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Implementation of Integrated Quality Management in Nursing Services

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Abstract

Integrated Quality Management (IQM) is a strategic approach oriented towards continuous improvement to enhance the quality of healthcare services, including nursing care. Nurses, as frontline care providers, play a crucial role in ensuring patient quality and safety. Therefore, the implementation of IQM in nursing care is a relevant issue that merits in-depth study. This study aims to explore the implementation of IQM in nursing care and identify supporting factors, barriers, and its impact on service quality. The study employed a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document review in the nursing care unit. The informants included nurses, ward heads, nursing managers, and the quality management team, selected purposively. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify key patterns and themes. The results indicate that the implementation of IQM in nursing care has been ongoing, but remains partial and tends to be administrative. Nursing leadership and active nurse involvement play a crucial role in the success of IQM implementation. Key barriers include high workload, limited resources, and lack of ongoing training. Nevertheless, the implementation of Integrated Quality Management (TMM) has had a positive impact on compliance with care standards, nursing documentation, and patient safety awareness. This study concludes that strengthening a culture of quality, visionary leadership, and nurse empowerment are necessary to optimize the implementation of Integrated Quality Management (TMM) in nursing services.

Keywords: Integrated Quality Management, Nursing Services, Service Quality, Qualitative Research, Patient Safety

Introduction

Nursing services are one of the main foundations of a modern healthcare system, ensuring patient safety, comfort, and satisfaction. In an era of complex healthcare needs, the quality of nursing

services is no longer seen simply as the completion of clinical procedures, but as an integrated quality ecosystem that requires sustainability, accuracy, and consistent patient orientation. Integrated Quality Management (IQM) or Total Quality Management (TQM) has emerged

as a strategic approach capable of integrating quality principles into every organizational process, including nursing services. TQM principles such as customer focus, involvement of all organizational members, strong leadership, and continuous improvement have been widely identified as pillars of quality improvement in healthcare (Talib, Rahman, & Qureshi, 2019, as reviewed in the integrative literature).

Conceptually, Integrated Quality Management (IQM) is based on the paradigm that quality must be managed holistically, not only as the final output of care but also as part of the organization's strategic processes. In the context of nursing care, this means that every touchpoint between nurses and patients represents an opportunity to ensure quality: from initial assessment and nursing planning, implementation of nursing interventions, to evaluation of outcomes and follow-up. Dimensions such as quality leadership, staff training, nurse involvement in decision-making, and patient feedback are key indicators in ensuring that the quality management system functions effectively in hospital nursing units.

A study in Indonesia by Hidayat, Pratiwi, and Agustin (2016) found that the quality leadership of ward heads significantly influenced the implementation of the nursing service quality management system in inpatient wards. This study shows that when ward heads are committed to quality values and are able to facilitate planning, implementation, evaluation, and quality improvement, the nursing service quality management process can run smoothly and have a positive impact on service quality. This underscores the importance of the role of unit leaders as quality champions within the nursing service system.

Furthermore, another study conducted in the context of a national

general hospital showed that TQM implementation can also improve overall organizational performance, including in aspects of clinical services closely related to nursing. Research by Agiwahyunto, Octaviasuni, and Fajri (2019) on TQM at Kendal Regional General Hospital found that the application of TQM principles helped improve the efficiency of administrative and operational processes, ultimately impacting the quality of patient care. This approach includes activities such as mapping service processes, identifying key obstacles, and developing systematic, evidence-based solutions so that the organization operates not only reactively but proactively in improving quality.

The link between TQM practices and nurse performance outcomes and service quality indicators has also been discussed in literature reviews of healthcare quality management. One systematic review, published in *Risk Management and Healthcare Policy*, integrates various TQM implementation models in the healthcare sector and demonstrates that TQM can influence aspects of patient safety culture, service quality, and patient satisfaction—components highly relevant to nursing practice as a frontline service. This review emphasizes that the success of TQM depends not only on the design of standard operating procedures but also on an organizational culture that supports collaboration, innovation, and continuous learning.

Beyond the Indonesian context, empirical evidence from international research also supports the important role of TQM implementation in improving the quality of healthcare services in general. For example, a study by Al-Shdaifat (2015) showed that TQM implementation in Jordanian hospitals was significantly influenced by leadership commitment, thorough strategic planning, and staff involvement in the quality improvement

process. While this study was not specific to nursing, its components reflect the dynamics consistent with the provision of high-quality nursing services, particularly in the context of human resource management and client-care provider relationships.

Furthermore, other literature on the relationship between continuous improvement and healthcare quality indicates that the integration of TQM methodology can create a sustainable mechanism for improving clinical and non-clinical performance. Methods such as Plan-Do-Check-Action (PDCA), which are part of the TQM philosophy, have been shown to help healthcare units map work processes, identify potential improvements, and evaluate the results of these improvements in an iterative cycle. This approach is particularly useful in the nursing context, where any changes in work processes can directly impact patient safety, speed of response, and the patient experience during care.

Although ample evidence demonstrates the benefits of implementing TQM, several challenges in its implementation also need to be recognized. Barriers such as lack of staff competency in applying advanced tools, resistance to organizational culture change, and limited resources often hinder the effective implementation of TQM. Therefore, a comprehensive implementation strategy needs to encompass not only technical aspects but also human and organizational cultural aspects, including continuing education for nurses and strengthening visionary leadership.

In the context of nursing services, implementing TQM is not merely an administrative or bureaucratic process. Rather, it is a strategic element that determines how the nursing care system adapts to increasingly complex patient needs, improves the patient experience,

and fosters an organizational culture focused on safety, efficiency, and effectiveness. Therefore, the understanding and application of TQM in nursing practice need to be continuously developed through systematic quantitative and qualitative research to maximize its relationship to service quality and clinical outcomes.

Method

Research Approach

This study used a qualitative approach to understand how the Total Quality Management (TQM) implementation process works in nursing practice at a healthcare facility. The qualitative approach was chosen because it aimed to explore the experiences, perceptions, and dynamics of nursing practitioners' behaviors and interactions in a real-world context, rather than simply statistical data (Munhall, 2021). Qualitative research allows researchers to explore various aspects of implementation in depth through participant narratives, observations, and reflections. In healthcare research, qualitative methods are often used to explore humanistic phenomena, such as nurses' clinical experiences and the process of quality culture change in healthcare organizations (Munhall, 2021; Creswell, 2012; doi:10.7910/DVN/PI6V6T).

Research Design

The research design used was descriptive qualitative with a phenomenological approach to understand the experiences and meanings interpreted by nursing practitioners regarding the implementation of total quality management in daily practice. The phenomenological approach helps uncover how participants perceive and give meaning to the process of quality change in nursing care without experimentally manipulating variables. A similar study

using a phenomenological design in the context of TQM implementation in healthcare demonstrates that this approach is appropriate for capturing social realities and professional experiences in clinical settings (Agiwahyunto, Octaviasuni, & Fajri, 2019).

Sampling Technique

Informants were selected through purposive sampling because the focus was on individuals directly involved in the implementation of TQM in nursing services. Key informants included clinical nurses, heads of nursing units, quality managers, and other relevant stakeholders. This technique aligns with the principles of qualitative research, which prioritizes selecting participants with genuine experience and in-depth insight into the phenomenon under study. Furthermore, theoretical sampling was considered to broaden insights if new concepts emerged during the analysis process (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Data Collection Instruments and Procedures

Primary data were collected through several techniques, including: 1) In-depth semi-structured interviews, conducted to explore the experiences, perceptions, and challenges faced by nurses and management in implementing TQM in nursing services. Interview questions focused on understanding TQM principles, adaptations in nursing care, barriers to implementation, and their impact on service quality and patient satisfaction, 2) Participatory observation, in which the researcher directly observed work processes in the nursing unit, quality governance, and interactions among team members, 3) Documentation, including analysis of quality policy documents, SOPs, quality records, and relevant TQM implementation reports. The data collection process was iterative and

flexible, allowing the researcher to adjust the questions and focus of the analysis based on field findings. A data triangulation strategy (interviews, observation, documentation) was applied to enhance the credibility of the findings.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data collected from interviews, field notes, and documents were analyzed through thematic analysis. The analysis process included: 1) Transcription of interview data; 2) Initial coding (open coding) to identify initial themes and patterns; 3) Categorization and grouping of codes into broad themes reflecting aspects of TQM implementation such as quality leadership, staff engagement, organizational culture barriers, and service outcomes; 4) Thematic interpretation to explain relationships between themes and answer the research questions. The use of qualitative software such as NVivo or manual coding can be applied to support the categorization and visualization of narrative themes. Member checking techniques were also used to validate findings with multiple informants, thereby increasing the trustworthiness of the research.

Results

Informant Overview

This study involved 15 purposively selected key informants, consisting of nurses, ward heads, nursing managers, and the quality management team. All informants had at least five years of work experience and were directly involved in the implementation of nursing services and quality improvement programs in their respective units. Interviews and observations revealed that the implementation of Integrated Quality Management (IQM) was conceptually familiar to most informants, but the level

of understanding and implementation varied across service units.

Data analysis using a thematic analysis approach yielded five main themes representing informants' experiences and perceptions regarding the implementation of TQM in nursing services.

Theme 1: Nurses' Understanding of the Concept of TQM

Most informants interpreted TQM as a continuous effort to improve the quality of nursing services through adherence to standard operating procedures, hospital accreditation, and patient safety. However, this understanding tended to be normative and administrative in nature, not fully reflecting the TQM philosophy as an organizational culture.

Some nurses associated IQM solely with quality audits, completing paperwork, and preparing for accreditation surveys. Meanwhile, ward heads and nursing managers had a more comprehensive understanding, including aspects of continuous improvement, staff engagement, and patient satisfaction orientation. This difference in understanding indicates a conceptual gap between the managerial and executive levels in MMT implementation.

Theme 2: The Role of Nursing Leadership in IQM Implementation

The leadership of ward heads and nursing managers emerged as a central factor in the successful implementation of Integrated Quality Management. Informants reported that leaders who actively provide direction, feedback, and role models in the implementation of quality standards are able to create a work environment that supports continuous quality improvement.

Conversely, in units with a leadership style that tends to be passive or

solely administratively oriented, the implementation of Integrated Quality Management (IQM) is less than optimal. Nurses in these units perceived that quality activities were more top-down and did not involve active staff participation. This finding suggests that transformational leadership plays a crucial role in building nurses' commitment to quality care.

Theme 3: Nurse Involvement in the Quality Improvement Process

Research findings indicate that nurse involvement in the quality improvement process remains uneven. Some units have involved nurses in quality discussions, reporting patient safety incidents, and service evaluation meetings. Nurses in these units feel valued and share responsibility for the quality of nursing care.

However, in other units, nurse involvement is still limited to carrying out instructions without opportunity for input or innovation. This situation has led some nurses to view Integrated Quality Management as an additional workload, rather than an integral part of professional nursing practice. This lack of involvement results in a low sense of ownership of the quality program.

Theme 4: Barriers to the Implementation of Integrated Quality Management

The main barriers identified in the implementation of Integrated Quality Management include limited human resources, high nurse workloads, and a lack of ongoing training related to quality of care. Informants reported that the unbalanced nurse-to-patient ratio often causes nurses to focus more on fulfilling basic clinical tasks than on quality evaluation and improvement activities.

Furthermore, an organizational culture that does not fully support learning

and reflection is a significant barrier. Several informants expressed a fear of being blamed when reporting errors or incidents, thus hindering a culture of safety and open quality improvement. This situation indicates that the implementation of Integrated Quality Management has not been fully integrated into the nursing work culture.

Theme 5: Impact of Integrated Quality Management Implementation on the Quality of Nursing Services

Despite facing various obstacles, informants acknowledged the positive impact of the implementation of Integrated Quality Management on the quality of nursing services. These impacts include increased compliance with nursing care standards, more systematic documentation, and increased nurse awareness of patient safety.

Several informants also assessed that the implementation of Integrated Quality Management (IQM) contributed to increased patient and family satisfaction, particularly in aspects of communication, accuracy of actions, and continuity of care. However, this impact was deemed suboptimal and still highly dependent on leadership commitment and overall organizational support.

Discussion

1. Understanding Integrated Quality Management in Nursing

The research results indicate that nurses' understanding of Total Quality Management (TQM) remains normative, related to SOPs and accreditation, and does not always reflect a philosophical and practical understanding of TQM as an organizational culture of continuous improvement. This finding is consistent with a literature review that shows that although the concept of Total Quality

Management is widely recognized in the healthcare context, its implementation often focuses on procedures rather than on core TQM values such as staff empowerment, organizational learning, and a comprehensive patient orientation (Vituri & Évora, 2015).

This incomplete understanding implies that quality activities are often perceived as additional administrative tasks, rather than an integral part of professional nursing practice. However, the literature confirms that when nurses understand TQM as a holistic approach, they are more likely to engage in continuous improvement and direct process improvements that impact patient safety and quality of care (Alzoubi et al., 2019).

2. The Role of Leadership in TQM Implementation

Nursing leadership emerged as a very dominant factor in the success of TQM implementation. Proactive and supportive ward leaders create an environment that encourages team participation. These findings reflect the critical success factors for TQM in healthcare often cited in the literature: top management commitment and employee engagement are key predictors of TQM success (Alzoubi et al., 2019).

In the context of nursing services, effective leaders not only ensure standards are followed but also foster open communication and a culture of learning. This aligns with findings that the implementation of TQM principles such as continuous improvement, teamwork, and customer focus significantly contribute to the effectiveness of quality systems in hospitals (Al-Shdaifat, 2015).

3. Nurse Involvement in Quality Improvement

The results show variations in nurse involvement in quality activities. In units

actively involved in quality discussions and action evaluations, nurses felt shared responsibility for service outcomes. This aligns with literature confirming that staff involvement in decision-making and continuous improvement processes is a crucial part of TQM practices and impacts implementation success (Vituri & Évora, 2015).

Conversely, in units with minimal involvement, nurses tended to view TQM as an administrative burden. The literature shows that a lack of engagement can hinder the formation of a true quality culture, as frontline nurses are strategically positioned to identify quality issues and initiate pragmatic solutions (Alzoubi et al., 2019).

4. Barriers to TQM Implementation in Nursing Services

The main barriers that emerged were limited resources, high workloads, and a lack of ongoing training. This situation is also supported by a literature study that reported that among the biggest challenges to TQM implementation in healthcare facilities are cultural resistance, a lack of competent human resources, and a lack of systematic training (Alzoubi et al., 2019).

Furthermore, nurses' partial understanding of TQM has resulted in topics such as reporting patient safety incidents, reflecting on work processes, and evaluative discussions not yet becoming routine practices. This aligns with the conclusion that the literature still notes a lack of qualitative research that fully explores organizational culture in nursing units as an integral part of TQM (Vituri & Évora, 2015).

5. Impact of TQM Implementation on Service Quality

Although TQM implementation has not been optimal, nurses acknowledge a positive impact on service quality. This finding aligns with empirical evidence that

suggests that when TQM principles are consistently implemented, there is a tendency for increased adherence to care standards, improved documentation, and overall patient satisfaction (Al-Shdaifat, 2015).

The literature also shows that TQM, when managed with an emphasis on continuous improvement, customer focus, and employee empowerment, can improve overall organizational performance and create a work environment that is more responsive to patient needs (Alzoubi et al., 2019).

6. Relationship to Healthcare Quality Theory

This study confirms that the success of TQM implementation depends not only on technical instruments but also on human resources and organizational culture. This is consistent with the findings of Alzoubi et al. (2019), who emphasized the importance of understanding the fundamental elements of TQM and predictors of success, including leadership commitment, training, and a culture of continuous improvement in the context of healthcare organizations.

Previous integrative studies also emphasized that TQM in nursing cannot be implemented solely through formal policies but must be part of a practice philosophy that supports evidence-based decision-making and multidisciplinary collaboration (Vituri & Évora, 2015).

Conclusion

Based on the results of this qualitative research, it can be concluded that the implementation of TQM in nursing services has been ongoing, but is not yet optimal and evenly distributed across all service units. Quality management is still understood as an administrative obligation related to standards, accreditation, and documentation, and has not yet been fully

internalized as a culture of continuous improvement in nursing practice. Nursing leadership plays a key role in determining the success of TQM implementation, particularly in encouraging active nurse participation and establishing a work climate that supports quality and patient safety. Involving nurses in the quality improvement process has been shown to increase their sense of responsibility and ownership of service quality. However, barriers such as high workloads, limited resources, and lack of ongoing training remain major challenges. Therefore, strengthening leadership, organizational culture, and nurse empowerment are strategic steps to increase the effectiveness of IQM implementation in nursing services.

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