

# Current Situation and Enlightenment of Core Competence Development of Psychiatric Nurses in China

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**Abstract:** *With the progress of social civilization and the improvement of mental health awareness, the public's demand for high-quality mental health services has increased significantly. The complexity and professionalism of the mental health field requires psychiatric nurses to have a set of core competencies to ensure that they can provide high quality, safe care to their patients. At present, the overall level of core competence of psychiatric nurses in China is in the middle stage, in which the ability of ethics and legal practice is more prominent, but the ability of thinking and scientific research is relatively weak. The high scores of ethics and legal practice ability reflect that nurses in psychiatric specialties in China attach great importance to industry norms and patients' rights and interests. The lack of critical thinking ability and scientific research ability means that nurses' judgment and innovative problem-solving ability in the face of complex clinical situations need to be strengthened, which also limits their participation in nursing scientific research and the promotion of disciplinary progress. Drawing on the mature experience of foreign countries and combining with China's national conditions, hospitals should clarify the responsibilities of nurses, strengthen training, especially in critical thinking and scientific research literacy, build a supportive interdisciplinary work environment, and establish a professional certification system. In order to comprehensively enhance the core competence of psychiatric nurses, improve the quality of life of patients, meet the needs of high-quality mental health services, cope with the challenges in the field of mental health, and promote the field of mental health nursing in China to a higher level.*

**Keywords:** Psychiatry; Specialized nurses; Core competence; Current development situation.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

According to the requirements of the national "14th Five-Year" quality and efficient medical and health service system construction implementation program to promote the "14th Five-Year" period of China's nursing career of high-quality development, to improve the health of the people, China's health commission issued the "National Nursing The National Nursing Career Development Plan (2021-2025)" [1]. It puts forward a series of requirements such as improving the service system of nursing, strengthening the construction of nurses' team, and promoting the high-quality development of nursing. Due to the serious problems of population aging and changes in the disease spectrum in China, even though the number of nursing personnel is growing, new challenges have been ushered in to the quality of care required of nursing personnel.

## 2. DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS

### 2.1 Nurse Specialist

"Specialized nurses are part of the Advanced Practice Nurse (APN) category. APNs are registered nurses who have extensive theoretical knowledge of specialized medical care, the ability to make decisions in the face of complex problems, and the ability to expand clinical nursing practice [2]. The responsibilities of APNs include five basic areas: clinical care, clinical management, clinical education, clinical nursing consultant, and clinical research [3]. In Europe and the United States, specialized nurses are defined as nursing personnel who are firstly registered nurses, then after attending specific training, have specific specialized nursing competencies, and finally pass the examination and obtain the specialized qualification certificate [4]. However, psychiatric nurses, as one of the highly specialized groups of nurses, are highly specific in their care, and nurses are at high risk in their clinical work, which puts forward the requirement that psychiatric specialist nurses need to have high professional competence [4].

### 2.2 Core Competencies

Internationally, there is no uniform normative definition of the concept of nursing core competence (nursing core competence), the International Council of Nurses for the first time defined core competence as: some of the knowledge, skills, judgment, as well as personal traits appear in the registered nurses for the patient in the process of providing safe and compliant with the ethical requirements of the service [5]. According to the Chinese Nursing Council of Hong Kong, the core competencies are: the necessary skills that registered nurses need to acquire at the beginning of their practice to qualify for nursing education in order to provide nursing care to the public in a safe, effective and ethical manner. These include five areas: "competence in professionally legal and ethically compliant nursing; health promotion and health education competence; managerial leadership; personal effectiveness; and professional development competence". There are different views in the mainland nursing community on the concept of nursing core competencies. The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health first proposed the core competencies of Chinese nurses in 2003, which included health assessment, communication, hygiene guidance and health education, emergency response and resuscitation, observation of medication response, geriatric care, community care, and overall nursing competencies [6]. Different scholars have proposed different categorizations and dimensions of nursing core competencies. Domestic scholar Liu Ming [7] summarized nursing core competency as "the organic combination of knowledge skills and attitudes in clinical practice." His article outlines seven dimensions as: the ability of critical thinking, the ability of legal practice, the ability of research ethics, the ability of educational counseling, the ability of professional interpersonal relations, and the ability of clinical care. As well as Chen Yanhua et al [8] summarized that "core competencies in nursing are key core competencies in nursing, an essential ability to achieve work goals." The key foundation of core competencies in nursing is the specialized knowledge in the clinical work of nursing as well as the relevant applied disciplinary knowledge in practice, which reflects the substantive characteristics of the professional practice of nursing. Core competencies in nursing are also one of the key ways in which nursing professionals can accomplish the goals of professional clinical care, so the ability to master the clinical nursing process becomes fundamental to the achievement of nursing goals. Interpersonal communication skills, critical thinking skills, information retrieval and utilization skills, and lifelong learning skills are among the core nursing competencies, while professional nursing skills, team management and collaboration skills, professional nursing growth, and professional nursing values are among the basic nursing competencies. To summarize the above literature discussion, further research and definition are still needed regarding the content of nursing core competencies.

### **2.3 Core Competencies of Psychiatric Nurses**

Hospitals specializing in psychiatric diseases have a single type of disease and a high risk factor for patients. Nurses' clinical work includes routine observation of drug therapy effects and adverse reactions, assessment of possible risky behaviors, timely functioning of emergency plans, and mastery of new clinical therapeutic techniques and special treatment methods. In addition, as psychiatric patients as the main nursing object of psychiatric nurses, most of the patients have their cognitive impairment. One of the important nursing tasks in psychiatric specialties is to establish a harmonious therapeutic relationship with patients, which in turn leads to effective communication and ultimately to the improvement of the condition. As well as in the psychiatric nurses core competencies equally critical include nursing interpersonal communication skills, education and counseling skills, legal and ethical practice skills [9]. For the following reasons, psychiatric nurses are tasked with the mission of promoting public mental health, and good interpersonal communication skills can play a key role in bridging the gap between nurses and patients. Nurses are equally required to assist psychiatrists in the task of counseling patients and even healthy people, so education and counseling skills are equally important [10]. During the Xinguang epidemic, some of the population experienced a variety of negative emotions including panic and depression as well as anxiety, and many services for psychoeducation and counseling grew rapidly throughout the country, with most of the publicity, psychoeducation, and counseling done by local nurses, and were well received by the public. In addition, legal and ethical issues in psychiatric nursing are beginning to gradually come into the public eye. Psychiatric nurses should also master nursing-related laws and regulations because since the promulgation of the Mental Health Law of the People's Republic of China [11], the rights and interests of psychiatric patients have been emphasized as never before. Therefore, when dealing with and responding to ethical issues in practice, psychiatric nurses should also master nursing-related laws and regulations.

## **3. OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH ON CORE COMPETENCIES OF PSYCHIATRIC NURSES SPECIALIZING IN PSYCHIATRY**

The training and development of core competencies for psychiatric nurse specialists began in foreign countries a long time ago, and it is mainly based on academic education, which is usually required to be a master's level and above diploma [12]. However, the development of psychiatric nurse specialist training in China is relatively late

[13], and most of the research focuses on theoretical studies in the embryonic stage: psychiatric nurse specialist core competency components and so on.

#### **4. THE CORE COMPETENCY COMPONENTS OF PSYCHIATRIC NURSE SPECIALISTS**

Domestic scholars such as Cheng Geng [14] believe that the core competencies of psychiatric nurse specialists consist of seven aspects, including clinical care, professional development, critical thinking, interpersonal communication, education, management and legal and ethical practice. This study highlights the characteristics of core nursing competencies for psychiatric specialties, which is in line with the planning of psychiatric nursing development and has implications for standardizing core competencies for psychiatric nurses. Scholars Yuan Jie et al [15] from the perspective of the discipline specificity of psychiatry combined with the core competencies of nurses, which are categorized into four dimensions: clinical care, leadership and decision-making, education and guidance, and research. Cui Ying [16] developed the components of core competencies for psychiatric nurses based on the work of previous researchers, and determined the competency standards based on seven dimensions by using the delphi method, including: clinical care, educational tasks, managerial responsibilities, self-study, law, research, and teamwork. These findings highlight the characteristics of psychiatric nursing and have implications for nurses in other fields.

#### **5. ANALYSIS OF THE CURRENT STATUS OF CORE COMPETENCIES OF PSYCHIATRIC NURSE SPECIALISTS**

Domestic scholars Xia Zhichun et al [17] investigated the core competencies of 83 junior nurses using a self-assessment scale, the Chinese Registered Nurses Core Competency Scale (CIRN), as well as an other-assessment scale, and found that the core competencies of psychiatric junior nurses were at a moderate level. Among them, the ethical and/or legal practice competency was the first place in the score, and the scores of clinical nursing competency, critical thinking competency and/or research competency, and educational competency and/or counseling competency ranked in the last three places. Cai Qin et al [18] used the Psychiatric Nurse Specialist Core Competency Questionnaire for 99 psychiatric nurse specialists in Jiangsu Province, which showed that the total core competency scores of psychiatric nurse specialists are currently in a medium level state, with the first highest score for collaborative competency and the second highest for legal and ethical practice, both of which are at a very high level; and the lowest score for scientific research competency is at the bottom of the scale, which is at the middle to lower level. Zhu Ping et al [9] used convenience sampling method to select 193 nurses, which were divided into two groups of nurses with lower seniority and nurses with higher seniority as research subjects. The current status of core competencies of nurses in the two groups was investigated using CIRN, and the resultant total scores were at a moderate level. Younger nurses' educational counseling skills, critical thinking skills/research skills, and clinical nursing leadership skills were at a lower competency level. While the professional development critical thinking skills/research skills of mature nurses were at a medium-low level, the rest of the CIRN dimensions scores and total mean scores were higher than those of young nurses. Zhang Xiao-man [19] conducted a questionnaire survey on 237 nurses in the psychiatric department of a tertiary hospital in Shandong Province, and the results showed that the total core competency scores of psychiatric nurses were at a medium level; the highest scores were for ethical and legal practice competencies, and the lowest scores were for critical thinking competencies and research competencies. The results of the above literature are highly consistent: the total core competency scores of psychiatric nurses are currently at a medium level, and there are differences in core competencies between junior and senior nurses. It reveals that hospital management needs to strengthen the training of low seniority nurses, especially to develop clinical nursing skills, leadership skills, critical thinking and research skills, and educational and counseling skills. It is also necessary to pay attention to the training of senior nurses in critical thinking/research ability, actively develop nursing research and academic activities, and comprehensively improve the level of core competencies and competitiveness of the psychiatric nursing team in order to guarantee a more rational allocation of human resources.

#### **6. IMPLICATIONS**

In recent years, with the rapid change of society and the improvement of people's living standards as well as the development of medical technology, higher requirements have been put forward for psychiatric nurses' professional theoretical knowledge and practical skills. It is urgent to develop the core competence of psychiatric nurses. Define the work responsibilities of psychiatric nurse specialists, carry out training of specialist nurses, play

the leading role of specialist nurses, which is reflected in the training, teaching, health education and scientific research in clinical nursing work, put the optimization of the ability structure of psychiatric nursing personnel in an important position, establish a good working mode, improve the mental health of nurses, reduce the sense of burnout of nurses, improve the communication of psychiatric nursing personnel, and enhance interpersonal skills. ability, enhance interpersonal professionalism and a series of other comprehensive qualities, improve psychiatric nurses' independent learning ability, and help nurses realize their personal career planning. In this way, the core competence level of psychiatric nurses can be comprehensively improved, which will help to improve the level of psychiatric medical services and promote the rapid development of the national psychiatric nursing career.

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