



NURSES' EXPERIENCES IN PROVIDING PALLIATIVE CARE TO STROKE PATIENTS

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ABSTRACT

Stroke is one of the main diseases that causes long-term disability and increases the need for palliative care. Nurses play a central role in providing palliative nursing care, especially in improving the quality of life of patients experiencing physical, psychological, social, and spiritual disorders. Exploring the experiences of nurses providing palliative care to stroke patients in the Garuda Ward of S.K. Lerik Regional General Hospital in Kupang City. This study used a qualitative method with a phenomenological approach. Data were obtained through in-depth interviews, using purposive sampling technique with 10 nurses as participants. The participant was selected based on inclusion criteria as follow: nurses who have experiences in palliative nursing care for stroke patients. We identified five main themes as follow: (1) Nurses have a good understanding of palliative care, (2) Patience and empathy as the main keys for nurses, (3) Professional responsibility and initiative of nurses, (4) Collaboration and initiatives in providing palliative care, (5) The need for palliative care competency development. Nevertheless, nurses demonstrated strong commitment and high empathy in providing holistic support for stroke patients.

Keywords: nursing care; nurses' experiences; palliative care; stroke patients

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INTRODUCTION

A stroke is a neurological disorder that occurs suddenly due to disruption of blood flow to the brain, either due to blockage or reduced blood supply. This disease is one of the leading causes of morbidity and mortality worldwide. (Ariyanto et al., 2023). According to the 2022 WHO report, more than 101 million people worldwide live with a history of stroke, and there are approximately 12.2 million new cases each year (Saposnik et al., 2022). Indonesia ranks among the top three countries for stroke-related catastrophic illnesses, with 1.7 million cases and significant economic and social impacts (Aditianti et al., 2020), however in East Nusa Tenggara province the highest rates are recorded in Sikka Regency (9%), Manggarai (8%), and Kupang City (5%) (Wahab, 2021). Based on data from the S.K. Lerik General Hospital in Kupang City from 2023 to 2024, there were 62 cases of stroke treated in the Garuda inpatient ward, with the majority being non-hemorrhagic strokes. Most patients experienced complications such as difficulty swallowing (dysphagia), severe pain, mobility issues, and complete dependence on nursing assistance for daily activities.

Palliative care is an important approach in improving the quality of life of stroke patients, especially those in the terminal phase. Palliative care not only covers pain management but also supports the emotional, spiritual, and social aspects of patients and their families. Nurses, as healthcare professionals who are closest to and interact most frequently with patients, play a central role in implementing holistic and humane palliative care. However, palliative care services at S.K. Lerik General Hospital have not yet been fully integrated into the hospital's care system. Nurses still face challenges such as limited specialized training, the absence of a palliative care team, emotional stress when caring for terminally ill patients, and insufficient institutional support in the form of

policies or supporting facilities. In line with these conditions, it is important to gain an in-depth understanding of nurses' experiences in providing palliative care to stroke patients, particularly in the Garuda inpatient ward. This study is expected to contribute to the development of palliative care services that are contextual, adaptive, and tailored to local needs in Kupang City.

This study aims to explore in depth the experiences of nurses providing palliative care to stroke patients in the Garuda ward of S.K. Lerik Regional General Hospital in Kupang. The primary focus of this study includes analyzing nurses' understanding of the concepts and implementation of palliative care for stroke patients, identifying strategies used to demonstrate empathy and patience during the care process, and describing the forms of collaboration between nurses, other healthcare professionals, and patients' families in providing palliative care services. Additionally, this study explores the various challenges nurses face in palliative care practice and identifies the need for competency development and institutional support required to optimize the quality of palliative care services.

METHOD

We submitted a letter requesting permission to the Director of RSUD S.K. Lerik Kupang with registered number 400/STIK-Ns/E.07/IV/2025 and then we presented the proposal to the hospital. After completing the research, we received a letter from Dinas Kesehatan Kota Kupang with registered number B-710/RSUD.SKL.4007.22.1/VII/2025. This study uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological method to explore in depth the experiences of nurses providing palliative care to stroke patients. Ten nurses working in the Garuda ward of S.K. Lerik General Hospital with a minimum of two years of work experience were selected as informants through *purposive sampling* based on specific inclusion criteria. Data were collected through in-depth interviews using a semi-structured guide, conducted in person and recorded with the informants' consent. The interview results were then transcribed and analyzed using *Colaizzi's* method, which includes the stages of repeatedly reading the transcripts, identifying meaningful statements, grouping meanings into themes, and constructing essential descriptions based on the informants' experiences. To maintain data validity, source triangulation and member checking techniques were used to ensure the accuracy and credibility of the information obtained.

RESULT

Based on in-depth interviews with ten participants, this study identified five main themes that describe nurses' experiences in providing palliative care to stroke patients in the Garuda ward of S.K. Lerik Regional General Hospital in Kupang City.

Theme 1: Nurses Have Good Understanding on Palliative Care

The nurses who participated in the interviews demonstrated a good to deep understanding of the concept of palliative care. This was reflected in the way they explained the main objectives of care, who the targets were, the holistic approach, and its impact on improving the quality of life of patients and their families. This understanding is an important basis for the implementation of appropriate and meaningful palliative nursing practices.

“Palliative care focuses more on improving life quality of a patient...not only patient, but also his/her family.” (N1)

“Palliative care is provided to patients suffering from serious or life-threatening illnesses... including stroke patients.” (N2)

“Palliative care supports and continuously improves the quality of life of patients with conditions such as cancer, kidney failure, and stroke.” (N3)

“Efforts to improve the physical, psychosocial, and spiritual quality of life of patients.” (N6)

“This care is a service to improve quality of life and provide comfort to patients with certain diseases.” (N8)

“Palliative care is... a psychological and spiritual approach for patients and their families.” (N10)

Theme 2: Patience and Empathy as Key Qualities for Nurses

Nurses emphasized that caring for stroke patients in palliative care requires a high degree of patience, empathy, and a willingness to understand the patient's condition holistically.

“As nurses, we must be more patient when dealing with stroke patients, whose emotions are unstable.” (N1)

“We often motivate patients who feel hopeless to stay positive.” (N3)

“Palliative care makes us more patient, truly training us to be sensitive and face patients.” (N6)

“We must be patient... because the patients are elderly and have had a stroke, so sometimes they wonder what the point of living is anymore, so we nurses must give them encouragement.” (N4)

Theme 3: Professional Responsibility and Initiative of Nurses

Nurses take the initiative to provide interventions, train patients, and assist with the training process even without direct instructions from doctors.

“Sometimes there are instructions from doctors, but sometimes it is the initiative of the nurses in the room to do light activity training.” (N7)

“We monitor patients’ blood pressure and neurological status regularly.” (N2)

“We help patients and teach families how to mobilize them, turning them from side to side, to prevent pressure ulcers.” (N5)

“Nurses must be proactive and not just wait for orders, because stroke patients deteriorate quickly if they are not trained.” (N3)

Theme 4: Collaboration and Initiatives in Providing Palliative Care

Nurses take the initiative to provide interventions, train patients, and assist with the training process even without direct instructions from doctors.

“Sometimes there are instructions from doctors, but sometimes it is the initiative of the nurses in the room to do light activity training.” (N7)

“We help patients, teach families how to mobilize them, turn them from side to side, to prevent pressure ulcers.” (N5)

“Nurses must be proactive, not just wait for orders, because stroke patients deteriorate quickly if they are not trained.” (N3)

“Often patients cannot speak Indonesian, so we ask family members to act as interpreters.” (N2)

Theme 5: Competency Development Needs and System Support in Palliative Care

Most participants revealed that their ability to provide palliative nursing care was still not optimal, especially in terms of therapeutic communication, symptom management such as pain and discomfort, and providing emotional and spiritual support to stroke patients.

“Palliative care needs to be improved so that patients’ quality of life is maintained... regular training is important.” (N1)

“We need regular training and additional staff because there are many patients.” (N4)

“We should attend more seminars on stroke patients so we can provide better care.” (N6)

“If possible, community health centers should also help monitor stroke patients through home visits.” (N7)

DISCUSSION

Nurses Have Good Understanding on Palliative Care

According to (Faida et al., 2023), the deeper nurses' understanding of palliative care, the more positive their attitude will be in providing services. This increase in knowledge can be obtained through regular training, educational programs, and continuous work experience. In practice, nurses play a central role in palliative care and providing education to patients' families. This is because nurses spend more time with patients, enabling them to understand changes in patients' conditions more comprehensively—physically, psychologically, and socially—compared to other healthcare professionals. With this comprehensive understanding, nurses can provide palliative care services effectively and maximally (Faida et al., 2023). Based on a study by (Djamdin et al., 2023) The

longer a person works, the more mature their thinking tends to become, which ultimately increases their insight and knowledge. Nurses with more work experience usually have more opportunities to learn, especially when undergoing job rotations.

Patience and Empathy as Key Qualities for Nurses

Empathy and a friendly attitude from nurses are important factors that can have a significant impact on patient satisfaction levels. Although patient satisfaction is highly subjective, difficult to measure precisely, and influenced by various aspects, this subjectivity can be minimized. In fact, satisfaction can be assessed more objectively if there is a consensus among many individuals (Hasan, 2022). According to a study (Rahmawati et al., 2025) it is stated that, from the perspective of virtue ethics, decisions regarding euthanasia are not only evaluated from a technical or legal standpoint but also reflect an individual's moral character and wisdom. Aristotle emphasized that to achieve eudaimonia or well-being in life, one must act based on virtue, such as compassion and deep understanding. In the case of patients in the terminal stage, empathy for their suffering can lead to decisions that appear humane, including considering euthanasia. However, virtue ethics also requires wisdom in weighing the long-term impacts and moral aspects of such actions. This moral wisdom suggests that compassion does not always have to be expressed by ending life, but can also be achieved through emotional support, spiritual guidance, and palliative care.

Professional Responsibility and Initiative of Nurses

Nursing care is a form of professional practice that is an integral part of the healthcare system. This service is based on nursing knowledge and skills that encompass biological, psychological, social, and spiritual aspects comprehensively. The target of nursing services includes individuals, families, and communities in both healthy and sick conditions, throughout various stages of life. Nursing services are provided in response to physical, mental, knowledge, motivation, or ability limitations that prevent individuals from performing daily activities independently. In carrying out their daily duties, nurses interact directly with other medical personnel and the patients they care for. Nurses are required to provide healthcare services responsibly, in accordance with procedures and their educational background. The medical interventions performed by nurses are part of the nursing practice provided to patients, families, or communities. The primary goal of these interventions is to improve, maintain, and restore health until the patient achieves recovery (Nuraeni et al., 2022). Interprofessional collaboration is important, not only in maintaining patient safety, but also in improving nurse job satisfaction and optimizing the quality of health services to meet established standards (Lumbantoruan & Nurhidayah, 2023) Effective interprofessional collaboration has a positive impact on nursing services, particularly on the final outcomes experienced by patients. Research by (Rahel et al., 2024) reveals that specific actions and a holistic service approach carried out collaboratively by doctors, nurses, and midwives can improve the quality of healthcare services.

Collaboration and Initiatives in Providing Palliative Care

Palliative care is a comprehensive approach that aims to improve the quality of life of patients with serious illnesses through pain management, symptom management, and integrated psychological, social, and spiritual support. The success of this service depends heavily on strong collaboration between medical personnel and the central role of nurses as the frontline providers of care. According to research (Lia & Siregar, 2025) It has been stated that early involvement of palliative care through interprofessional team collaboration can provide more effective management of various patient issues, including those related to physical, psychological, social, and spiritual aspects. According to research (Rohman et al., 2024) education provided by nurses plays a crucial role in enhancing family knowledge about palliative care, thereby underscoring the importance of nurses' initiative in fulfilling this educational function.

Competency Development Needs and System Support in Palliative Care

Continuous professional development is both a necessity and an expectation for every nurse. Through ongoing education and competency improvement, the quality of nursing care for patients

can be maintained. Commitment to continuing nursing education, whether in the form of informal training, seminars, webinars, workshops, conferences, or other forms of learning, is essential to ensure that nurses are able to provide high-quality care that is in line with current evidence-based practices.(Price & Reichert, 2017). According to research (Fahruji et al., 2020) Stating that all healthcare workers are required to participate in education or training, including continuing education, to maintain and improve their competence. Hospitals must also have a structured process in place for the implementation of continuing education and development for all staff.

System support in palliative care includes structures, policies, and the involvement of various parties such as healthcare workers, families, communities, and institutions working collaboratively to ensure holistic care for patients with terminal illnesses (Ratnasari et al., 2023) This support encompasses physical, psychological, social, and spiritual aspects that are integrated to ensure the continuity and effectiveness of care. Additionally, the role of the system is evident through hospital policies, national protocols, the use of digital technology, and training for healthcare workers and community volunteers as companions in the patient's environment (Karisma & Arsy, 2024) Families also play a key role in this system as they directly contribute to meeting the physical and emotional needs of patients (Suhertini et al., 2023).

CONCLUSION

Nurses understand the basic concept of palliative care as an effort to improve the quality of life of patients and their families, not for complete healing, but for the reduction of suffering and comprehensive support. Nurses' experience in providing palliative care is greatly influenced by empathy, patience, and concern, especially when dealing with stroke patients who are totally dependent (bedridden, uncooperative, and depressed). Collaboration with the patient's family is key to the success of palliative care, as the family is involved in activities such as mobilization, ADL fulfillment, and emotional-spiritual support. Additionally, nurses face various challenges, including limitations in patient/family knowledge and communication, lack of resources (time, staff), and the absence of standardized SOPs for palliative care practices in inpatient units. Recommendations include enhancing nurses' competencies, both in technical aspects (pain management, mobilization, education) and non-technical aspects (end-of-life communication, spiritual care), accompanied by institutional system support and interprofessional team collaboration.

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