

Enhancing Comfort in End-of-Life Care: The Crucial Role of Nursing

Melhorar o Conforto em Cuidados de Fim-de-Vida: O Papel Crucial da Enfermagem

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Death is an unavoidable reality for all living beings. However, approaching the end-of-life phase can be profoundly challenging, representing a significant paradigm shift for any individual.¹

In contemporary times, technological advancements and increased life expectancy have heightened the demand for palliative care, creating substantial challenges for healthcare systems and professionals. Optimizing patient comfort in end-of-life palliative nursing care is imperative in this complex context. The essence of "palliating," which involves promoting comfort, relief, and empathetic symptom control, is central to end-of-life care. Modern nursing integrates these concepts, emphasizing a holistic approach where the client's well-being is prioritized while curative measures are planned.²

The importance of comfort in the multifaceted, complex dimensions of human existence, rooted in subjective experiences, is undeniable. This concept relates to healthcare professionals' concern for promoting patients' well-being, respecting human dignity, and acknowledging the vulnerability that arises in the end-

of-life process. Florence Nightingale, the foremost pioneer of the nursing profession, emphasized the primacy of comfort and individual needs over nursing care itself, highlighting the importance of ensuring comfort beyond the obvious physical processes.³

In nursing, the goal is not only to treat the disease but to care for the person as a whole. This holistic approach is essential in palliative care, where the focus shifts from curative treatment to comfort and quality of life. Nurses play a critical role in managing pain, providing emotional support, and helping patients and families navigate the complexities of end-of-life care. The ability to alleviate physical discomfort and provide psychological and emotional comfort is a cornerstone of effective nursing practice in palliative care.⁴

A recent study highlighted that avoiding actions and attitudes diminishing patient comfort is a key quality indicator in palliative units, underscoring the domain's fundamental importance for care quality. This finding emphasizes that nursing professionals are not only aware of the need for comfort but are actively seeking ways to improve their practice continually.

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Moreover, the integration of comfort into nursing care provision is legally recognized, as it is the case within the Portuguese legislation, particularly emphasized in the context of palliative care.⁵ This legal framework supports nurses in prioritizing comfort, ensuring that their efforts are aligned with broader healthcare policies and patient rights.

However, practical implementation in nursing presents notable challenges, including issues at the levels of conceptualization, classification, diagnosis, intervention, and evaluation of actions. Nurses must navigate these challenges to deliver high-quality care. This involves continuous education, training, and a commitment to best practices in palliative care. As the population ages and the demand for palliative care increases, the role of nursing in providing comfort will become even more critical.

The need for a compassionate, patient-centered approach in end-of-life care cannot be overstated. By prioritizing comfort and adopting a holistic view of patient care, nurses can significantly enhance the quality of life for patients in their final days. This concern should be a focus for all those committed to improving care for such a vulnerable population as palliative patients. Ensuring that patients experience dignity, relief from suffering, and emotional support must be the ultimate goal of nursing care in the context of end-of-life and palliative situations.

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