Short Communication

A Qualitative Study on Emergency Nurses' Experiences Caring for Patients without Identification

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DESCRIPTION

The Emergency Department (ED) is a primary factor of the healthcare system, offering immediate care to individuals facing acute or life-threatening medical situations. Emergency nurses are key members of this team and their skills, experience and ability to make quick decisions directly impact patient outcomes and the quality of care. In this high-pressure environment, emergency nurses are tasked not only with addressing the medical needs of patients but also with offering emotional support and ensuring that patients feel secure, despite the uncertainty surrounding their condition.

This challenge becomes particularly complex when dealing with unidentified patients-those whose identity or medical history is unknown at the time of their treatment [1,2]. These patients may be unable to provide their personal information due to factors such as trauma, unconsciousness or other critical conditions. Unlike homeless patients, who lack stable housing and social connections or unaccompanied patients, who may have identification but no immediate family support, unidentified patients present a unique set of issues due to the absence of both personal identification and social support at the time of care [3].

Emergency nurses often face significant challenges in these situations, including increased workload, communication difficulties and the added burden of providing care under uncertain circumstances. While study on unidentified patients in emergency settings has been conducted globally, limited studies have focused on this issue within China's healthcare context. With its large population, unequal distribution of healthcare resources and unique patient behaviors, China's EDs present distinct challenges that may affect how emergency nurses cope with unidentified patients.

Study design

This study adopts a descriptive phenomenological approach, grounded in the philosophical framework of Husserl's phenomenology [4,5]. Phenomenology, both a philosophy and a study method, seeks to examine and describe the lived experiences of individuals without imposing any preconceived notions or interpretations. A key concept in phenomenological study, which involves methods like "bracketing" and "bringing back" to ensure that the researcher sets aside their personal biases and assumptions, allowing the phenomenon to be presented in its purest form [6]. This approach is particularly suited to exploring the experiences of emergency nurses who care for unidentified patients.

Study setting

The study was conducted in the ED of a large medical teaching hospital in northeastern China. This hospital's ED serves as one of the busiest in the region, treating a significant number of patients daily. It is the leading facility in the province for handling unidentified patients, serving as the primary referral center for these cases. As a result, the ED has extensive experience in managing cases involving patients whose identity and medical history are initially unknown [7,8]. In 2023, the department experienced a notable increase in the number of unidentified patients treated compared to the previous year, highlighting the growing significance of the issue within this healthcare setting.

Participants

The study identified eligible participants through the hospital's nurse manager's scheduling system, targeting emergency nurses who had cared for unidentified patients between June and September of 2023. Using purposive sampling, the analyzing selected nurses with direct experience in treating such patients to ensure that the participants could provide relevant and insightful information [9,10]. An email was sent to potential participants through the hospital's internal communication system, providing detailed information about the study, its objectives, methods and ethical considerations.

CONCLUSION

In summary, emergency nurses encounter heightened workloads, increased mental stress and a need for better material and envir-

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onmental support when caring for unidentified patients. These challenges are unique to emergency department settings and differ significantly from those associated with treating identified patients, which can negatively impact nurses' work efficiency and job satisfaction. Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that hospitals develop comprehensive care protocols for unidentified patients and improve resource allocation to better support emergency nursing staff. Additionally, targeted training programs should be implemented to enhance nurses' ability to handle these cases, addressing both the practical and psychological aspects of care. This training should include guidance on legal matters, ethical considerations and mental health support. It is important for healthcare institutions and administrators to acknowledge these challenges and take appropriate actions to enhance the quality and safety of care for unidentified patients. Future studies could analyze specific interventions to address these issues and assess their effectiveness through further empirical study.

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