

Enhancing Nurse Performance in Iranian Hospitals: Expert and Stakeholder Insights on Key Influencing Factors

Abstract

Background: Nurses play a critical role in healthcare delivery and public health advancement, yet they face numerous challenges such as work pressure, financial constraints, job-related stress, and burnout. This research aims to identify the factors that influence enhancing nurses' performance in Iranian hospitals, as perceived by experts and stakeholders. **Materials and Methods:** This qualitative study, conducted in 2024, employed conventional content analysis. Participants included nurses, hospital administrators, human resources specialists, and healthcare policymakers, selected through targeted sampling from university hospitals with varied performance metrics. Data were collected via semistructured interviews and analyzed in three stages: identifying themes, comparing concepts, and categorizing subthemes to extract core concepts. **Results:** The analysis revealed seven primary themes, 21 subthemes, and 70 specific issues. Key themes included skill and occupational knowledge, job satisfaction, organizational structure and managerial support, nurse involvement and roles, professional growth, standards and service excellence, and professional proficiency in nursing. For instance, the theme of Job Knowledge and Skills encompassed subthemes such as the necessity of domain-specific knowledge, the development of learning opportunities, and the importance of continuing education. **Conclusions:** The findings indicate that improving nurses' performance requires a multifaceted approach, focusing on skill and knowledge enhancement, increased job satisfaction, stronger managerial and organizational support, and pathways for professional growth. Continuous educational improving working conditions and robust professional networks are essential to elevate nursing quality and job satisfaction. These insights can inform the development of effective policies to enhance nurses' performance and improve the overall quality of healthcare services.

Keywords: Hospitals, Iran, job satisfaction, nurse's role, nursing care, qualitative research

Introduction

Nurses are fundamental to healthcare systems, playing an indispensable role in delivering high-quality medical services and promoting public health. This professional group carries extensive responsibilities including direct patient care, collaboration with interdisciplinary medical teams, ensuring patient safety, and providing emotional support. Their contributions significantly influence patient experiences and clinical outcomes.^[1] On a global scale, nurses represent the largest segment of healthcare professionals, and their effective engagement is critical to the operational success of healthcare institutions. Statistics indicate that nurses provide at least 50% of health services, with this figure reaching as high as 80% in certain countries.^[2,3] The multifaceted roles of nurses—including advisory, managerial, educational, research,

and supportive capacities—are integral to the healthcare workforce. Numerous studies have established that nurse performance directly impacts the quality of medical services and overall patient satisfaction.^[4] Despite their essential contributions, nurses face significant challenges in their professional duties, including heightened pressure to enhance efficiency, reduce costs, manage work-related stress, and cope with burnout. The complex nature of the nursing profession necessitates extensive communication with healthcare teams, patients, and families, which, coupled with organizational pressures, exposes nurses to additional challenges. Suboptimal performance among nurses can lead to errors in patient care, prolonged hospital stays, and increased medical costs, potentially resulting in severe consequences such as significant injury or patient mortality.^[5,6]

Research indicates a correlation between inadequate nurse performance and factors

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such as understaffing, negative feedback, low compensation, inadequate working conditions, and insufficient training. Hospitals, often characterized as high-stress environments, can adversely affect the mental and physical wellbeing of nurses. While nurses typically enter the profession as organized, compassionate, and motivated individuals, prolonged exposure to occupational stress can lead to increased fatigue and a greater propensity to leave the profession.^[6,7] Kahya asserts that human resource enhancement programs significantly influence patient satisfaction, emphasizing the necessity for effective systems to evaluate nurses' performance in hospitals.^[8] Research conducted in Tehran, Iran, reveals a pressing need to enhance the quality of these programs.^[9] Studies indicate that hospitals implementing such strategies experience increased job satisfaction, decreased employee dissatisfaction, and improved trust and self-efficacy.^[10,11] While successful international models can provide valuable insights into best practices for enhancing nurse performance, their implementation necessitates localization to address cultural and social differences. Consequently, developing a coherent, strategic, and context-specific model is essential as a foundational step for performance enhancement initiatives. This study employs qualitative methods to investigate the motivations and strategies for improving nurse performance in Iranian hospitals, drawing insights from experts and stakeholders.

Materials and Methods

This qualitative study, conducted in 2024, employed conventional content analysis to extract insights directly from interviews, free from predetermined topics or theoretical frameworks. Participants included nurses, hospital administrators, human resource specialists, nursing organization experts, and healthcare policymakers from the Ministry of Health and universities.

This study utilized several innovative methodologies and analytical techniques that contribute to its originality: (1) Purposive sampling was employed to select key participants from three categories of university hospitals (high, medium, and low performance) in Fars province, ensuring comprehensive representation. This targeted approach facilitated the collection of diverse perspectives that reflect the complexities of nurse performance across varying hospital contexts. (2) Interviews were conducted until data saturation was achieved, employing a combined saturation model comprising inductive thematic saturation and data saturation.^[12] This approach ensures a comprehensive view of the phenomena under investigation as saturation is reached when no new themes emerge. (3) Semistructured interviews, conducted by researchers AS and VR, lasted approximately 48 minutes each and were recorded and transcribed on the same day, following participant consent. The interview guide incorporated open-ended questions designed to elicit in-depth responses related to the study's objectives. A pivotal question was "What are the criteria, indicators, and

components for enhancing the capabilities and performance levels of nurses?" This methodology allowed participants to share their experiences and insights freely, thereby enriching the data collected. (4) To ensure the integrity of the research, we adhered to Guba and Lincoln's criteria, employing peer review and member checking to establish data credibility.^[13] Transcripts were shared with participants for verification, and coding was performed by two researchers, with a third researcher resolving any discrepancies. This triangulation method enhances the reliability and validity of the findings. (5) Content analysis was conducted in three stages: identifying primary themes and subthemes from interviews, recognizing concepts through comparative analysis, and systematically categorizing subthemes to extract core concepts.^[14] This structured analytical approach facilitates a comprehensive understanding of the data and ensures that the identified themes are grounded in the participants' experiences. (6) Data analysis commenced with the first interview and continued throughout the study, utilizing MAXQDA version 12.0 software. This software facilitated systematic coding and analysis, thereby enhancing the rigor of the qualitative analysis process.

An interview guide was developed to outline the study's objectives. Participant confidentiality was maintained through coding. Ethical principles were rigorously upheld in data recording and storage throughout the research process.

Ethical considerations

All procedures involving human participants received approval from the Ethics Committee of the Shiraz University of Medical Sciences under Ethics Code No. IR.SUMS.REC.1399.341. To address ethical concerns, researchers minimized power dynamics by creating a supportive environment and informing participants of the study's purpose, their right to withdraw, and the measures taken to ensure confidentiality. Data were anonymized, and recordings were securely stored to protect participants' identities, foster trust, and encourage open dialog.

Results

A total of 20 participants were interviewed, resulting in a mean (SD) of work experience of 25.9 (7.10) years. The majority of the participants were female (60%), with Registered Nurses (RNs) representing 20% of the sample [Table 1]. Initially, seven primary themes, 21 subthemes, and 70 concepts were identified and subsequently validated by the study participants [Table 2]. The key codes derived from the interviews were organized into the following seven themes: "job knowledge and skills", "job satisfaction", "organizational structure and management support", "participation and roles at Various levels", "professional development", "Quality of service standards", and "professional qualifications". Each theme encompasses specific subthemes and related concepts, which are elaborated upon below.

Table 1: Characteristics of the interview participants

Participant code	Interview length (min)	Gender	Position	Major	Job experience
P1	54	Female	Registered Nurse	Nurse	30
P2	49	Female	Chief Nurse	Nurse	25
P3	53	Male	Iranian Nursing Organization	Nurse	40
P4	50	Female	Head Nurse	Nurse	14
P5	35	Male	Registered Nurse	Nurse	10
P6	51	Female	Registered Nurse	Nurse	30
P7	55	Female	Deputy for Curative Affairs	Medical Education	30
P8	48	Female	Head Nurse	Nurse	29
P9	55	Female	Head Nurse	Nurse	32
P10	58	Female	Department of Nursing	Nurse	29
P11	48	Male	Chief Nurse	Nurse	26
P12	43	Female	Nursing management	Nurse	30
P13	60	Female	Iranian Nursing Organization	Medical Education	32
P14	43	Male	Deputies for research Affairs	GP	27
P15	52	Male	Registered Nurse	Nurse	25
P16	44	Female	Department of Medical	Medical specialist	14
P17	51	Female	Nursing Deputy	Nurse	20
P18	44	Male	Hospital Manager	General Practitioner	30
P19	40	Female	Deputy for Curative Affairs	Medical Education	18
P20	46	Male	Nursing management	Nurse	27

1. Job Knowledge and Skills

The theme of “job knowledge and skills” underscores the critical importance of specialized knowledge and practical competencies in nursing. Nurses must attain mastery over a comprehensive body of medical and nursing knowledge, patient care techniques, effective communication skills, and the proficient utilization of advanced medical equipment. To enhance these competencies, it is essential to establish numerous learning opportunities through specialized courses, workshops, and conferences. Furthermore, the pursuit of continuing education and the ongoing updating of knowledge through formal programs and online platforms are imperative.

The subtheme emphasizing the necessity for extensive medical and nursing knowledge indicates that nurses require access to a substantial body of scientific information to deliver high-quality care. One participant articulated: *“A significant level of expertise and a diverse range of technical skills are essential for the effective delivery of high-quality healthcare services within nursing practices.”* Given the rapid growth in medical sciences, the continuous updating of knowledge is not merely beneficial but essential. A participant stated: *“Innovative methods have emerged in nursing, making education obligatory.”*

Effective communication with patients and collaboration among healthcare team members are vital components of quality care. However, challenges persist in physician–nurse relationships; one participant remarked: *“Some physicians exhibit authoritative behaviors and engage in inappropriate conduct toward nurses.”*

Establishing ongoing learning opportunities is necessary for developing nursing skills. Participants emphasized that organizations should facilitate skills development and encourage attendance at international conferences, with one stating: *“Attending international conferences is essential for maintaining current nursing knowledge.”* An effective mentoring system is also paramount for transferring knowledge from experienced nurses to novices.

While the significance of continuing education is acknowledged, concerns about its quality are also expressed. One participant commented: *“Numerous teaching courses are offered, yet there is an excessive focus on quantity rather than quality.”* Access to online learning platforms is recommended to enable easy access to educational resources, with a participant noting: *“Access to necessary tools, such as personal computers, is essential for nurses.”*

2. Job Satisfaction

The theme of “job satisfaction” underscores its pivotal role in the provision of high-quality healthcare services by nurses. High levels of job satisfaction are correlated with increased commitment, enhanced loyalty, improved patient care outcomes, and diminished burnout. Key strategies for fostering job satisfaction encompass identifying stressors, optimizing working conditions, promoting a healthy work–life balance and, addressing compensation and benefits.

Job satisfaction has a direct and profound impact on the quality of healthcare services. As one participant articulated: *“Job satisfaction increases nurses’ commitment, loyalty, and motivation. It is thus very effective in*

Table 2: Main factors for improving nurses' performance

Theme	Subtheme	Issue
1- Job Knowledge and Skills	1.1. Necessity of Domain-Specific Knowledge and Skills for Effective Service Delivery	1.1.1. Importance of specialized knowledge across various medical and nursing disciplines 1.1.2. Necessity of proficiency in contemporary patient care methodologies 1.1.3. Requirement for robust communication skills to facilitate effective interaction with patients and interdisciplinary colleagues 1.1.4. Significance of competence in operating advanced medical equipment
	1.2. Development of Learning Opportunities and Enhancement of Nursing Skills	1.2.1. Implementation of specialized training courses and practical workshops 1.2.2. Provision of opportunities for participation in scientific conferences and seminars 1.2.3. Establishment of a mentoring system for transfer of knowledge from experienced nurses to novice staff 1.2.4. Encouraging and support for nurses to pursue continuing education and advanced specialized degrees
	1.3. Continuing Education and Maintenance of Current Nursing Knowledge	1.3.1. Implementing continuous education programs that reflect recent scientific and technological advancements 1.3.2. Utilization of online learning platforms to enhance access to educational resources 1.3.3. Periodic evaluations of nurses' knowledge and skills, accompanied by constructive feedback 1.3.4. Promotion of self-directed study and lifelong learning among nursing professionals.
2- Job Satisfaction	2.1. Significance of Job Satisfaction in Delivering High-Quality Nursing Services	2.1.1. Influence of job satisfaction on increasing nurses' commitment and loyalty to the healthcare organization 2.1.2. Direct correlation between job satisfaction levels and quality of patient care outcomes 2.1.3. Role of job satisfaction in decreasing instances of burnout and absenteeism
	2.2. Challenging Work Environment and the Imperative for Job Satisfaction	2.2.1. Identifying stressors prevalent in nurses' work environment and strategies for their reduction 2.2.2. Development of psychological support and counselling programs tailored for nursing staff 2.2.3. Enhancement of physical working conditions (e.g., lighting, temperature, ergonomics, etc.)
	2.3. Determinants of Job Dissatisfaction	2.3.1. Review and optimization of nurses' working hours and shift arrangements 2.3.2. Establishing a balance between professional responsibilities and personal life for nursing staff 2.3.3. Addressing compensation-related issues, including salary and benefits 2.3.4. Provision of welfare and recreational resources to alleviate mental and emotional stressors
	2.4. Requirements for Supportive Work Environments and Reduced Work-Related Stress	2.4.1. Fostering positive interpersonal relationships among colleagues to cultivate a supportive workplace culture 2.4.2. Enhancing job security and stability within the work environment 2.4.3. Provision of adequate rest and recovery facilities during work shifts
3. Organizational Structure and Management Support	3.1. Role of Management in Empowering Nurses and Enhancing Performance	3.1.1. Implementation of empowerment and professional development initiatives for nurses 3.1.2. Establishment of a fair and transparent performance evaluation framework 3.1.3. Provision of necessary resources and equipment to facilitate nursing responsibilities
	3.2. Organizational Structure and Career Advancement for Nurses	3.2.1. Design of a clear career progression pathway with promotion opportunities for nursing staff 3.2.2. Creation of specialized and leadership positions for skilled and experienced nursing professionals 3.2.3. Revaluation and enhancement of organizational structure to improve efficiency and effectiveness
	3.3. Importance of Management Support and Recognition	3.3.1. Implementation of recognition and reward programs for exemplary nursing performance 3.3.2. Establishment of effective and regular communication channels between managers and nursing staff 3.3.3. Providing support for nurses in navigating workplace challenges
	3.4. Delegation of Authority and Responsibilities to Nurses	3.4.1. Increasing nurses' autonomy in their respective areas of specialization 3.4.2. Assigning managerial responsibilities to qualified nursing professionals 3.4.3. Creating opportunities for nurses to engage in decision-making processes relevant to their practice

Contd...

Table 2: Contd...

Theme	Subtheme	Issue
4. Participation and Roles at Various Levels	4.1. Engagement in Management and Decision-Making Processes	4.1.1. Establishment of specialized committees with representation from nursing staff 4.1.2. Inviting nurses to participate in strategic planning sessions 4.1.3. Incorporating nurses' insights into the formulation of organizational policies
	4.2. Clearly Defined Roles and Responsibilities Across Different Domains	4.2.1. Explicit delineation of nursing roles across various domains (clinical, educational, research, and managerial) 4.2.2. Providing opportunities for nurses to gain diverse experience 4.2.3. Supporting nurses in developing expertise in specialized fields
	4.3. Attention to Nurses' Opinions and Recommendations	4.3.1. Establishing a system approach for collecting and reviewing nurses' suggestions 4.3.2. Conducting regular forums to solicit nurses' opinions and address their concerns 4.3.3. Implementing actionable recommendations from nursing staff while acknowledging their contributions.
	4.4. Creation of Collaborative Opportunities	4.4.1. Forming task groups composed of nurses to address organizational challenges 4.4.2. Creation of Collaborative opportunities for nurses to provide education and mentorship to peers 4.4.3. Encouraging participation in quality improvement and research initiatives
5. Professional Development	5.1. Advancement of the Social and Occupational Status of Nurses	5.1.1. Initiatives aimed at enhancing the public perception of the nursing profession 5.1.2. Supporting professional nursing associations to strengthen their influence and role 5.1.3. Creating media platforms to highlight nurses' achievements and the significance of their contributions
	5.2. Opportunities for Career Advancement and Professional Growth	5.2.1. Designing clear pathways for career progression and promotion 5.2.2. Creating avenues for specialization within various nursing disciplines 5.2.3. Supporting nurses in obtaining advanced degrees and professional certifications
6. Quality of Service Standards	6.1. Formulation and Implementation of Nursing Services Standards	6.1.1. Development of comprehensive and current standards for nursing services 6.1.2. Training staff on the precise implementation of standards across all levels of the organizational 6.1.3. levels ongoing evaluation of adherence to standards, accompanied by constructive feedback
	6.2. Enhancement of Nursing Services Quality	6.2.1. Implementation of continuous quality improvement initiatives within in nursing services 6.2.2. Utilization of key performance indicators to assess and improve service quality 6.2.3. Recognizing and rewarding nurses who deliver high-quality service 6.2.4. Collecting and utilizing patient feedback to inform improvements in service quality
7. Professional Qualifications	7.1. Essential Skills and Competencies	7.1.1. Capacity to manage and resolve organizational challenges 7.1.2. Flexibility and adaptability to diverse organizational systems 7.1.3. Commitment to lifelong learning and the development of professional competencies 7.1.4. Establishing professional standards for nursing practice
	7.2. Attitudes and Perceptions Regarding the Nursing Profession	7.2.1. Recognition of professional benefits associated with nursing practice 7.2.2. Experience of respected and valued within the workplace 7.2.3. Demonstrated passion and commitment toward the nursing profession 7.2.4. Ability to empathize and establish meaningful emotional connections with patients

delivering high-quality healthcare services." Participants also emphasized that satisfied nurses typically exhibit a heightened commitment to their organizations and experience lower incidences of burnout and absenteeism. One participant stated: "*Nurses who feel satisfied with their jobs are likely to provide patient care with significantly greater motivation and commitment.*" Another participant remarked: "*Nurses who are content with their roles are less prone to experiencing burnout.*"

The demanding nature of nursing, characterized by extended hours and psychological stress, significantly contributes to job dissatisfaction. One participant admitted,

"When nurses are required to care for numerous patients during a single shift, they feel overwhelmed." Another noted, *"A high workload is one of the foremost challenges in the nursing profession that degrades the quality of care delivered."*

Establishing supportive work environments is essential for mitigating job dissatisfaction. As one participant commented, *"Many healthcare centers lack adequate resting facilities for nurses."* Additionally, psychological support and counseling programs are necessary, as one participant stated, *"The work environment is both challenging and erosive."*

Excessive workloads, irregular shift patterns, understaffing, and insufficient management support contribute to job dissatisfaction. A participant asserted, “*Most nurses have encountered significant issues due to prolonged work shifts.*” To alleviate work pressure, adequate staffing levels should be ensured before new hospital wards open.

Finally, fostering positive workplace relationships and ensuring job security are crucial. One participant emphasized, “*If stronger connections are established between healthcare and education, the relationships can become significantly more intimate.*” Another participant noted, “*One of the major challenges in hospitals is the scarcity of employment opportunities.*”

3. Organizational Structure and Management Support

The theme of “organizational structure and management support” emphasizes the essential role of management in empowering nurses and fostering effective work environments. Core strategies include the implementation of empowerment programs, the establishment of equitable performance evaluations, and the provision of well-defined career paths and promotion opportunities.

Within the subtheme of management’s role in empowering nurses, participants underscored the importance of creating structured learning opportunities and promoting professional development. For instance, one participant stated: “*There is an empowerment plan once they enter the work environment. Nurses are thus asked to be empowered.*” Another emphasized: “*We need to encourage nurses. It is vital to put much emphasis on the workforce.*”

The development of transparent and structured career pathways is critical for sustaining nurse motivation and engagement. As one participant noted: “*Promotion here is not based on your abilities, and this certainly causes a lack of motivation.*” Furthermore, the establishment of specialized managerial roles holds the potential to inspire experienced nurses to pursue leadership positions. One participant suggested: “*If someone is going to grow into a nursing manager, they should be an ordinary nurse for at least three years.*”

Management support and recognition, both financial and nonfinancial, are indispensable in hospital environments. One participant explained: “*A proper mechanism should be set and followed for more appreciation.*” Another participant highlighted the importance of nonmonetary recognition, stating: “*It is likely to have a much greater effect than financial issues.*”

Delegation of authority and responsibilities to nurses is another key factor in enhancing autonomy and improving performance outcomes. One participant emphasized: “*Nurses must have enough power and authority to make better decisions.*” However, concerns were repeatedly raised regarding the diminishing decision-making power of nurses within the healthcare system. As one participant

observed: “*If the healthcare system does not give nurses sufficient power, the desired performance cannot be fulfilled.*” Highlighting the importance of nurse involvement in decision-making processes, another participant remarked: “*Holding annual meetings and sharing many sufferings can help improve hospital performance.*”

4. Participation and Roles at Various Levels

The theme of “participation and roles at Various levels” emphasizes the importance of involving nurses in various management and decision-making capacities to enhance their professional engagement and the overall efficiency of healthcare organizations. Establishing structured opportunities for nurses to join committees, engage in strategic planning, and contribute to policy formulation is fundamental to achieving this goal.

In the subtheme of participation at different management levels, one participant highlighted: “*We now can attend commitment boards of the healthcare system, where there are the representatives of the nursing system.*” However, significant legal and institutional barriers persist as the same participant noted: “*Since this has not yet become a law, it cannot be implemented.*” To address these challenges and enhance participation, the introduction of incentive systems was proposed. For instance, one participant stated: “*I think certain rewards or gifts should be given to those who make the best practical suggestions.*”

The subtheme of roles and responsibilities underscores the necessity of clearly defined job descriptions and responsibilities for nurses. One participant remarked: “*Much transparency in the existing roles and job descriptions helps expand nurses’ abilities and raise their awareness.*” Another participant stressed the need for periodic updates to job descriptions in response to evolving healthcare demands: “*Job descriptions need to be reviewed and updated together with the changes in the healthcare system.*” The ambiguity surrounding professional roles was further emphasized, as one participant observed: “*The professional position of most nurses at hospitals seems to be unclear.*”

Incorporating nurses’ perspectives and feedback is vital for improving workplace conditions and fostering a sense of ownership within healthcare systems. One participant emphasized: “*The actuality of a suggestion system necessitates conditions such as being effective and efficient.*” Despite the recognized importance of such systems, concerns were expressed regarding the limited visibility of nurses in decision-making processes. As another participant noted: “*Nurses’ participation in decision-making is hardly visible.*”

The theme also addresses the creation of partnership opportunities as a strategy to enhance nurse participation. One participant pointed out: “*Nursing joint meetings between education and healthcare teams are held on a monthly basis.*” Moreover, experienced nurses play a critical role

as mentors, as highlighted by another participant: “*Nurses endowed with more work experience have higher abilities to educate and guide newcomers.*” Beyond mentorship and clinical practice, the involvement of nurses in research activities was identified as a key area for professional growth. As one participant stated: “*Nurses play an active part in research activities along with their learning ones.*”

5. Professional Development

The theme of “professional development” emphasizes the importance of enhancing both the social and professional status of nurses while establishing structured pathways for career advancement. Key strategies for achieving professional growth include improving public perceptions of nursing, empowering professional associations, and creating opportunities for specialization.

Within the subtheme of enhancing the social and occupational status of nurses, participants stressed the necessity of elevating the public image and credibility of the nursing profession. One participant noted, “*The public image of the nursing profession in society is crucial.*” Addressing sociocultural barriers, another participant remarked, “*Among the significant challenges in nursing are various cultural issues. As nurses, we need to earn greater respect in society.*” The influence of media in shaping public perceptions was also highlighted, with one participant stating, “*Culturally, nursing should be represented on radio and television.*” Furthermore, the role of professional associations in advocating for nurses’ rights was acknowledged: “*Professional associations are essential advocates for the rights of nurses.*”

The subtheme regarding opportunities for promotion and career development is crucial for optimizing nursing human resources. Participants identified the need for clear career pathways and specialization opportunities to motivate and retain nurses. One participant expressed optimism, stating, “*The prospects of the nursing profession are now much brighter to me. I feel more motivated.*” Another participant emphasized the necessity of specialization: “*We must advance towards specialization.*” Supporting nurses in obtaining professional qualifications was also highlighted, with one participant asserting, “*Nurses who pursue further education should be afforded greater recognition.*” This underscores the need for institutional mechanisms that promote ongoing education and professional development. Additionally, the significance of aligning educational programs with specialization and skill enhancement was stressed: “*We need to direct education towards specialization and place considerable emphasis on skills development.*”

6. Quality of Service Standards

The primary focus of “quality of service standards” is the development and implementation of comprehensive and contemporary nursing standards, coupled with ongoing quality assessments. This approach aims to enhance the quality of nursing care and elevate patient satisfaction.

In the subtheme of formulating and implementing nursing service standards, participants underscored the significance of effective standards. One participant remarked, “*Unfortunately, we are facing a critical shortage of nurses.*” They emphasized that the current nurse-to-patient ratios in Iran are substantially below global benchmarks. Another participant noted, “*Due to an insufficient workforce, one nurse is responsible for the care of six to eight patients,*” which adversely affects performance. The necessity for role models in nursing education was also highlighted: “*There should be role models to guide nurses.*” Continuous assessment of these standards is imperative, as indicated by one participant’s statement: “*These standards must evolve to become more objective and practical.*”

In the subtheme of enhancing nursing service quality, the emphasis is on continuous quality improvement initiatives and the application of quality indicators to evaluate nursing performance. One participant suggested, “*Students are not adequately familiar with these protocols,*” advocating for dedicated instructional time to address new regulations. This preparation is essential for students transitioning into the workforce, as articulated by another participant: “*The primary objective is to ensure that students are acquainted with various aspects upon entering hospitals.*”

Quality indicators are crucial for evaluating nursing performance. One participant stated, “*There exists a set of national indicators that places significant emphasis on levels of care.*” These indicators encompass the rates of pressure ulcers and patient falls, which reflect the capabilities of nurses in safeguarding patient safety. Additionally, one participant noted, “*Among the primary indicators is the rate of falls, which is assessed quarterly.*” Ultimately, the enhancement of nursing quality necessitates a focus on both physical and mental health, as one participant articulated: “*Nursing is a profession that addresses both the physiological and psychological needs of patients.*”

7. Professional Qualifications

The theme of “professional qualifications” highlights their critical role in enabling nurses to provide high-quality healthcare and effectively navigate organizational challenges. These qualifications foster adaptability, enhance professional competencies, and promote public health, empowering nurses to fulfil their responsibilities with confidence and earn respect in the workplace.

In the subtheme of professional skills and competencies, participants emphasized the multifaceted nature of nursing roles. One participant observed, “*The professional roles in nursing are inherently multidimensional.*” This encompasses the ability to balance familial obligations with organizational responsibilities. Regarding moral courage, another participant stated, “*When nurses possess moral courage, they strive to confront new challenges effectively.*” Adaptability to organizational systems is also vital, as

explained by one participant: “*Nurses encounter numerous challenges in adjusting to organizational frameworks.*” Effective communication and collaboration are paramount, with a participant asserting, “*Enhanced communication skills significantly improve nursing effectiveness.*”

Assessing nurses’ mental and physical conditions before their placement is essential. One participant affirmed, “*Before assigning a nurse to a ward, it is crucial to conduct an interview and allow them to shadow in a ward for at least a few days.*” This practice ensures that they possess the requisite awareness, knowledge, and physical capacity.

In the subtheme of attitudes and perceptions toward the nursing profession, participants emphasized personal development and the sense of self-worth derived from nursing. One participant remarked, “*Being a nurse helped me recognize my significance and fostered my continuous growth.*” Social respect for the nursing profession was perceived as conducive to positive professional behaviors, with one participant noting, “*Social respect for nursing cultivates a constructive atmosphere.*”

Interest in nursing aids practitioners in navigating the challenges inherent to the profession. One participant articulated, “*Nursing is demanding work, yet I am deeply committed to my role.*” Patient satisfaction also serves as a motivational factor for nurses, as one participant shared, “*What inspires me to excel in my work is the satisfaction of my patients.*”

Discussion

This study identifies critical factors influencing nurse performance in Iranian hospitals, emphasizing the importance of professional competencies, job satisfaction, and supportive organizational frameworks. A comprehensive understanding of these elements not only enhances local nursing practices but also provides valuable insights applicable to global healthcare systems. The following discussion will explore the implications of our findings and their alignment with existing literature.

The findings highlight the paramount importance of professional knowledge and skills in enhancing nursing performance. Proficiency in specialized knowledge, practical expertise, and effective communication are essential for improving the quality of nursing care. Continuous professional development through training, conferences, and online educational platforms significantly enhances nursing performance; empirical studies indicate that nurses engaged in ongoing education deliver superior patient care.^[15] For instance, Salmani *et al.*^[16] found a strong correlation between effective communication skills increased patient satisfaction and improved health outcomes. Furthermore, a comprehensive literature review underscores the benefits of proficient communication for both patients and healthcare providers.^[17] Additionally, Wu *et al.*^[18] demonstrated the advantages of online learning platforms in facilitating flexible access to educational resources. Consequently, investing

in professional competencies and continuous education is imperative as it not only enhances nursing performance but also positively influences patient outcomes and satisfaction.

In addition to professional competencies, job satisfaction plays a pivotal role in enhancing the quality of patient. Research conducted by Lu^[19] and Li^[20] in China and Europe has established a direct relationship between job satisfaction, quality of patient care, and overall patient satisfaction. In Spain, a positive work environment, characterized by reduced job-related stress, is essential for fostering job satisfaction.^[21] Supportive organizational cultures not only bolster nurses’ commitment but also contribute to improved mental health and resilience against occupational stress, as evidenced by studies conducted in developed countries.^[22,23] Therefore, creating a supportive and low-pressure work environment is crucial for sustaining high levels of job satisfaction, ultimately leading to improved quality of patient care and enhanced nurse wellbeing.

Organizational structure and managerial support are pivotal in influencing nurses’ performance. A conducive work environment that empowers nurses and acknowledges their contributions has a significantly positive impact on overall performance. For instance, Cicolini’s systematic review elucidates the connection between managerial support and learning opportunities, emphasizing their role in enhancing job satisfaction.^[24] Similarly, Labrague’s findings in the Philippines indicate that empowering organizational structures leads to increased job satisfaction and reduced burnout among nursing professionals.^[25]

Moreover, Gensimore’s research in Virginia suggests that the implementation of advanced professional models for nurses can elevate both job satisfaction and the quality of care provided.^[25] Wei’s review further corroborates this by establishing a link between perceived organizational support, increased commitment, and reduced burnout.^[26] Importantly, a study conducted in Belgium demonstrates that delegating decision-making authority to nurses not only enhances care quality but also improves patient satisfaction.^[27] Kutney-Lee’s research in Philadelphia reinforces this by showing that nurse participation in decision-making enhances work environments and mitigates emotional fatigue.^[28]

Moreover, Gensimore’s research in Virginia suggests that the implementation of advanced professional models for nurses can significantly enhance both job satisfaction and the quality of care provided.^[26] Wei’s review further substantiates this by establishing a correlation between perceived organizational support, increased commitment, and reduced burnout among nursing professionals.^[27] Importantly, a study conducted in Belgium demonstrates that delegating decision-making authority to nurses not only improves care quality but also significantly enhances patient satisfaction.^[28] Kutney-Lee’s research in Philadelphia reinforces this significantly by illustrating that nurse participation in decision-making contributes

to improved work environments and mitigates emotional fatigue.^[29] In summary, a supportive organizational structure and managerial support are essential for fostering nurse empowerment, ultimately leading to improved performance and elevated quality of patient care.

The involvement of nurses in management and decision-making processes significantly impacts their performance. Enhanced participation not only results in improved working conditions but also increases job satisfaction and enhances the quality of care provided. For instance, Laschinger's study in Canada found that nurse involvement in decision-making correlates positively with higher job satisfaction and lower burnout rates.^[30] This finding aligns with Kutney-Lee's research, which indicates that hospitals with active nurse participation achieve superior care quality and enhanced patient safety.^[31] Furthermore, Egerod's study emphasizes that when nurses are engaged in policymaking, it results in the formulation of more effective healthcare policies.^[32] This engagement not only benefits nurses but also contributes to the overall efficacy of healthcare delivery systems. In conclusion, integrating nurses into decision-making roles is vital for enhancing both their satisfaction and the overall effectiveness of healthcare services, thereby reinforcing the significance of their perspectives in organizational policies.

Professional development is crucial for enhancing nurses' performance and career prospects. Investments in professional growth not only improve their social standing but also facilitate advancement opportunities. For instance, Jackson's research in Canada underscores that enhancing the public image of nursing can significantly aid in recruitment and retention efforts.^[33] Furthermore, the current study highlights the necessity for clear career pathways, with Price in Canada noting that well-defined career trajectories enhance job satisfaction.^[34] Halm's study supports this assertion by demonstrating that continuous professional development bolsters clinical competence.^[35] Additionally, Tomajan emphasizes the critical role of nursing associations in advocating for nurses' rights.^[36] The trend toward specialization is also shown to improve care quality and job satisfaction as specialized nurses deliver superior patient care and report higher levels of job satisfaction.^[37] In summary, investing in professional development and establishing clear career pathways is essential for enhancing nurses' performance, job satisfaction, and the overall quality of patient care.

Quality standards and service delivery frameworks are critical determinants of nursing performance and patient care outcomes. Establishing clear service delivery protocols and continuously evaluating performance metrics can lead to significant improvements. Research indicates that optimal staff-to-patient ratios, nurse involvement in decision-making, and collaborative physician–nurse relationships significantly enhance patient safety and satisfaction. For instance, a study

conducted in Europe and the United States demonstrates that improved hospital environments correlate positively with enhanced patient safety and care quality.^[38] Aiken's cross-European study identifies a direct association between lower nurse-to-patient ratios and increased patient mortality as well as nurse burnout.^[39] Furthermore, the implementation of ongoing quality improvement initiatives and the utilization of quality indicators are essential for robust assessments of nursing performance. Ferguson's research illustrates that quality improvement programs effectively reduce medical errors while concurrently increasing patient satisfaction.^[40] Thus, maintaining high standards and implementing systematic quality improvement measures are imperative for ensuring optimal nursing performance and enhancing the quality of patient care.

Competence in nursing is fundamental in influencing nurse performance and encompasses the requisite skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary for delivering high-quality care. This study emphasizes essential competencies such as managerial skills, adaptability, and teamwork, reflecting Liu's findings that effective communication, critical thinking, and problem-solving abilities are vital for nurses.^[41] Additionally, Kikanloo's research in China highlights that highly competent nurses excel in both stress management and adaptability.^[42] In the Iranian context, cultural perceptions of nursing significantly impact the profession's attractiveness and the retention of skilled nurses.^[43] Societal views often undervalue the complexity of nursing roles, which can impede recruitment efforts and professional development opportunities.^[44] Moreover, systemic challenges such as inadequate staffing policies and resource allocation directly affect nurses' ability to perform optimally, contributing to increased stress and burnout.^[45] Addressing these systemic challenges is vital for enhancing nurse competence and improving overall healthcare outcomes in Iran.

Furthermore, the significance of ethical courage is underscored by Numminen's research, which links it to both personal and professional growth.^[46] A study conducted in three Brazilian hospitals indicates that nurses' mental wellbeing directly influences organizational culture, emphasizing that a positive attitude among nurses correlates with improved performance and job satisfaction.^[47] The study also highlights the importance of patient satisfaction and health recovery, aligning with Mueller *et al.*'s findings that understanding patients' perspectives enhances self efficacy in clinical skills.^[48] In summary, the findings reinforce the necessity of developing professional skills, ethical courage, mental wellbeing, and a positive attitude as essential components for enhancing nurses' competence and overall performance in patient care.

This study has conclusions regarding the enhancement of nurse performance in Iranian hospitals based on a limited sample of participants from specific institutions, which may constrain the generalizability of the findings to the broader

nursing community and other regions within Iran. While the study acknowledges societal perceptions of nursing, it does not thoroughly investigate the cultural and systemic barriers that may impede performance improvement or the effective implementation of relevant policies. Addressing these limitations is crucial for providing a more nuanced understanding of the challenges and potential solutions within the nursing profession.

However, the findings of this study have significant implications that extend beyond Iranian hospitals, offering valuable insights into global healthcare practices. Emphasizing continuous professional development and fostering supportive work environments can enhance nursing standards on a worldwide scale. Involving nurses in decision-making processes and establishing clear pathways for career progression is essential for improving job satisfaction and attracting new talent—issues that are prevalent across various regions. Furthermore, the implementation of quality standards and ongoing evaluation mechanisms can significantly enhance patient safety across healthcare systems. These insights can inform international policies and practices, contributing to improved nursing performance and patient care.

Conclusion

This study identifies seven key factors that influence nurse performance in Iranian hospitals: professional skills and knowledge, job satisfaction, organizational structure and managerial support, participation in decision-making, professional development, service standards, and professional competence. The findings underscore that specialized knowledge, practical skills, high levels of job satisfaction, and effective organizational structures are indispensable for enhancing the quality of nursing care. Additionally, the active involvement of nurses in decision-making and ongoing professional development has been shown to significantly improve both performance and job satisfaction. To effectively enhance nurse performance, healthcare policymakers should adopt a comprehensive approach that includes continuous education through structured training programs aligned with the latest practices, improved working conditions by reducing nurse-to-patient ratios and providing ergonomic environments, increased decision-making involvement by establishing formal channels for nurse participation in policy development, clear career progression pathways with transparent promotion criteria, implementation of specific and measurable nursing service standards with regular performance assessments, and integration of technological solutions such as digital health tools to enhance operational efficiency and support nursing practice. Building upon the findings of this study, future research should explore innovative approaches to enhancing nurse performance, such as the impact of mentorship programs on career progression and the role of digital health tools in improving patient care. Longitudinal studies are also recommended to examine the long-term effects of specific interventions and to monitor changes in nurse performance over time. Such

investigations can yield valuable insights for developing effective healthcare policies that enhance nursing quality both in Iran and globally. This holistic strategy has the potential to significantly improve the quality of healthcare services and enhance the overall efficiency of the national healthcare system, thereby providing a robust foundation for future research aimed at elevating nurse performance and healthcare quality.

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Conflicts of interest

Nothing to declare.

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