient care.

This present paper explores the various roles which health assistance plays in enhancing patient care and the barriers which prevent the role of healthcare assistants in fulfilling their role of enhancing patient care.

Methodology

Study Design

The study design is based on a mixed method study where both surveys and systematic literature review have been used which allows the use of both qualitative and quantitative research to draw findings on the research topics. A mixed method research is one which uses both qualitative and

quantitative research methods to draw findings to meet research objectives (11). As part of this study design, a close-ended survey and systematic review of primary literature have been carried out.

Participants and Sampling

The sampling of the participant for the survey has been purposive in nature which helps in identifying the most suitable sample population for this research. The main reason behind purposive sampling is that it helps researchers to identify a sample which best matches the research aims and objectives thereby improving the trustworthiness and rigour of the data (2). Based on this a sample population of 20 healthcare assistants in the UK has been chosen for the survey who have been identified from GP clinics (30%), hospitals (50%) and care homes (20%). The eligibility criteria for the participants are as follows:

1. A minimum experience of 3 years
2. Directly involved with assisting patients and working alongside healthcare professionals.

Data Collection

1. Literature Review: For the purpose of a systematic literature review the data has been collected from databases such as PubMed, ScienceDirect and Scopus between 2019 to 2024. The keywords for the search have been formed using Boolean operators like “AND”, and “OR”. The keywords are as follows:

“Healthcare assistance” AND “Patient care”, “Patient care” AND “Healthcare assistant” AND “Challenges”.

The following inclusion and exclusion criteria have been followed and a total of 4 primary research articles have been chosen:

Inclusion criteria:

- Articles between 2019 to 2024 have been chosen to include the recent information.
- Only primary and peer-reviewed research articles have been included to improve research rigour.
- Only Freely available full-text articles have been included for full analysis.

Exclusion criteria:

- Articles with only abstracts available have been excluded.
- Travels available in a language other than English have been excluded to avoid misinterpretation.

2. Survey

A survey of 20 healthcare assistants in the UK has been carried out which involves the following questions for better understanding of the role of health assistance in enhancing patient care:

1. Which age groups do you belong to?
2. How many years of experience do you have in this field?
3. How important do you think health assistance is for enhancing patient care?
4. To what extent do you agree that health assistance can positively impact the overall health care experience?
5. Do you agree that clear communication with health assistants can effectively improve the provision of health assistance to enhance patients' care?
6. Do you agree that lack of resources and poor recognition act as a barrier to enhancing patient care by healthcare assistants?

Data Analysis

The data for the survey has been analysed using descriptive statistics (SPSS) and data from the systematic literature review has been analysed using thematic analysis. SPSS is statistics software used for analysing qualitative studies to identify factors such as standard deviation, correlation, p values and heterogeneity in data (9). This software has made it convenient to determine the correlation between the dependent and independent variables of this research. The principles of thematic analysis lie in coding data, searching for them, refining the themes and reporting the findings and is mainly used for analysing qualitative data (5). This is an ideal method which helps in identifying common themes within research carried out by different researchers and then interpreting the inherent meaning within them.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for the Institutional Review Board has been taken, along with this informed consent form for each of the survey participants have also been taken. Data of the participants have been

stored in an encrypted folder to ensure privacy and confidentiality of data. To further ensure the integrity of this research data manipulation in any form has been avoided at all costs.

Results

Demographic characteristics

The study involves a total of 20 healthcare assistants in the UK who took part in the survey, for analysing the survey data correlational analysis and descriptive statistics have been carried out the results have been the following. The Likert scale for the demographic question indicates 1 for the youngest age groups and 4 for the oldest age groups. Similarly, for the experience of the participants, 1 indicated the lowest experience range while 4 indicated the highest experience range.

1. Which age groups do you belong to?		2. How many years of experience do you have in this field?	
Mean	1.9	Mean	2.35
Standard Error	0.23952	Standard Error	0.26433
Median	1.5	Median	2.5
Mode	1	Mode	1
Standard Deviation	1.07115	Standard Deviation	1.1821
Sample Variance	1.14737	Sample Variance	1.39737
Kurtosis	-0.7234	Kurtosis	-1.5409
Skewness	0.78797	Skewness	0.08019
Range	3	Range	3

Minimum	1	Minimum	1
Maximum	4	Maximum	4
Sum	38	Sum	47
Count	20	Count	20
Confidence Level(95.0%)	0.50131	Confidence Level(95.0%)	0.55324

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

(Source: Self-developed)

From above Table 1, it can be seen that the mean age of participants who took part in the survey is 1.9 which is 20 to 25 years of age. In addition to this, it can also be seen that the participants who took part in the survey had an average experience of 2.35 years which is between 6 to 15 years of age. In addition, the survey findings have also indicated the median value to be at 1.5 which shows that at least half of the participants belong to the youngest age groups. The standard deviation for the age groups is at 1.07 which indicates that there is moderate levels of variability between the age groups of participants as most of them are clustered around the participants belonging to younger age groups that are 20 to 25 years. The key observation and analysis which can be drawn from the above data is that the majority of participants who took part in the research belong to the young age groups of 20 to 25 years whilst their experiences vary. The following table can be used for understanding the experience levels of survey participants.

Years of experience	% Share
3 to 5 years	35%
6 to 10 years	15%
11 to 15 years	30%
More than 15 years	20%

Table 2: % share of experience which survey participants have with their work

(Source: Self-developed)

In addition to descriptive statistics, correlational analysis between the dependent and indeed variable have also been carried out. The correlational analysis is depicted in Table 3:

	3. How important do you think health assistance is for enhancing patient care?	4. To what extent do you agree that health assistance can positively impact overall health care experience?	5. Do you agree that clear communication with health assistants can effectively improve the provision of health assistance to enhance patients' care?	6. Do you agree that lack of resources and poor recognition act as a barrier to enhancing patient care by healthcare assistants?
3. How important do you think health assistance is for enhancing patient care?	1			
4. To what extent do you agree that health assistance can positively impact overall health care experience?	0.466679	1		

5. Do you agree that clear communication with health assistants can effectively improve the provision of health assistance to enhance patients' care?	0.471805	0.573861	1	
6. Do you agree that lack of resources and poor recognition act as a barrier to enhancing patient care by healthcare assistants?	0.446365	0.351401	0.596198	1

Table 3: Correlation analysis

(Source: Self-developed)

Statistical Highlights**The correlation between healthcare assistance and enhanced patient care**

From Table 3 it can be seen that the role of healthcare assistance in enhancing patient care and improving overall healthcare experiences is positively correlated with a correlation value of 0.466679. This indicates that health care assistance plays an important role in not only enhancing patients but at the same time playing an important role in improving the overall experience of patients with healthcare. It has also been found that the role of health assistants in improving patient care and engaging in clear communication by healthcare assistants to provide quality health assistance to patients are also positively correlated with a correlational value of 0.471805. The correlation value of 0.596198 also indicated that lack of resources and recognition of healthcare assistance actually impact the ability of healthcare assistance to effectively improve healthcare services for patients.

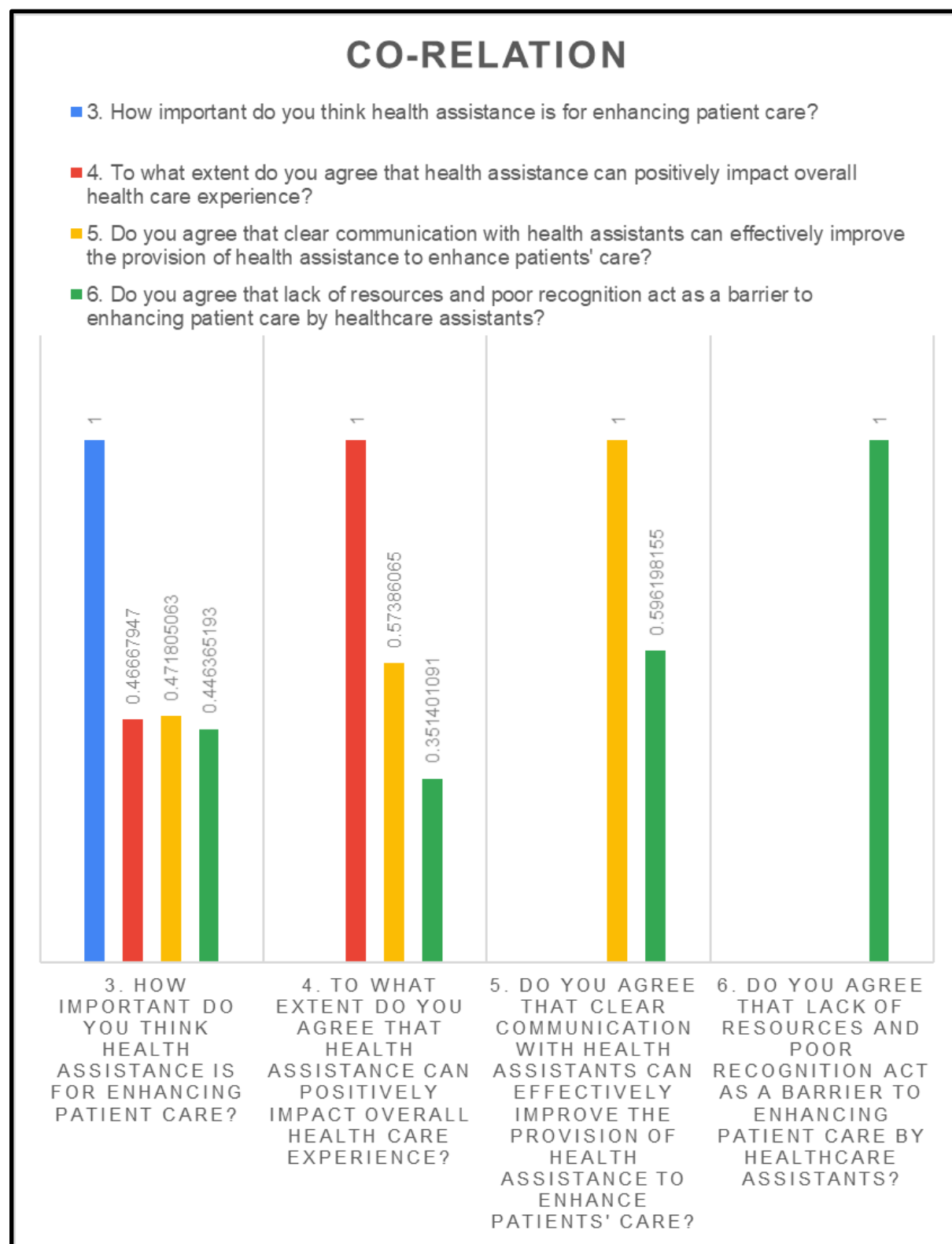


Figure 1: Correlational analysis

(Source: Self-developed)

Systematic literature review results

Role of healthcare assistance in enhancing patient care through reducing hospital admissions, offering hospice care, and supporting families

Healthcare assistance is gaining growing importance due to the rising number of chronic diseases and limited resources (10). The involvement of healthcare assistants in primary healthcare facilities can

significantly help in reducing the number of hospital admissions, medication costs and consultations as it helps in the provision of improved quality and high-quality healthcare to meet the health needs of patients (10). Apart from medical staff, it is the healthcare assistants who offer health assistance and thus while working in hospice settings they play a pivotal role in supporting people and their families by offering end-of-life care and support (7). HCA ensures that patients are able to access healthcare services and advocate on behalf of them to healthcare professionals.

Challenges such as lack of training, resource availability, peer support and administrative workload faced while enhancing patient care through health assistance

The lack of training, reduced resource availability and lack of standardisation of professional roles pose a major challenge to the provision of health assistance by healthcare assistants (10). Sudden changes in the external environments and lack of standardised practices have led to the creation of anxiety and confusion among healthcare assistants in the UK (8). Lack of shortage of resources for health care assistants for instance during the covid-19 pandemic the shortage of PPE hindered the ability to provide adequate health assistance (8). The lack of peer support, recognition and loneliness can be challenging in offering quality health assistance to patients (7). Excessive workload and administrative responsibilities can also be under the ability of HCA to offer quality health assistance to patients (3).

Discussion

Key Findings and Implications

The findings from this research sheds light on the vital role of health assistants in enhancing patient care which includes reducing hospital admissions, providing support to the patients, and acting as an intermediary between patient and healthcare professionals. Based on the survey result, it can be observed that HCAs in the UK mostly belong to the 20–25 age group which suggests that healthcare organisations seek energetic, young individuals who can stand together with long-term goals of the organisations. Based on the correlation between healthcare assistance and overall patient care improvement, it was observed that the overall value was 0.4667 which emphasises the need for HCAs in improving healthcare experiences of patients. Moreover, a correlation value of 0.4718 suggests that communication is deemed as the key requirement for HCAs in engaging with patients. This is supported by the findings from the systematic literature review, where it is found that HCAs acts as a pillar to reduce strain of patients and converse with them whenever required. They understand the patients and provide effective measures to improve the overall care quality (10). It has also been found that HCAs often are found to manage end-of-life care and provide emotional support to patients and their families. This justifies that HCAs play an important part in improving patient care. However, On the other hand, a correlation of 0.5962 posits that lack of resources and recognition can significantly impact the abilities of HCAs in catering to patients. In this respect, a systematic literature review has also been done from which it can be identified that inadequate training, resource shortages, and high administrative workloads can be the major causes for effective care among HCAs.

Comparison with Literature

The findings align with the existing studies where it has been stated that HCAs contribute significantly to patient care in a hospital as well as community settings. For example, the study from (10) supports this claim and states that HCAs reduce the burden of patients by connecting them with healthcare professionals and supporting patients with chronic diseases. Similarly, (7) also reflect that HCAs provide hospice care and support families during the time of need or during any operation process. On the other hand, the literature also foreshadowed a few challenges for HCAs such as workload and lack of support from patients and their families. (8) states that HCAs are often overworked and due to shortage of labourers, they face significant challenges to maintain a good relationship with patients. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a significant shortage of labourers which affected the service quality of HCAs towards patients. Furthermore, the literature points that lack of standardised roles and insufficient peer support can also affect the quality of patient care.

Strategies for Improvement

In order to address the challenges faced by the HCAs in providing quality care, several strategies can be adopted which include enhanced training programs, appropriate resource allocation, recognition and support system, role standardisation, and administrative support. In the context of the strategies, it can be said that comprehensive as well as ongoing training will be suitable for HCAs because it can

allow them to get skilled employees for managing patients' needs. Adequate resource allocation can also be an effective aspect in this context including medical supply can technological tools which can be suitable for improving HCAs efficiency. Clear guidelines as well as standard practice can assist in developing consistency of care.

Conclusion

It can be concluded from this report that health assistance is crucial for enhancing patient care as it helps both patient and their families to seek the adequate care needed to improve their health, In addition to this it has also been found that health care assistance helps in improving access of patient to a range of healthcare services and facilities but the lack of resources, peer supports, assistance and excessive workload and hinder this process.

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