

The Role of Advanced Practice Nurses in Managing Multimorbidity: A Narrative Review

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Mini Review

ABSTRACT

This narrative review examines the role of Advanced Practice Nurses (APNs) in managing patients with multimorbidity. Multimorbidity, the presence of multiple chronic conditions in an individual, presents unique challenges for healthcare systems. This review explores the contributions of APNs in providing comprehensive care, coordinating treatment plans, and improving health outcomes for patients with multimorbidity. The findings highlight the critical role of APNs in managing complex patient needs and suggest strategies for optimizing their impact in clinical practice.

Keywords: Multimorbidity; Advanced practice nurses; Treatment; Patient

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INTRODUCTION

Multimorbidity, defined as the coexistence of two or more chronic conditions in an individual, is increasingly prevalent due to aging populations and advances in medical care. This complex health status challenges healthcare systems, requiring comprehensive and coordinated care to manage multiple conditions effectively ^[1]. Advanced Practice Nurses (APNs), including Nurse Practitioners (NPs), Clinical Nurse Specialists (CNSs), nurse anesthetists, and nurse midwives, are well-positioned to address the needs of these patients. This review aims to explore the role of APNs in managing multimorbidity and to identify strategies that enhance their contributions to patient care.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Multimorbidity complicates patient care by increasing the risk of adverse drug reactions, requiring complex treatment regimens, and leading to higher healthcare utilization. Effective management requires a holistic approach that considers the interplay between different conditions, patient preferences, and social determinants of health. APNs, with their advanced clinical training and patient-centered approach, are uniquely equipped to provide this type of care.

APNs are trained to offer comprehensive assessments, develop and implement care plans, and provide ongoing management for patients with chronic conditions. Their roles often include prescribing medications, ordering and interpreting diagnostic tests, and coordinating care among various healthcare providers. These capabilities are particularly valuable in managing multimorbidity, where integrated care is essential.

Several studies have demonstrated the positive impact of APNs on patient outcomes. For instance, a systematic review by Stanik-Hutt et al. found that patients managed by NPs had similar or better health outcomes compared to those managed by physicians, particularly in chronic disease management. Another study by Martinez-Gonzalez et al. highlighted the effectiveness of APNs in reducing hospital admissions and improving quality of life for patients with multiple chronic conditions.

APNs also play a crucial role in patient education and self-management support. They empower patients by providing information about their conditions, teaching self-management skills, and supporting lifestyle modifications. This patient-centered approach is vital for managing multimorbidity, where patient engagement is key to achieving positive health outcomes.

Despite the demonstrated benefits, there are challenges in integrating APNs into healthcare teams. These include regulatory barriers, scope of practice limitations, and varying levels of acceptance among healthcare providers. Addressing these challenges requires policy changes and efforts to standardize APN roles and education across different regions.

Methodology

This narrative review was conducted by searching academic databases, including PubMed, CINAHL, and Google Scholar, for articles published between 2000 and 2023. Keywords included "advanced practice nurses," "multimorbidity," "chronic disease management," and "integrated care." Articles were selected based on relevance, focusing on studies that examined the role and impact of APNs in managing patients with multiple chronic conditions. Both quantitative and qualitative studies were included to provide a comprehensive overview of the topic ^[2].

RESULTS

The review identified several key themes regarding the role of APNs in managing multimorbidity:

Comprehensive assessment and care planning: APNs conduct thorough assessments that consider all aspects of a patient's health, including physical, emotional, and social factors. They develop individualized care plans that address multiple conditions simultaneously, ensuring coordinated and holistic care.

Advanced Practice Nurses (APNs) play a crucial role in conducting comprehensive assessments and developing individualized care plans for patients with multimorbidity. Their advanced training enables them to perform detailed evaluations that encompass a patient's physical, emotional, and social health aspects. This holistic approach is essential for identifying all the factors that contribute to a patient's overall health status.

APNs begin by gathering extensive medical histories, including information about all chronic conditions, medications, allergies, and previous treatments. They also assess current symptoms, lifestyle habits, and social determinants of health, such as living conditions, family support, and economic factors. This thorough data collection helps in understanding the complexity of each patient's situation and the interplay between different conditions.

Physical examinations conducted by APNs are comprehensive, covering all relevant systems affected by the patient's chronic conditions. They use their expertise to identify potential complications or interactions between conditions that may not be immediately apparent ^[3]. Diagnostic tests and screenings are ordered as necessary to obtain a complete picture of the patient's health.

Based on the assessment, APNs develop individualized care plans tailored to the unique needs of each patient. These care plans are multifaceted, addressing all chronic conditions concurrently rather than in isolation. APNs prioritize interventions based on the severity and impact of each condition, ensuring that the most critical issues are managed first.

Medication management is a significant component of care planning. APNs review all current medications to avoid potential drug interactions and ensure that each medication is necessary and effective. They may adjust dosages, discontinue unnecessary medications, or prescribe new treatments as needed. Educating patients about their medications, including how

to take them correctly and possible side effects, is also a key responsibility of APNs.

In addition to medical treatments, APNs incorporate lifestyle modifications into care plans. They provide guidance on diet, exercise, smoking cessation, and other behaviors that can improve health outcomes. APNs also recognize the importance of mental health in managing chronic conditions and may include strategies to address stress, anxiety, and depression in their care plans.

Coordination of care is another critical element. APNs ensure that all healthcare providers involved in the patient's care are informed and working towards the same goals. They facilitate communication between primary care physicians, specialists, pharmacists, and other healthcare professionals to create a cohesive and integrated care plan.

APNs also involve patients in the care planning process, recognizing that patient engagement is essential for successful management of multimorbidity. They take time to explain the care plan, address any concerns, and ensure that patients understand their role in managing their health. This collaborative approach empowers patients and encourages adherence to the care plan.

Regular follow-up and reassessment are integral to effective care planning. APNs monitor patients' progress, adjust care plans as necessary, and address any new issues that arise. This ongoing management ensures that care remains aligned with patients' evolving needs and circumstances ^[4].

Through comprehensive assessment and individualized care planning, APNs significantly enhance the management of patients with multimorbidity. Their ability to provide detailed evaluations, create tailored interventions, and coordinate care across multiple providers results in improved health outcomes and better quality of life for patients.

Coordination of care: APNs act as care coordinators, facilitating communication between different healthcare providers and ensuring that care is integrated across various settings. This role is crucial in preventing fragmented care and reducing the risk of adverse outcomes.

Advanced Practice Nurses (APNs) are instrumental in coordinating care for patients with multimorbidity, ensuring that healthcare delivery is seamless, integrated, and patient-centered. Effective coordination of care is critical for managing multiple chronic conditions, as it reduces the risk of fragmented care, minimizes adverse events, and improves overall patient outcomes.

APNs serve as central figures in the healthcare team, acting as liaisons between patients and various healthcare providers. They communicate and collaborate with primary care physicians, specialists, pharmacists, social workers, and other relevant professionals to develop and implement a cohesive care plan. This interdisciplinary approach ensures that all aspects of a patient's health are addressed comprehensively.

One of the primary roles of APNs in care coordination is to ensure that all providers involved in a patient's care are informed about the patient's health status, treatment plans, and progress. APNs regularly update healthcare providers on any changes in the patient's condition, new diagnostic results, and modifications to treatment plans. This continuous information flow helps prevent duplicative or conflicting treatments, which is particularly important for patients with complex health needs.

APNs also coordinate diagnostic tests and follow-up appointments. They ensure that patients undergo necessary screenings and tests at appropriate intervals and that results are communicated promptly to all relevant providers. By managing these logistics, APNs help streamline the patient's journey through the healthcare system, reducing delays in diagnosis and treatment.

Medication management is another crucial area where APNs excel in care coordination. Patients with multimorbidity often take multiple medications, which increases the risk of drug interactions and adverse effects. APNs review all prescribed medications, monitor for potential interactions, and work closely with pharmacists to optimize medication regimens. They also educate patients about their medications, emphasizing adherence and proper administration, to ensure effective management of their conditions.

Patient education and support are integral to care coordination. APNs provide patients with the knowledge and tools they need to manage their health effectively. This includes educating patients about their conditions, explaining the importance of each aspect of the care plan, and teaching self-management skills. APNs empower patients to take an active role in their health, which is crucial for the successful management of chronic conditions.

APNs also address social determinants of health that can impact patient outcomes. They identify barriers to care, such as financial difficulties, lack of transportation, or inadequate social support, and connect patients with resources to overcome these challenges. This holistic approach ensures that patients receive not only medical care but also the social and emotional support needed to manage their conditions.

Effective care coordination often involves the use of health information technology. APNs utilize Electronic Health Records (EHRs) to track patient information, monitor progress, and facilitate communication between providers ^[5]. EHRs enable APNs

to access comprehensive patient data, ensure continuity of care, and reduce the risk of errors.

Regular follow-up and reassessment are essential components of care coordination. APNs schedule and conduct follow-up visits to monitor patients' progress, evaluate the effectiveness of the care plan, and make necessary adjustments. This ongoing oversight helps address any emerging issues promptly and keeps the care plan aligned with the patient's evolving needs.

By coordinating care effectively, APNs play a pivotal role in managing multimorbidity. Their ability to integrate services, facilitate communication, and support patients leads to improved health outcomes, reduced healthcare utilization, and enhanced patient satisfaction. APNs' expertise in care coordination ensures that patients with complex health needs receive comprehensive, continuous, and patient-centered care.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this review underscore the significant contributions of APNs in managing multimorbidity. Their advanced clinical skills, holistic approach, and patient-centered care model are well-suited to address the complex needs of patients with multiple chronic conditions. By conducting comprehensive assessments, coordinating care, and providing education and support, APNs play a vital role in improving health outcomes and enhancing the quality of life for these patients.

However, to fully realize the potential of APNs in managing multimorbidity, it is essential to address the challenges they face. Policy changes that expand their scope of practice, standardize their education and training, and recognize their role in healthcare teams are necessary. Additionally, efforts to promote inter-professional collaboration and integrate APNs into care models are crucial for optimizing their impact ^[6].

CONCLUSION

Advanced practice nurses are pivotal in managing patients with multimorbidity, offering comprehensive, coordinated, and patient-centered care that improves health outcomes. Their role in the healthcare system should be supported and expanded through policy changes and increased recognition of their contributions. By leveraging the expertise of APNs, healthcare systems can better address the complex needs of patients with multiple chronic conditions, ultimately leading to improved care quality and patient satisfaction. Further research is needed to explore the long-term benefits of APN-led interventions and to identify best practices for integrating APNs into multimorbidity management frameworks.

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