

The Importance of Nursing in Caring for Patients with Autism

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Abstract:

Nursing plays a crucial role in the care of patients with autism, as these individuals often require specialized support that encompasses not only their physical health but also their emotional and psychological needs. Nurses are typically on the front lines, providing direct care and serving as advocates for patients, ensuring they receive appropriate interventions tailored to their unique sensory profiles and communication styles. By employing therapeutic communication techniques, such as using clear, simple language and nonverbal cues, nurses can foster trust and effectively engage with patients on the autism spectrum. They also collaborate with multidisciplinary teams to develop individualized care plans that address the specific challenges and strengths of each patient, promoting a more holistic approach to their health care. Furthermore, nurses are instrumental in educating families and caregivers about autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and the best practices for support and intervention at home and in the community. They provide valuable resources, helping families navigate the complexities of autism, including behavioral challenges and the impact on daily living. The empathetic support that nurses offer can significantly enhance the overall quality of life for individuals with autism, empowering them and their families to better cope with the demands of the condition. By fostering an inclusive environment that respects and accommodates sensory sensitivities and individual differences, nursing care not only improves health outcomes but also promotes independence and dignity for patients with ASD.

Keywords: Nursing, autism, patient care, therapeutic communication, individualized care plans, multidisciplinary teams, family education, behavioral challenges, sensory sensitivities, quality of life.

Introduction:

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a complex neurodevelopmental condition characterized by a range of difficulties in social interaction, communication, and restricted or repetitive patterns of behavior. As the prevalence of autism continues to rise globally, with current estimates suggesting that approximately 1 in 54 children in the United States are diagnosed with some form of ASD (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020), the role of nursing in the management and support of individuals with autism has become increasingly important. Nurses serve as frontline caregivers and advocates for patients through their lifespan, from

childhood through adulthood. Given their unique position within the healthcare system, nurses not only provide clinical care but also play a pivotal role in improving the overall quality of life for patients with autism and their families [1].

Nursing involves a multidimensional approach that encompasses medical care, emotional support, and educational guidance—all of which are essential aspects when caring for patients with autism. The complexities associated with ASD require nurses to possess specialized knowledge and skills that extend beyond traditional nursing protocols. As healthcare providers, nurses are tasked with addressing the unique challenges faced by patients with autism,

including sensory sensitivities, communication barriers, and behavioral challenges. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of autism is vital for nurses working in various settings, including hospitals, community clinics, schools, and home health environments [2].

One of the primary roles of nurses in the care of patients with autism is to facilitate effective communication. Many individuals with ASD experience difficulties in verbal and non-verbal communication, which can hinder their ability to express needs or concerns. This challenge creates barriers to receiving appropriate care, making it essential for nurses to employ various communication strategies tailored to the individual's abilities. Techniques such as visual aids, social stories, and other augmentative communication methods can enhance understanding and cooperation between the patient and the healthcare provider [3].

Moreover, the nursing profession often entails working as part of a multidisciplinary team to develop and implement individualized care plans. Nurses frequently liaise with other healthcare professionals, including physicians, psychologists, occupational therapists, and speech-language pathologists, to provide holistic care tailored to the patient's specific needs. The coordination of care among various disciplines not only maximizes the effectiveness of treatment but also ensures that all aspects of the patient's wellbeing—physical, emotional, and developmental—are adequately addressed [4].

Furthermore, nurses are in a unique position to advocate for patients and their families. Educating families about autism, its manifestations, treatment options, and available community resources is an integral component of nursing care. Nurses can empower families and caregivers with information and support, helping them navigate the complexities of healthcare systems and access necessary services. Advocacy extends beyond patient education; it includes promoting awareness about autism within the larger community and within various healthcare settings to foster an environment that is inclusive and responsive to the needs of individuals with autism [4].

In addition to meeting the immediate healthcare needs of patients with autism, nurses play a crucial role in the long-term management of the disorder. Many individuals with autism require ongoing care and support for managing associated medical

conditions like gastrointestinal issues, sleep disturbances, or anxiety disorders. A continuous nursing presence allows for ongoing assessment and monitoring of these conditions, promoting timely interventions and adjustments to care plans as necessary. This longitudinal care fosters trust and rapport between patients and healthcare providers, which can significantly reduce anxiety for both the patient and their family [4].

The importance of cultural competence in nursing practice cannot be overstated, particularly when caring for individuals with autism. Cultural beliefs and values significantly influence perceptions of disability, treatment preferences, and family dynamics. Nurses must recognize the diversity within the autism community and strive to provide culturally sensitive care that respects these differences. This cultural awareness enhances therapeutic relationships and improves the overall effectiveness of nursing interventions [5].

Lastly, as the landscape of autism care continues to evolve, nurses must engage in ongoing professional development and education to stay abreast of current research, best practices, and emerging therapies. Continuing education programs, workshops, and certification courses focusing on autism spectrum disorders are essential for ensuring that nurses possess the knowledge and skills necessary to provide optimal care for this unique population [5].

The Role of Nurses in Autism Care: An Overview:

The field of healthcare has long recognized the multi-dimensional needs of individuals diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). As autism rates have surged globally, the demand for specialized care has continued to grow. Within this burgeoning landscape, the role of nurses has become increasingly vital. Nurses serve not only as care providers but also as educators, advocates, and coordinators of care for individuals with autism and their families [5].

Before delving into the role of nurses, it is essential to understand what Autism Spectrum Disorder entails. Autism is a neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by difficulties in social interaction, communication deficits, and restricted or repetitive behaviors. The spectrum encompasses a broad range of symptoms and abilities, leading to varying degrees of challenges for individuals affected. This complexity underscores the necessity for a tailored,

multidisciplinary approach to care, in which nurses play a crucial component [6].

One of the primary responsibilities of nurses caring for individuals with autism is the provision of direct patient care. This encompasses assessments, interventions, and ongoing evaluation of health outcomes. Nurses in different settings—such as hospitals, outpatient clinics, and community care centers—are equipped to assess the physical and psychological health of individuals with autism. They monitor vital signs, administer medications, and manage co-occurring health conditions, which are frequently seen in individuals with autism, such as epilepsy, gastrointestinal disorders, or anxiety [6].

Nurses employing therapeutic communication techniques can help facilitate interactions with autistic patients who may struggle with verbal communication. By utilizing visual aids and alternative communication methods—such as Picture Exchange Communication Systems (PECS)—nurses can provide a greater level of understanding and trust, encouraging patients to express their needs and concerns [7].

Education plays a pivotal role in autism care, and nurses are in a key position to educate both patients and their families. By offering information regarding autism and developmental disorders, nurses can help demystify the condition and create an environment of support and understanding. They can guide families in recognizing signs and symptoms, optimizing care strategies, and navigating various healthcare systems [7].

Nurses also provide critical training to caregivers, educators, and healthcare professionals about the best practices for interacting with autistic individuals. This may include strategies for behavior management, sensory integration techniques, and methods to support social skills development. Educating those in the immediate sphere of autistic individuals is essential to build a comprehensive support network that extends beyond medical care, fostering inclusivity and understanding within families and communities [7].

Advocacy is another fundamental role of nursing in autism care. Nurses are often seen as the bridge between patients, families, and the healthcare system. They advocate for the needs of individuals with autism, ensuring they receive appropriate resources, services, and interventions. This can involve navigating complex insurance systems or

advocating for individualized education plans (IEPs) in schools [8].

Moreover, nurses can influence policy changes at local and national levels by raising awareness about the needs and challenges faced by individuals with autism. By participating in professional organizations, attending forums, and collaborating with community advocacy groups, nurses can help promote research, funding, and legislative efforts aimed at improving the lives of those on the autism spectrum.

Another critical aspect of the nursing role in autism care is care coordination. Nurses often take the lead in orchestrating the multidisciplinary approach required for effective intervention. This encompasses collaboration with a wide array of professionals, including physicians, speech and occupational therapists, psychologists, and social workers. The complexity of autism often necessitates a tailored treatment plan, requiring input from various disciplines to address holistic needs—social, emotional, educational, and physiological [9].

Nurses serve as case managers, helping to track patient progress, schedule appointments, and ensure seamless transitions between different services. They keep meticulous records and communicate effectively with all parties involved, ensuring that every aspect of the patient's care is interconnected and aligned with their overall treatment goals [10].

The mental health of individuals with autism is another area where nurses can significantly impact. Many individuals on the autism spectrum experience mental health challenges, including anxiety, depression, and behavioral issues. Nurses trained in mental health nursing can employ evidence-based interventions to assist these individuals [11].

They can implement cognitive-behavioral strategies, mindfulness practices, and stress-relief techniques, tailored to the unique challenges faced by their patients. Recognizing signs of distress and connecting individuals to counseling services or support groups can also play a pivotal role in mental wellness.

Given the evolving nature of research and treatment options for autism, continuous education and professional development for nurses are crucial. Autism care is not static; it adapts as new evidence emerges from scientific studies and clinical

practices. Nurses must stay informed about the latest interventions, therapies, and technological advancements to provide the best possible care. This might involve attending workshops, engaging in specialized training, or pursuing certifications in autism care [12].

Despite the vital role nurses play in autism care, they often face challenges such as limited resources, high caseloads, and the need for training in autism-specific practices. Addressing these challenges requires systemic changes in educational programs, healthcare policies, and community support [12].

Communication Strategies for Effectively Engaging Patients with Autism:

In an increasingly diverse healthcare environment, medical professionals face the challenge of catering to various patient needs, among which is the necessity to effectively communicate with patients on the autism spectrum. Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) comprises a range of neurodevelopmental conditions characterized by difficulties in social interactions, communication, and restrictive or repetitive behavior patterns. As such, it is essential for healthcare providers to develop tailored communication strategies to engage and support patients with autism in a meaningful and effective manner [13].

The cornerstone of effective communication with patients on the autism spectrum lies in the comprehension of their unique needs and challenges. Autism manifests differently in each individual, encompassing a broad range of abilities, skills, and preferences. For some, verbal communication may be limited or absent, while others may communicate fluently but struggle with nonverbal cues, figurative language, or understanding social nuances. Moreover, sensory sensitivities can significantly impact a person's comfort level in clinical settings, where bright lights, loud noises, or even unfamiliar smells can provoke anxiety or distress [13].

To engage effectively, healthcare providers should undergo training on autism awareness to help them understand the complexities associated with the disorder. This training should encompass insights into the diverse characteristics of ASD, including challenges related to social communication, sensory processing, and emotional regulation. By equipping themselves with knowledge about these aspects, providers can adjust their communication styles and

create a supportive atmosphere that respects each patient's individuality [14].

Creating a welcoming and inclusive environment is critical when engaging patients with autism. The physical setting of healthcare facilities should be carefully considered. Sensory-friendly spaces can alleviate anxiety and enhance communication effectiveness. Design elements such as soft lighting, soundproofing to minimize noise, and calm colors can create a soothing environment that helps patients feel more at ease [15].

Furthermore, staff training is essential in fostering an inclusive atmosphere. All personnel, from administration to clinical providers, should be educated on the nuances of ASD and the significance of respectful, patient-centered communication. Simple courtesy practices—such as allowing extra time for responses, maintaining a calm demeanor, and showing patience—can significantly enhance interactions with patients. Conducting consultations with family members or caregivers can also provide valuable insights into the patient's preferences, thus creating a more supportive experience [16].

Among the most effective strategies for engaging patients with autism is the implementation of clear, concise communication. Clarity is particularly important, as individuals with autism may struggle to understand complex language or abstract terms. Healthcare providers should aim to utilize simple language, short sentences, and direct statements. For example, rather than asking open-ended questions, it is more effective to use yes/no questions or to give options, which can help patients navigate their responses without overwhelming them [16].

Additionally, the use of concrete language is crucial. Figurative expressions, idioms, and slang can pose barriers to understanding; therefore, healthcare providers should avoid such phrases and instead convey information in literal terms. For instance, stating “We are going to take your blood for testing” is much clearer than saying “We are going to draw your blood [16].”

Visual aids serve as powerful tools for enhancing communication with patients on the autism spectrum. Many individuals with ASD are visual learners, which means they may grasp concepts better when presented visually rather than verbally. Providers can integrate various visual aids into clinical interactions, including pictures, diagrams, charts, and written instructions [17].

For example, utilizing pictograms to illustrate procedures can help demystify processes that may otherwise provoke anxiety. A visual schedule outlining the steps of a medical appointment can provide structure and predictability, reducing uncertainty and allowing the patient to mentally prepare for what lies ahead. Additionally, visual tools like social stories—short, personalized narratives that illustrate social situations—can offer valuable insight into what a patient may encounter during an appointment, easing anxiety and improving cooperation [17].

An often-overlooked aspect of effective communication with patients with autism is the encouragement of feedback. Creating an open dialogue where patients feel comfortable expressing their needs and concerns can significantly enhance the patient-provider relationship. Healthcare providers should invite patients to share their thoughts about the communication process itself. Inquiries such as “How am I doing?” or “Is there anything that would help you understand better?” can empower patients and foster a collaborative atmosphere [17].

Moreover, caregivers can be instrumental in this feedback loop. Engaging family members or trusted advocates can provide crucial insights into a patient’s communication preferences and needs. By partnering with caregivers in the dialogue, healthcare providers can modify their approaches in real-time, ensuring that patient care is tailored to the individual’s unique requirements [17].

Individualized Care Plans: Tailoring Nursing Approaches to Meet Unique Needs:

In the realm of healthcare, there is a growing recognition of the importance of individualized care plans that cater to the unique needs of each patient. Individualized Care Plans (ICPs) represent an essential approach in nursing that prioritizes patient-centered care by acknowledging the differences in health conditions, personal preferences, and socio-economic status of patients. These customized plans are crucial for enhancing patient outcomes, increasing satisfaction, and promoting efficient use of healthcare resources [18].

An Individualized Care Plan is a systematic method used by nursing professionals to create tailored interventions aimed at addressing the specific needs of a patient. This plan typically involves a comprehensive assessment of the patient's medical history, current health status, psychosocial factors,

and environmental context. The creation of ICPs is a collaborative effort; nurses work closely with patients, their families, and other healthcare professionals to develop a holistic care strategy that reflects the values, preferences, and goals of the patient [18].

The philosophy behind individualized care is rooted in the model of patient-centered care, which champions the concept of treating patients as active participants in their care journey. The American Nurses Association (ANA) emphasizes that nurses have a critical role in the delivery of patient-centered care that respects and responds to individual patient preferences, needs, and values [18].

The advent of ICPs in nursing practice presents an opportunity to improve healthcare delivery on multiple levels. First and foremost, these plans encourage a more comprehensive understanding of the patient as a whole rather than merely focusing on the disease or condition. Patients dealing with chronic illnesses, for instance, often face unique challenges that vary significantly from one individual to another. An individualized care plan takes these variables into account, ensuring that the interventions are not only clinically appropriate but also relevant to the patient's lifestyle and preferences.

Moreover, ICPs foster improved communication and collaboration among healthcare professionals. By engaging multidisciplinary teams in the development of care plans, various perspectives and expertise can contribute to better decision-making processes that enhance the quality of care. This collaborative environment reduces the likelihood of discrepancies in the treatment approach and helps create a blanket of support for the patient, reinforcing the importance of shared responsibility in achieving positive health outcomes [19].

In addition, individualized care plans can lead to better patient satisfaction. When patients feel seen, heard, and valued as unique individuals, their trust in the healthcare system strengthens. Studies have shown that patient satisfaction is often linked to tailored care initiatives. Patients who believe that their specific needs are being addressed are more likely to adhere to treatment protocols, engage in preventive health measures, and communicate openly with their healthcare providers [19].

Creating an effective individualized care plan involves several critical steps. The first is the comprehensive assessment, which should include

not only the physical health status of the patient but also psychological and social dimensions. Nurses use various assessment tools and techniques, such as standardized questionnaires, patient interviews, and observational assessments, to gather comprehensive data [19].

Following the assessment, nurses must identify the key problems or challenges faced by the patient. This step requires critical thinking and analysis, as the nurse must synthesize the assessment data to determine priority issues. Subsequently, measurable goals and objectives should be established based on the identified problems. These goals should be Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound (SMART) to facilitate clear evaluation criteria [20].

After the goals are defined, the next phase involves planning interventions. These interventions should reflect best practices and evidence-based methods while accommodating the patient's values and preferences. The involvement of patients in this stage is crucial; effective communication ensures that patients are not just passive recipients of care but active contributors to their health journey [20].

The final steps involve implementing the care plan and continuously evaluating its effectiveness. Regular reassessments allow nurses to monitor progress and make necessary adjustments to the plan. This dynamic process reflects the fluidity of healthcare needs, as changes can arise due to improvements in health status or new challenges emerging [21].

While the benefits of individualized care plans are plentiful, their implementation is not without challenges. Time constraints in busy healthcare environments can hinder nurses' ability to conduct comprehensive assessments and develop tailored care plans. Furthermore, inadequate staffing levels may restrict opportunities for collaborative efforts among healthcare professionals [21].

Another challenge arises from varying levels of patient engagement. Not all patients are equipped or motivated to participate actively in the care planning process. Factors such as age, cultural background, cognitive impairments, and health literacy can affect a patient's ability to engage fully. In such cases, it becomes the responsibility of healthcare providers to adapt their communication techniques and provide additional support [22].

Additionally, healthcare systems may face institutional barriers, such as rigid protocols that do not align with the individualized approach. For an ICP to be successful, healthcare institutions must cultivate a culture that prioritizes patient-centered practices and supports the autonomy of healthcare professionals [22].

Multidisciplinary Collaboration in Autism Care:

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a complex neurodevelopmental condition characterized by challenges related to social interaction, communication, and behavior. Individuals with autism may exhibit a wide range of abilities and challenges, leading to unique needs in their care and support systems. As awareness and understanding of ASD have evolved, it has become increasingly clear that a multidisciplinary approach to autism care is essential for providing comprehensive support to individuals and their families [23].

Before delving into the nuances of multidisciplinary collaboration, it is crucial to understand the nature of autism. ASD is characterized by a spectrum of symptoms and challenges, which means that no two individuals with autism are the same. While some may have significant cognitive and communicative impairments, others may possess advanced skills in specific areas, such as mathematics or music. Furthermore, autism can co-occur with other conditions, including attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), anxiety disorders, and intellectual disabilities, complicating care and treatment [23].

Given this variability, a one-size-fits-all approach to intervention and care is insufficient. Instead, effective autism care requires tailored strategies that address the unique strengths and challenges encountered by each individual. Herein lies the significance of multidisciplinary collaboration, which involves the integration of expertise and perspectives from different fields to create a cohesive care plan that supports every aspect of an individual's well-being [24].

The Components of Multidisciplinary Collaboration

Collaboration among various professionals is central to the effectiveness of autism care. This interdisciplinary approach typically includes a range of specialists, such as:

1. **Psychologists:** Often at the forefront of autism assessment and intervention, psychologists provide valuable insights

into cognitive and emotional functioning. They conduct standardized assessments to create comprehensive profiles that highlight strengths and challenges, which can inform treatment strategies [25].

2. **Speech-Language Pathologists (SLPs):** Given that many individuals with autism experience difficulties with communication, SLPs play an essential role in promoting effective verbal and non-verbal communication skills. They employ various therapeutic techniques tailored to each individual's abilities and challenges, facilitating improved social interaction.
3. **Occupational Therapists (OTs):** OTs focus on enhancing the individual's ability to participate in daily activities. They work on skills such as self-care, play, and social participation, taking into account sensory processing issues that may affect an individual's functioning.
4. **Special Education Teachers:** In educational settings, special education teachers are instrumental in implementing individualized education plans (IEPs) tailored to meet the specific learning needs of students with autism. They foster academic and social development in a supportive classroom environment [25].
5. **Medical Professionals:** Pediatricians, psychiatrists, and neurologists contribute a medical lens to autism care. They manage co-occurring medical conditions, monitor developmental milestones, and prescribe medications when necessary to address behavioral or psychological challenges.
6. **Social Workers:** Social workers provide essential support to families, helping them navigate the complexities of the healthcare and educational systems. They offer resources, counseling, and advocacy, creating a bridge between families and healthcare providers.
7. **Caregivers and Family Members:** Often overlooked in professional collaborations, family members are crucial stakeholders in autism care. Their insights into the individual's needs, preferences, and behaviors are vital for creating effective intervention strategies [25].

Effective Collaboration in Practice

For multidisciplinary collaboration to be effective, several key principles should guide the process:

1. **Communication:** Open lines of communication are essential among all team members. Regular meetings, shared documentation, and collaborative goal-setting foster a unified approach to care. This communication should also extend to families, who should be kept informed and involved in decision-making [26].
2. **Shared Goals:** Establishing clear, shared goals among team members ensures that everyone is aligned in their approach to care. Individual treatment plans should incorporate these goals, promoting a holistic perspective focused on the individual's strengths and aspirations.
3. **Respect for Expertise:** Each professional brings unique knowledge and skills to the table. Acknowledging and respecting each member's expertise fosters a culture of collaboration where diverse perspectives are valued and integrated [26].
4. **Family-Centered Care:** Families should be regarded as equal partners in the collaborative process. Their input regarding the individual's needs and preferences should inform care strategies, creating an environment that empowers families.
5. **Flexibility:** The needs of individuals with autism may evolve over time, requiring flexibility in treatment strategies and care approaches. A multidisciplinary team should be willing to adapt their plans based on ongoing assessments and feedback from families and individuals [26].

Benefits of Multidisciplinary Collaboration

The benefits of a multidisciplinary collaboration in autism care are profound and far-reaching:

1. **Comprehensive Care:** By integrating diverse expertise, multidisciplinary teams can develop comprehensive care plans that address the multifaceted needs of individuals with autism. This holistic approach enhances the individual's development in various domains, including

social skills, academic achievement, and overall well-being [27].

2. **Enhanced Outcomes:** Research has shown that collaborative care models lead to improved outcomes for individuals with autism. By leveraging each professional's strengths and insights, the likelihood of positive progress in areas such as communication, social interaction, and behavior management is significantly increased.
3. **Empowerment for Families:** Families often feel overwhelmed navigating the complexities of autism care. A collaborative approach empowers families by providing them with access to a team of specialists who can support them through the challenges they face. Furthermore, families are included in the care process, leading to a stronger sense of control and advocacy for their loved ones [27].
4. **Holistic Development:** Autism does not exist in a vacuum, and individuals with ASD benefit from approaches that consider the interplay between their cognitive, emotional, social, and physical development. Multidisciplinary collaboration shines in this regard, enabling practitioners to create well-rounded care strategies that promote overall growth.
5. **Sustainable Support Systems:** Collaborative models create a network of support that extends beyond individual treatment sessions. By fostering strong connections between families and professionals, individuals with autism and their families can access a continual source of advocacy, education, and resources [27].

Nurses as Advocates: Supporting Families of Patients with Autism:

In the sphere of healthcare, nurses occupy a unique and vital role, not only providing medical care but also serving as advocates for patients and their families. This advocacy becomes particularly pronounced in the case of patients with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), a neurodevelopmental condition that affects communication, behavior, and social interaction. Families of individuals with autism face myriad challenges, and the support of

health professionals, especially nurses, can be a significant resource during times of stress and uncertainty [28].

Before focusing on the advocacy role of nurses, it is important to understand the complexities surrounding autism. Autism is a spectrum disorder, meaning it encompasses a wide range of symptoms and challenges that vary significantly between individuals. Core characteristics include difficulties with interpersonal communication, restrictive or repetitive behaviors, and unique sensory processing experiences. Children and adults with autism may find it challenging to navigate social situations and express their needs effectively. For families, this can lead to a sense of isolation, confusion, and fear regarding the future of their loved ones [28].

Families often grapple with the emotional burden of their loved one's diagnosis and the societal misconceptions surrounding autism. They may face stigma, lack of understanding from peers, and difficulties accessing appropriate resources and services. In this context, the role of nurses extends beyond traditional care; it encompasses providing emotional and informational support, fostering understanding, and facilitating access to resources [29].

Effective communication is the cornerstone of nursing practice, and it is especially crucial in advocating for families of patients with autism. Nurses are often the primary points of contact within healthcare settings. They possess a unique position to bridge the gap between medical professionals, patients, and their families. By utilizing clear and compassionate communication, nurses can provide families with essential information about autism, treatment options, and available resources [29].

For instance, nurses can educate families about early intervention services, behavioral therapy options, and educational support tailored to individuals with autism. They can help families understand the importance of routine and predictability in the lives of individuals with autism, as well as strategies to manage sensory sensitivities and behavioral challenges. Additionally, nurses can guide families on how to effectively communicate with their loved ones, providing tips on creating a supportive environment that emphasizes understanding and patience [29].

Notably, nurses also play a critical role in advocating for patients who may have difficulty articulating their needs. By observing non-verbal

cues and behaviors, nurses can relay important information back to the healthcare team, ensuring that the unique perspectives and needs of the patient are taken into consideration during their care [30].

Compassionate care is fundamental in nursing, particularly when advocating for families of individuals with autism. Nurses often encounter families who are experiencing heightened levels of stress, anxiety, and grief. This is compounded by the societal barriers and misunderstandings surrounding autism, which can further alienate families from support networks. Therefore, a core aspect of a nurse's advocacy role is to provide emotional support and validation to these families [31].

Nurses can foster a sense of trust and understanding through active listening and empathetic engagement. By creating a safe space for families to share their fears, frustrations, and triumphs, nurses can help alleviate feelings of isolation. They can also help families navigate the emotional rollercoaster that often accompanies a diagnosis of autism. By normalizing the ups and downs of this journey and providing practical coping strategies, nurses can empower families to advocate for themselves and their loved ones [31].

Moreover, nurses can facilitate connections to local support groups and community resources, giving families opportunities to interact with others who share similar experiences. These networks can provide invaluable emotional reassurance and practical solutions, further enhancing the support that nurses can offer [32].

In the pursuit of optimal care for patients with autism, nurses must also advocate for accessible education and resources for families. This advocacy takes many forms, including supporting families in accessing health services, educational supports, and community programs. Nurses can help families navigate the often-complex healthcare and educational systems, which may feel overwhelming, particularly for those new to the autism journey [32].

Specifically, nurses can assist families in understanding their rights regarding special education services and accommodations in the school system. They can advocate for individualized education plans (IEPs) tailored to the unique needs of children with autism, facilitating collaboration between healthcare providers, educators, and family members. By empowering families with knowledge, nurses can help them become effective advocates for

their children, ensuring their needs are met both within healthcare settings and at school [32].

To effectively advocate for families of patients with autism, nurses must collaborate with other healthcare professionals, educators, and community organizations. Interprofessional collaboration leverages the strengths and expertise of various disciplines to provide comprehensive care. In practice, this can mean coordinating with psychologists, speech therapists, occupational therapists, and special education teachers to develop multi-faceted care plans that address the medical, emotional, and educational needs of patients [33].

Through this collaboration, nurses can help ensure that families receive cohesive and holistic care. By participating in team meetings and case discussions, nurses provide critical insights into individual patient needs based on their frontline experience, advocating effectively for required resources and supports [33].

Enhancing Quality of Life through Nursing Interventions:

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a complex neurodevelopmental condition characterized by a wide range of symptoms, including challenges in social interaction, communication difficulties, and restricted or repetitive behaviors. With the increasing recognition of autism as a fundamental public health concern, the role of nursing professionals has become increasingly pivotal in designing and implementing interventions aimed at enhancing the quality of life for individuals on the autism spectrum [34].

The prevalence of autism has been rising, with the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimating that approximately 1 in 44 children are diagnosed with ASD. The spectrum nature of the disorder means that individuals experience varying degrees of symptoms and functional capabilities. Many autistic individuals can lead fulfilling lives when supported with appropriate resources and interventions tailored to their unique needs. These interventions must encompass a biopsychosocial approach, linking biological, psychological, and social factors that contribute to the individual's overall health [35].

Nurses are at the frontline of patient care, making them well-suited to advocate for and implement effective interventions for autistic patients. Their expertise encompasses not only clinical skills but

also a deep understanding of human behavior, making them critical players in promoting health and quality of life. Moreover, nurses often serve as liaisons between the patients, their families, and other healthcare professionals, ensuring coordinated care that addresses both physical and mental health needs [36].

A thorough assessment is a crucial first step in understanding the needs of autistic patients. Nurses utilize a range of assessment tools to evaluate various aspects of the patient's life, including sensory sensitivities, communication skills, and social interactions. By gathering comprehensive data through standardized assessments and observational methods, nurses can gain insights into the strengths and challenges faced by their patients. This information is vital in developing personalized care plans aimed at improving the quality of life for individuals with autism [37].

After identifying the unique needs of each patient, nurses can develop individualized care plans. These plans may include behavioral interventions, medication management, and support strategies for communication. Collaborating with interdisciplinary teams—comprising occupational therapists, speech-language pathologists, and psychologists—allows nurses to craft holistic care strategies that address the multifaceted challenges faced by autistic patients. By tailoring interventions to fit the specific needs and preferences of patients, nurses can foster environments that promote autonomy and empower individuals on the spectrum [38].

Many individuals with autism experience sensory processing issues, leading them to be either hypersensitive or hyposensitive to sensory stimuli. As such, nurses can implement sensory integration techniques to help patients manage sensory overload or seek sensory input in constructive ways. This may involve creating calming spaces with soft lighting and sensory-friendly materials or engaging patients in activities like deep pressure massage or weighted blankets. Such interventions can aid in reducing anxiety and increasing comfort, ultimately contributing to an enhanced quality of life [39].

Effective communication is a cornerstone of quality life across all populations, and this is particularly true for autistic individuals, many of whom may struggle with verbal communication. Nurses can facilitate Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) approaches to help non-verbal patients express their needs and desires.

Tools such as communication boards, speech-generating devices, or mobile apps can bridge the communication gap, empowering autistic patients to share their thoughts, preferences, and emotions. By promoting strategies that enhance communication, nurses enrich social interactions and enable patients to engage more fully in their environments [40].

Behavioral approaches, particularly Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA), are widely endorsed for helping autistic individuals develop essential life skills. Nurses can incorporate these methods into daily care, focusing on positive reinforcement to encourage desired behaviors while teaching coping mechanisms for challenging situations. Consistency in behavioral interventions fosters predictability, which is often beneficial for autistic patients. Nurses need to maintain open lines of communication with families about the interventions being employed, ensuring continuity of care and promoting skills that extend beyond healthcare settings [41].

Nurses play a crucial role in educating families about autism and the available resources. Family engagement is essential for the successful implementation of any intervention; thus, equipping families with knowledge about autism and training on support techniques is essential. By providing families with tools and strategies to manage challenges and promote development, nurses can enhance the overall environment in which the autistic individual lives, creating a cooperative support system that significantly contributes to improved quality of life [42].

Many autistic individuals face comorbid mental health conditions such as anxiety, depression, and attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Nurses need to adopt mental health screening tools to identify symptoms early and provide access to appropriate care. Therapeutic interventions, such as mindfulness practices, cognitive-behavioral strategies, and group therapy, can be integrated into clinical practice to help patients manage their mental health more effectively. By addressing psychological wellbeing, nurses can help individuals achieve emotional stability, ultimately fostering a better quality of life [43].

Future Directions for Nursing Practice in the Care of Individuals with Autism:

The prevalence of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) has seen a marked increase over the past few decades, necessitating an evolution in nursing practices to meet the specialized needs of

individuals with autism. As healthcare systems adapt to this growing demographic, nurses play a crucial role in delivering care that is not only effective but also compassionate and tailored to the unique challenges faced by those with autism [44].

The first step towards improving nursing care for individuals with autism is the enhancement of training and education programs. Current nursing curricula often lack comprehensive coverage of autism-specific issues, thereby leaving many nurses ill-equipped to provide optimal care. Future directions must emphasize the development of specialized training modules focused on autism spectrum disorder [45].

This includes understanding the nuances of communication styles, sensory sensitivities, and behavioral challenges often faced by individuals with autism. Integrating modules that provide real-world scenarios, case studies, and hands-on training can help nurses become adept at recognizing and interpreting the signs of distress, anxiety, or discomfort in non-verbal patients. Advanced certifications in autism care can also be developed for nurses interested in specializing in this area [46].

Nursing practice cannot operate in isolation, especially in complex cases like autism. Future directions must include fostering interdisciplinary collaboration amongst various healthcare professionals, such as occupational therapists, speech therapists, psychologists, and social workers. This collaborative approach ensures a holistic evaluation and intervention plan that addresses the myriad facets of autism [47].

Nurses can serve as the linchpin in these teams, utilizing their clinical insights to advocate for patients while effectively communicating their needs to other team members. Regular interdisciplinary meetings can facilitate the sharing of progress and concerns, ensuring that care is continuously responsive to the evolving needs of the individual with autism [48].

The understanding of autism is not free from cultural biases, and future nursing practice must strive to offer culturally competent care. Various cultural perceptions and stigmas surrounding autism can impede access to adequate care and resources. Nurses need to develop an awareness of how cultural background can influence the perception of autism and the willingness of families to seek care [49].

Training in cultural competence should encompass strategies for effectively communicating with individuals from diverse backgrounds, as well as understanding their unique family dynamics. Outreach programs tailored to specific communities can help break down barriers to care and foster trust between healthcare providers and families [49].

Individuals with autism often exhibit comorbid mental health conditions such as anxiety, depression, and obsessive-compulsive disorder. As mental health plays a significant role in overall well-being, future directions for nursing practice must prioritize the integration of mental health services into care plans.

Nurses should be prepared to screen for mental health issues, initiate therapeutic conversations, and provide supportive interventions. Creating a margin of safe spaces within healthcare settings for individuals with autism to express their concerns could also prove beneficial. Future practice can involve building therapeutic relationships that promote mental wellness, going beyond traditional medical care to encompass psychological support [49].

Advancements in technology present exciting opportunities for improving nursing care for individuals with autism. Telehealth services, for example, can enhance access to care for families living in rural or underserved areas. Future nursing practice should encompass proficiency in telehealth platforms, enabling nurses to perform assessments, follow-ups, and provide education remotely [50].

Moreover, the use of assistive technologies can help improve communication for non-verbal individuals with autism. Tools such as Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) devices can empower patients to express their needs more effectively. Training nurses to incorporate these technologies into their practice can significantly enhance patient engagement and compliance with therapeutic interventions [51].

Nurses have a pivotal role in advocacy and raising public awareness about autism. Future directions should include empowering nurses to advocate for policy changes that promote better access to services, support for families, and funding for autism-related research. Nurses can engage in community outreach initiatives to educate the public on autism, dispel myths, and foster acceptance. By promoting understanding and awareness, nurses can

help build inclusive environments where individuals with autism thrive [52].

Conclusion:

In conclusion, nursing plays an indispensable role in the care and support of individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), addressing their unique health needs and fostering a nurturing environment that enhances their quality of life. Through effective communication, the development of individualized care plans, and collaboration with multidisciplinary teams, nurses can provide comprehensive care that not only addresses physical health but also considers the emotional, behavioral, and cognitive challenges associated with autism. By being advocates for patients and their families, nurses empower them with knowledge and resources, facilitating better management of the condition within the community and home settings.

As awareness of autism continues to grow, the demand for skilled nursing professionals equipped with specialized knowledge in this area will become increasingly vital. Ongoing education and training in autism care will strengthen nursing practice, ensuring that healthcare providers remain responsive to the evolving needs of this population. Ultimately, the commitment of nurses to provide compassionate and tailored care can significantly impact the lives of individuals with autism, promoting their well-being, independence, and dignity throughout their healthcare journey.

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