



## **THE EXPERIENCES OF PATIENTS RECEIVING CARE FROM NURSE INTERNS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY**

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**ABSTRACT:** *The patient is one of the essential components of the educational environment process, playing a significant role in nurse interns' clinical experience. Clinical experience is necessary to nurse interns' learning as it prepares them to provide high-quality care to patients. The study explores the experiences of patients cared for by nurse interns in Saudi Arabia. The researchers used a qualitative phenomenological design and interviewed six patient participants in a government hospital under nurse interns' care. Six focused interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, coded, and analyzed using thematic analysis. Four themes emerged: Patient Experiences, Factors Affecting the Patient Experiences, the Barriers to Patient–Nurse Intern Relationships, and Perceived Patient Roles. The findings are discussed against Peplau's theory of interpersonal relationships, suggesting that the nurse interns' and patients' roles and behaviors affect their relationship and the learning process. Therefore, we recommend that instructors prepare student nurses focusing on interpersonal processes.*

**KEYWORDS:** Patient–Nurse Intern Relationship, Patient Roles, Patient Experiences, Nurse Intern



## INTRODUCTION

Patients in hospitals require qualified staff who can provide them with high-quality care and ensure their safety. In government hospitals not designated for training, the patient is unaware of this importance in the educational environment. It plays a significant role in the clinical experience of nursing students. Clinical experience is an integral part of nursing students' learning because it prepares nursing students to provide high-quality care. Still, nursing students may encounter challenges when some patients refuse to receive care from students and do not cooperate with them. This problem could affect the patient's relationship with the student nurse and the student nurse's clinical learning experience. Therefore, the nature of the patient–student relationship is crucial to achieving learning (Stockhausen, 2008).

## LITERATURE/ THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING

Compared to that of the ordinary staff, student care has shown to be more flexible with a more open approach with students' extraordinary efforts in dedicating their time. Supervising students pair-up using a learning model that supports student learning through reflection can contribute to patients receiving good care (Strömwall et al., 2018). In a learning environment, patients receive both stable and less stable care, and nurse interns must invite patients to be part of both the students' learning process and their health process. This learning process highlights the supervisors' role in patients' sense of security. There are indications that concepts such as a Dedicated Education Unit with a lifeworld-led didactic based on a reflection on both the patients' stories and the students' experiences can create learning environments that support patients' health processes and students' learning processes (Eskilsson et al., 2015).

Mukumbang and Adejumo (2014) reported three main methods of identifying student nurses by patients, positive perceptions of student nurses by patients and negative perceptions of student nurses by patients. The most striking results of Manninen et al. (2014) showed that patients displayed different attitudes in meetings with students. When the students created a good atmosphere and a mutual relationship, they were active participants in their learning. On the other hand, if the students could not establish a suitable atmosphere, the relationship became one-way. The patients were passive participants, allowing them to practice without being involved in a conversation with them.

The researchers expect that studying this phenomenon will improve nursing in many fields and enhance patient–nurse relationships by evaluating patients' experiences. It has significance for nursing practice because today's interns are future nurses. This study highlights patients' perspectives regarding the patient–nurse intern relationship. The results of this study will enhance the quality of care and address the deficits. In nursing education, while exploring patient experiences, researchers can determine patients' expectations in nursing care. Thus, the aim is to teach nursing students how to meet their expectations.

There are no studies in the "XXX" context in nursing research, especially in "XXX," regarding nurse interns' patient experiences. Therefore, this study has significant value for Saudi nursing research. This study's results can also improve the nursing internship program's quality to ensure that both nurse interns and patients have satisfactory experiences. It is crucial for student nurses to have good relationships with patients.



This study aimed to explore how patients perceive nurse interns' participation in their care. Patient experiences provide nurse interns with an understanding of patients' perceptions and attitudes toward their care, lead student nurses to become more responsible, and enhance the patient-nurse relationship and patient care, especially among those receiving care from a student. The findings of this study verify patients' experiences with nurse intern's participation in their care; identify the factors that affect the patients' perceptions and attitudes toward nurse interns' involvement in their care; determine the barriers to nurse intern-patient relationship, and identify patients' awareness of their role in the training environment process. The researchers assume that patients have varied experiences related to care provided by nurse interns.

The Interpersonal Relations Theory of Hildegard Peplau highlights the nurse-client relationship as the basis of the practice of nursing: "an interpersonal process of therapeutic interactions between an individual who is sick or in need of health services and a nurse specially educated to recognize, respond to the need for help." (Peplau, 1991). This theory is based on four main components: person, environment, health, and nursing. The nursing model illustrates four successive phases in the interpersonal relationship: orientation, identification, exploitation, and resolution. Peplau emphasized patients' experiences and the effect that nurse-patient relationships have on those experiences. The theory indicates the necessity of positive interactions between the nurse and the client in a warm environment. Both the nurse and the client know their roles in this therapeutic process. This theory is closely related to our study. It focuses on both the nurse and the patient and facilitates the discussion of the results as it details the roles of the study variables.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Participants**

The participants were adult patients in a governmental hospital in the Female Medical Ward (FMW), Male Surgical Ward (MSW), and Obstetric Ward (OBW) who received care from nurse interns. The type of sampling used was non-probability purposive.

### **Research Design**

The qualitative phenomenological descriptive design was employed. Phenomenology is the study of an individual's lifeworld as experienced rather than conceptual, categorized, or theorized as described by the participants. Phenomenology aims to provide a rich understanding of everyday experiences' nature or meaning (Creswell, 2018; Munhall, 2010). The researchers used this approach to explore patients' experiences receiving care from nurse interns and obtain more details about their experiences.

### **Place and Time**

The researchers gathered the Medical Ward, Surgical Ward, and Obstetric Ward data in a government hospital, "XXX," from March 4-24, 2020.



## **Sampling Scheme**

We obtained ethical approval (# TU-077/020/031) from the Institutional Review Board "XXX." Then we asked the head nurse for the names of patients who received care from nurse interns. The participants were adult patients in a governmental hospital in the FMW, MSW, and OBW who received care from nurse interns. The type of sampling used was non-probability purposive. This type of sampling involves researchers' knowledge about the population to create a category. The researchers might decide to purposely select people who are judged to be exceptionally knowledgeable about the issues under study (Polit, 2017). The informed consent included a brief introduction of the researchers, the study's purpose, and some answers to particular questions. We explained how they would participate, the data collection process, the reason for selecting the participants, any risk predicted, the benefits, if any, assurance of full privacy regarding their information, and whether recoding would be performed.

## **Procedure**

Interviews were conducted with the head nurses' cooperation, who requested the patients' participation in the research and obtained the contact numbers. The recorded interviews were conducted with three patients from FMW, one patient from OBW, and two MSW patients. Three of the participants were interviewed in person, and the researchers interviewed the other three by phone.

In-depth interviewing is a qualitative research technique that requires conducting intensive individual interviews with a small number of respondents to explore their perspectives of a particular idea, program, or situation. A focused or semi-structured interview uses a list of topics to cover rather than specific questions to ask (Polit, 2017). The semi-structured interview guide presents a clear set of instructions for interviewers and can provide reliable, comparable qualitative data. The in-depth interviews were audio-recorded. The researchers secured informed consent from the participants.

## **Data Analysis**

Upon reaching data saturation, sampling to the point at which no new information is obtained, and redundancy is achieved (Polit, 2017), audio-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim (Arabic) and translated into English. We developed a coding scheme. The data were coded for correspondence to the categories and analyzed using the deductive approach of the thematic content analysis through WebQDA, an online computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS).

## **Trustworthiness**

We maintained this qualitative study's trustworthiness by following the principles of credibility, transferability, confirmability, authenticity, and dependability (Polit & Beck, 2018). First, we ensure credibility by establishing rapport with informants to elicit honesty and by utilizing iterative questioning to clarify details and prevent recall bias; and through data triangulation, specifically, space triangulation, which involves gathering data on the same phenomenon at multiple sites to test for cross-site consistency (Polit, 2017). For this study, we conducted interviews with patients of the medical ward, surgical ward, and obstetric ward. Next, we enhance the findings' transferability using detailed, thick descriptions that detail the



essence of participants' experiences. We uphold confirmability and authenticity by presenting relevant quotes to support our themes, and quotes are linked to participants' anonymous ID for reference (e.g., P1 and P2). Also, we followed our approved protocol throughout the study to uphold dependability.

## RESULTS

Four main themes emerged from this study: patient experiences, factors affecting patient experiences, barriers to the patient-nurse intern relationship, and perceived patient roles.

**Table 1: Themes Emerged**

Themes
1. Patient experiences
2. Factors affecting patient experiences
3. Barriers to patient-nurse intern relationship
4. Perceived patient roles

### Theme 1: Patient Experiences

Patient experiences as a theme emerging from this study refer to the past and present experiences of patients who received care from nurse interns.

**Table 2: Patient Experiences**

Patient Experiences
Past Experiences
● Competence / Incompetence of Nurse Intern
Actual Current Experiences
● Good behavior of Nurse Intern
● The incompetence of Nurse Intern

#### *Sub Theme 1. Past Experiences*

Participants' previous experiences were varied, from perceiving competence to the incompetence of nurse interns. Some participants reported competence when the nurse intern appeared to be able to perform and behaved well with them:

*"She dealt with me well, even when she drew my blood. I didn't get hurt." (P4)*

*"They have excellent behavior." (P1)*



Some patients perceived incompetence in the nurse intern based on the nurse intern's appearance. They are being compared with the staff nurses, such as when appearing shy and afraid to make mistakes or acting differently from what they are experiencing.

*"They draw my blood and look tense, shy, and reluctant—afraid of giving care or do anything wrong." (P6)*

*"I refused to cooperate when I know that she is an intern; I didn't know I have a role in their learning." (P5)*

A patient may believe that nurse interns are not highly trained but still give them time and be cooperative while receiving care. The attitude of nurse interns is also vital to patient care and gives them a sense of worthiness:

*"I asked him to call the doctor, but he just went and didn't return." (P3)*

The patient perceived this as the incompetence of the nurse intern to be unresponsive to his needs.

### ***Sub Theme 2. Actual Current Experiences***

Patients described the experience as pleasant if nurse interns complied with their requests with calm behavior and no complaining.

*"They were good to me. They were removing the tube, helping me go to the bathroom." (P1)*

*"When I asked them something, they did it without hesitation." (P2)*

Being calm and supportive during stressful situations also enhances patient experiences with the nurse interns. As P3 describes the nurse interns, *"they were confident and quiet"* when they received him from the ambulance.

*"I was alone, and she is the only one who supported me." (P5)*

The participant verbalized having a satisfying experience and that she had no objection to care from interns at any time.

A nurse intern who appears confused negatively affects patients' perceptions because when interns appear confident, patients feel trust and competence.

*"He brought three additional needles. If he fails the first time, he can use them." (P6)*

The nurse intern's failed attempt the second time caused the patient to perceive the intern as incompetent.



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## Theme 2: Factors Affecting Patient Experiences

The second theme that emerged is related to the factors affecting patient experiences.

**Table 3. Factors Affecting Patient Experiences**

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<b>Factors Affecting Patient Experiences</b>
Nurse intern-related factors
● Identification
Uniform
Appearance
Self-introduction
● Competence
Patient-related factors
● Feelings
Fear and Anxiety
Trust and Confidence
● Actions
Allow procedures to be done
Cooperate with the nurse-intern

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### *Sub Theme 1. Nurse inter-related factors*

One of the main factors affecting patient experiences involves the nurse intern.

Differentiating between the nurse intern and the staff nurse plays a role in patient experiences. The participants mentioned that they could quickly identify the nurse through the uniform, which is different from the staff nurse's uniform.

*"...through the uniform, it is a gray color and white color." (P1)*

The appearance and actions of nurse interns play a role in patients identifying them. A nurse intern can sometimes appear confused. As one participant recounted:

*"...the nurse interns bring too much equipment and are confused." (P6)*

Another patient identified nurse interns through their manner of questioning. As one participant explained:

*"Many answers suggest to me that they are interns." (P5)*

Some participants stated that the nurse interns introduced themselves, which is essential before any procedure. One participant disagreed:

*"...they do not introduce themselves, perhaps they are preoccupied with thinking about how the medical procedure works and forget." (P6)*





The competence of the nurse intern also affects patient experiences. If the nurse intern can perform a procedure well, the patient will have a good experience:

*"They check on me, and they were good with me. They were removing the IV tube, helping me go to the bathroom, and taking my sugar analysis and blood analysis." (P1)*

### **Sub Theme 2. Patient-related factors**

The patient is one of the most critical factors in the experience, and thus the patients' perceptions affect their experiences. Based on the data gathered and scrutinized, we determined some of the factors that affect patients' experiences. There is a difference in the feelings of patients; some patients feel fear and anxiety.

*"I feel a little anxious and nervous because I am an experience for this person." (P5)*

*"Sometimes, I feel that if she gives me the medicine, I am afraid that she is not experienced." (P2)*

On the other hand, some patients feel trust and confidence in nurse interns:

*"I feel comfortable when I deal with them (smiles) and trust them, and when they come to talk to me, I feel comfortable (smiles)." (P1)*

Patient behavior has a significant impact on nursing interns' experience as they allow them to perform necessary procedures.

*"I allow them to give me the injection and medications that I have previously taken, and I don't mind if they start giving me a new type of medication." (P2)*

*"I allow blood drawing and taking vital signs—the essential things a nurse intern can do." (P6)*

The patients' cooperation with the nurse interns is an integral part of the nurses' training process, and some of the patients cooperated with the nurse.

*"I try not to show those anxiety feelings because I might be in her situation, so I could need the care receiver to trust me." (P5)*

### **Theme 3: Barriers to the Patient–Nurse Intern Relationship**

The third theme that emerged is Barriers to the Patient–Nurse Intern Relationship.



**Table 4. Barriers to Patient-Nurse Intern Relationship**

<b>Barriers to Patient-Nurse Intern Relationship</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The incompetence of nurse intern</li> <li>● Unacceptable behavior of nurse intern</li> <li>● Procedures refused by the patient to be done by the nurse intern</li> </ul>

### ***Sub Theme 1. The incompetence of a nurse intern***

The incompetence reflects nurse interns' inability to successfully perform a task and the lack of knowledge and skills needed to complete a task. Many students do not have sufficient knowledge to provide patient care at the bedside when dealing with the clinical learning environment. Providing care to patients can be challenging (Jamshidi, Molazem, Sharif, Torabizadeh & Kalyani, 2016).

The behavior of the nurse intern was cited as an impediment by P1. The participant described one of the nurse interns' actions as neglecting patient needs and taking information with disrespect. Being valued and regarded as a human being is a fundamental patient right.

*"...depends on their behavior and if they are in a hurry. I will not allow her to take care of me. I have been in a situation with a student. She wanted me to give her the information quickly, and I couldn't focus." (P1)*

A lack of experience is one of the essential factors that hinder the patient and nurse's relationship. One patient said that care depends on the health situation and skills, so she will refuse care if it is urgent.

Lack of confidence and skills is considered a barrier that affects the patient-nurse relationship. One participant described her preference regarding nurse interns:

*"Especially for injections, if I feel like she is unable to do it, I don't want her to give me any care." (P2)*

Another participant stated that when she was cared for by a nurse intern:

*"The intern asked the doctor where to inject the needle." (P3)*

Another participant expressed her refusal to nurse intern's care during a new procedure:

*"If there is a change in the treatment plan and it is the nurse intern who is the first person to perform the procedure on me, I would ask for the staff nurse instead." (P2)*

Patient's fear that a nurse intern would make mistakes results from a nurse intern's lack of competence and confidence.

*"The fear is that he could do something wrong that would give me the wrong*



*medicine or enter the needle more than once."* (P6)

Self-confidence and skills are essential to patient care, and their shortage leads to problems that can harm patients. One participant was asked about what would negatively affect the relationship between the student and the patient. She replied,

*"When she is confused and has no experience."* (P4)

The lack of confidence is reflected in a nurse intern's characteristics, such as hesitation and stuttering, which suggest to patients that there is a defect in the nurse intern's competence.

*"When the student is hesitant, frightened, not confident of himself, and stutters with words."* (P6)

The nurse intern's lack of experience and practice makes patients avoid the nurse intern's care, as P3 said, *"...because he is an inexperienced intern."* One patient noted that stress and poor skills caused the nurse's shaking hands to drop things accidentally. This tension, anxiety, or nervousness indicates a lack of confidence and inefficiency. It suggests that the nurse intern does not have sufficient experience, even if the intern has acquired the skills.

### ***Sub Theme 2. Unacceptable behavior of a nurse intern***

The field of patient care is heavily affected by the behavior of nurses. If nurse interns display poor behaviors, the relationship between the patient and nurse intern will be severed, as expressed by P1, P6, and P4. They only accept care from nurse interns, depending on how they view their behaviors.

One participant described her experience when a nurse intern wanted information hurriedly. Nurse interns should be able to communicate appropriately with patients.

*"..depends on their behavior, and if they are in a hurry, I will not allow them to take care of me. I have been in a situation with a student. She was saying she wanted me to tell her the information quickly, and I couldn't focus."* (P1)

Some nurse interns appear heedless of the danger or the consequences of one's actions, which affects the patient's decision to accept care.

*"For me, I look at the behavior of the nurse intern, and if he is hasty and reckless, I shall refuse to receive care from him."* (P1)

Nurse interns' behavior affects the patient's perception toward inefficient nurse interns who exude a lack of confidence.

*"Usually, they are shy and hesitant, afraid of giving care."* (P6)

### ***Sub Theme 3. Procedures refused by the patient to be done by a nurse intern***

Patients disagree considerably regarding which procedures are allowed. Some do not allow invasive procedures, such as those with needles, as the participants explained:



*"Needles that are in the vein because they are in a dangerous place." (P3)*

*"Things I do not allow include taking medicine from a student." (P6)*

*"I will not allow the intern to do something to my teeth." (P5)*

Negative previous patient experiences may damage the nurse intern-patient relationship, which prevents the nurse intern from providing safe, quality care. One participant explained that if he is cared for in a situation that may cause him long-term loss, he allows needles, but any procedure beyond that is rejected.

#### **Theme 4: Perceived Patient Roles**

Perceived patient roles as a theme emerging from this study refer to patients' awareness in collaboration with nurse interns.

**Table 5. Perceived Patient Roles**

<b>Perceived Patient Roles</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Cooperator</li><li>● Provider of Information</li></ul>

##### ***Sub Theme 1. Cooperator***

Collaboration is required for nurse interns' procedures, and collaborating plays a role in increasing the learning process for nurse interns. Some patients perceived their essential role in cooperating with nurse interns. One participant encouraged the opportunity for nurse interns to learn. She was aware that each time a nurse intern was allowed to practice, his sense of responsibility increases, performance is improved. Some participants will enable nurse interns to perform simple procedures:

*".. give them a chance to practice what they learned. It's okay if they make mistakes and learn for next time. Trust them so they will develop the responsibility to perform correctly." (P5)*

*"Allow them to do simple procedures." (P3)*

The participants understood the importance of learning for nurse interns. If they have adequate training, they will be more efficient and more confident, and patients will receive sufficient care from them.

*"I allow them to learn because I know that they are future nurses." (P6)*

The participant is aware that he helps nurse interns learn, and he accepts them unconditionally. He allows nurse interns to perform their tasks. They may make mistakes, maybe due to stress and because it's their first experience; however, they will gain confidence, correct themselves and succeed in the second attempt.



*"I help them learn and let them try and do not reject them because they are students."*  
(P6)

*"Yes, for sure. When a nervous patient comes, the student is afraid and becomes frightened and does not want to provide care, but when he finds a patient who cooperates with him and smiles and says to him, do not fear and speak to him, this relieves the student's tension."* (P6)

One participant stated that when the nurse interns see the patient is nervous, they feel afraid and cannot provide care. The patient's reaction can negatively or positively affect the nurse interns' performance. For example, when the patient smiles or says encouraging words to the nurse interns, the nurse interns feel reassured, have less stress, and perform well.

### ***Sub Theme 2. Provider of Information***

Some participants were aware of their role in providing information to nurse interns. They answer questions that help nurse interns perform a procedure. For example, the nurse interns ask the patients whether they ate before taking medicine or what the doctor said about their morning conditions.

*"I talk to them about my past experiences and tell them about things that could benefit them."* (P2)

*"When they ask questions, I give them answers and allow them to practice the procedures."* (P1)

Providing information to nurse interns helps them do their job well without mistakes. Besides, giving information strengthens the relationship between the patients and the nurse interns, and they both feel comfortable and safe.

## **Discussion**

This study's findings provide insight into patients' experiences when receiving care from nurse interns in governmental hospitals.

The results showed that the experiences of patients vary depending on the health situation. Some patients perceived that the nurse interns were generally skilful and qualified, whereas others perceived the nurse interns as incompetent for some procedures. The initial phase of Peplau's theory is orientation. During this time, the patient has health-seeking behaviors. The nurse is identified as someone qualified to help the patient. The nurse helps the individual recognize and understand his/her problem and determine the need for help.

The factors affecting the patient experience are fear and anxiety when they receive care from nurse interns. Still, with patient trust and confidence, the nurse intern can perform his/her task well. The second phase of Peplau's theory is identification. The nurse helps the individual to recognize and understand his/her problem and determines the need for help. The nurse permits



exploration of feelings to aid the patient in undergoing illness as an experience that reorients feelings and strengthens positive forces in the personality and provides needed satisfaction.

The third phase is exploitation. During this phase, the patient attempts to derive full value from what he/ she is offered through the relationship. Patients described the experience as pleasant and with satisfaction if nurse interns complied with their requests with calm behavior and no complaining. On the other hand, nurse interns' incompetence and unacceptable behavior serve as barriers that could sever the relationship between the patient and the nurse intern.

Some patients were aware of their role in the nurse intern's learning environment. They cooperated in answering questions and allowed nurse interns to perform necessary procedures even if they felt fear and anxiety. Patients' awareness of participating in the nurse interns' learning process significantly affects their experiences. When patients are aware of their importance, they interact with the interns appropriately. The last phase of Peplau's theory is resolution, which occurs after other steps are completed successfully. This phase leads to the termination of the relationship.

This research aimed to identify patients' experiences with nurse interns, the factors that affect their experiences, the barriers between patients and nurse interns, and patients' awareness of their roles in nurse interns' learning process. The findings were discussed against Peplau's theory of interpersonal relationships, suggesting that the nurse interns' and patients' roles and behaviors affect their relationship and the learning process.

The findings will help improve the nursing internship program by examining patients' perceptions toward nurse interns. The interpersonal focus of Peplau's theory requires that the nurse intern attends to the interpersonal processes that occur between the nurse intern and client. Interpersonal processes include the nurse-patient relationship, communication, pattern integration, and the roles of the nurse. Nurse interns should be able to understand one's behavior to help others identify felt difficulties and apply principles of human relations to the problems that arise at all levels of experience.

We, therefore, recommend future studies focusing on the nurse interns' experiences in the learning process and cultural context of patient experiences.

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