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REVIEW

Nursing students' perception of caring: a literature review

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Abstract

Aim: Exploring nursing students' perceptions regarding caring is essential, especially for nursing educators, in order to provide information for planning a curriculum in nursing education. The aim of this literature review was to synthesize the literature regarding nursing students' perceptions of caring based on the available primary research. *Design:* A literature review. *Methods:* Six electronic databases (Web of Science, PubMed, Science Direct, SCOPUS, Wiley Online Library, and SAGE) were searched. Articles were selected according to PRISMA guidelines. A thematic synthesis framework was applied in this review. *Results:* Thirteen primary studies were included and synthesized, and seven analytical themes emerged. The analytical themes were: caring as presence, caring as support, caring as professionalism, caring as communication, caring as establishing relationships, and patient well-being as a positive outcome of caring. *Conclusion:* Caring was perceived variously in this review, and consisted of physical aspects, emotional aspects, and professional aspects, together with obedience to the nursing codes of ethics. Finally, it was felt that being caring to patients should not mean that nurses neglect their own self-care.

Keywords: caring, literature review, nursing student, perception.

Introduction

Caring plays a pivotal role in providing effective nursing care and sustaining human dignity for a person who has experienced illness and a change in health (Hinshaw & Shaver, 1999). Several authors (e.g. Crowden, 1994; Leininger, 1988; Patistea, 1999; Petrou et al., 2017; Sapountzi-Krepia, 2013; Watson, 1988) emphasize that caring is central to nursing. Petrou et al. (2017) add that exploring the perceptions of nursing students regarding caring is very important since it is thought to provide useful information for nursing educators in planning the curriculum for nursing science studies.

Beck (1999) and Petrou et al. (2017) proposed that a qualitative methodology is appropriate to the conceptualization of caring. Drahošová and Jarošová (2016) looked at past publications on the concept of caring from nurses' and patients' perspectives, finding that nurses viewed caring as a meaningful interpersonal process further defined by their professional knowledge, skills, and personal beliefs, enabling the provision of protection and emotional

support, and the meeting of patients' bio-psycho-social needs. Drahošová and Jarošová (2016) suggested that nurses' perceptions of caring be used in the field of nursing education; however, it is also necessary to explore how nursing students perceive the concept of caring, as students are still going through the process of career development. Papastavrou and Andreou (2012) reviewed previous publications on the concept of caring from nursing students' point of view. In their review, they involved qualitative and quantitative studies. Beck (1999) stated that although qualitative and quantitative studies contributed to understanding the concept of caring, a qualitative methodology can help to clarify the conceptual framework of caring. Petrou et al. (2017) and Grobbel and Rowe (2014) also suggested that exploring nursing students' perceptions of caring could lead to a better conceptualization of caring. Brown (2011) identified a caring curriculum as an essential part of nursing education. However, while previous studies have contributed a considerable amount of qualitative research on the subject of caring, only a limited number of qualitative studies have been conducted on nursing students' perceptions of it. This literature review was undertaken to analyze the qualitative studies that have focused on caring from nursing

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students'perspectives. This could provide insight to support the development of a caring curriculum in nursing education, particularly in terms of nursing students' clinical learning related to caring.

Aim

The aim of this literature review was to synthesize the existing knowledge of nursing students' perceptions of caring based on the available primary research. The research question that guided the exploration of this literature review was: how do nursing students perceive caring in nursing?

Methods

Design

A literature review.

Eligibility criteria

In the case of the current research, the articles were selected according to PRISMA guidelines, as presented in Figure 1. The inclusion criteria were: a) a sample population restricted to nursing students; b) research that adopted a qualitative approach to investigating the issue; c) nursing students' perceptions of caring as the focus of the study; and d) peer-reviewed studies published in English between January 1990 and December 2019.

Search strategy

Six electronic databases (Web of Science, PubMed, ScienceDirect, SCOPUS, Wiley Online Library, and SAGE) were searched. The search strategy focused on three keywords: nursing students, caring, and perception. The keywords were paired and combined to search for relevant literature in the databases.

Study selection inc. PRISMA flow diagram

The initial searches yielded a total of 990 articles, 228 of which were identified as duplicates and removed at the first stage. The titles of the articles were then screened, and 636 publications whose titles did not align with the research objectives were eliminated. Based on the abstracts, a total of 104 articles were excluded, with most removed because perception of caring was not the primary research outcome. After screening, 22 articles were considered potentially eligible. The full texts of the studies were carefully reviewed. Nine publications were eliminated following the final review. The reasons for exclusion included: a) perception of caring was not the research outcome (n = 4); b) no full-text available (n = 3); c) the respondents were not nursing students (n = 1); and d) the articles were written in languages other than English (n = 1). As a result,

a total of 13 publications met the inclusion criteria and were deemed eligible for further analysis (Figure 1).

Evaluation of quality of articles

The studies that fulfilled the inclusion criteria were examined by critical appraisal. According to Bettany-Saltikov (2012), Korhonen et al. (2013), and Butler et al. (2016), the purpose of a critical appraisal is to ensure that the included studies are free from significant methodological issues that might influence the quality of review findings. Butler et al. (2016) suggest the use of the CASP tool developed by the CASP international network as an appropriate tool for critical appraisal. All the included primary studies were distributed and read independently by the authors. In this study, three authors were independently involved in the examination of the articles and use of the critical appraisal criteria. Differences of opinion between the reviewers regarding the results of the critical appraisal were discussed until a consensus was reached. The results of the critical appraisal of this review are presented in Table 1.

Data extraction

Characteristics of the included primary studies are presented in Table 2. The elements of the studies were: the author, the year of publication, the study aim, the research design, the sample population and size of sample, the methodology of data collection, the data analysis method, and the trustworthiness of the findings.

Data Synthesis

The findings from the included studies were then synthesized using thematic synthesis, as described by Thomas and Harden (2008), consisting of three stages: 1) coding text; 2) developing descriptive themes; and 3) generating analytical themes. In order to ensure the rigorousness of the research, the included primary studies were distributed between two authors, who then worked independently to develop analytical themes. The first stage involved line-by-line coding from the text taken from the included studies to produce initial codes. Next, descriptive themes were created. The differences and similarities between the initial codes were carefully assessed, and these initial codes were then organized into groups based on their distinctive features and similarities. The final step of the thematic synthesis involved the organization of descriptive themes into related areas, known as analytical themes. Agreement on the final analytical themes was reached after discussion between team members.
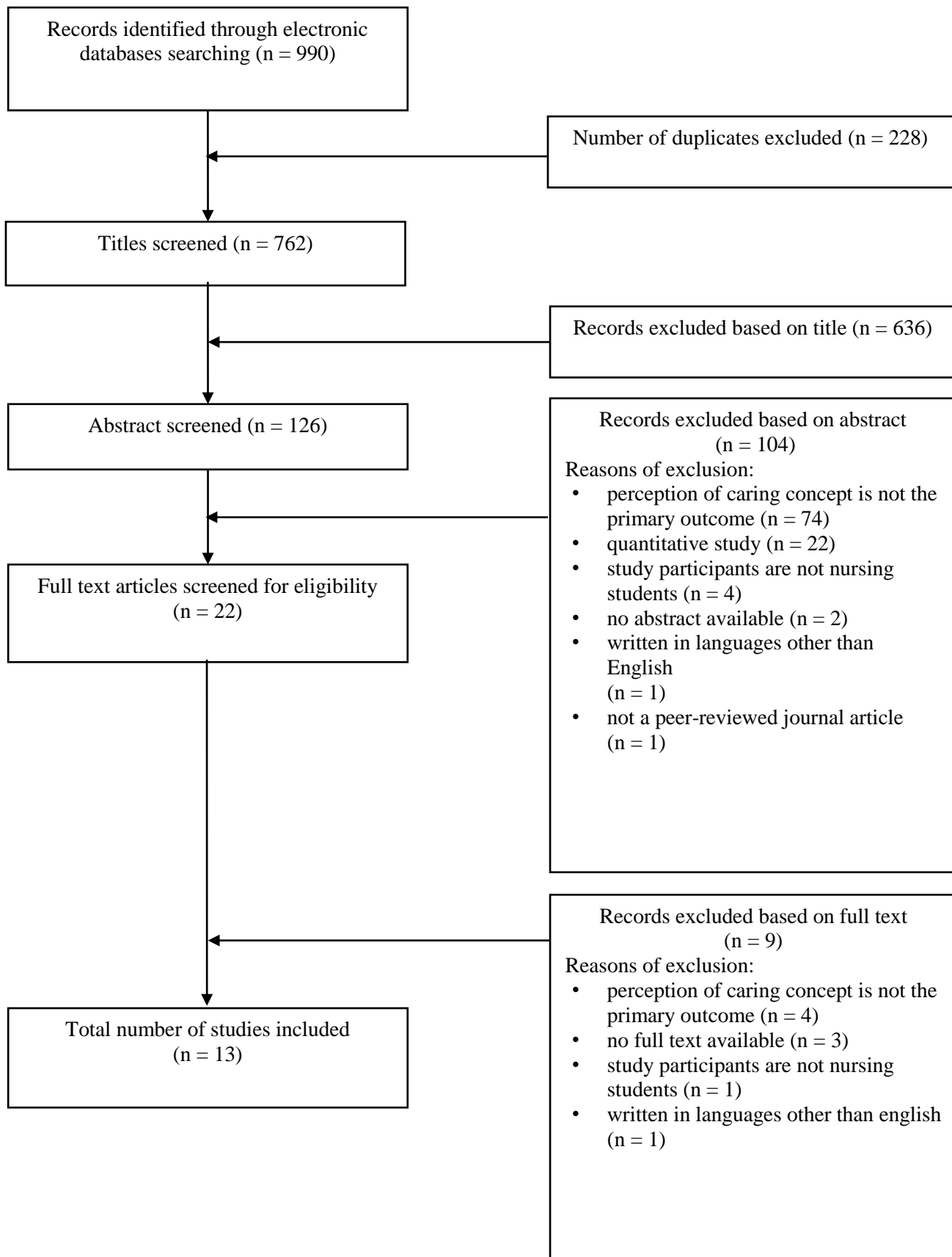
Figure 1 PRISMA diagram of article selection process

Table 1 Quality assessment of included studies using CASP qualitative research checklist

Author (year)	Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research?	Is a qualitative methodology appropriate?	Was the research design appropriate to addressing the aims of the research?	Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research?	Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue?	Was the relationship between researcher and participants adequately considered?	Were ethical issues taken into consideration?	Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?	Is there a clear statement of findings?	Is the research of value?
Bagdonaite-Stelmokiene et al. (2016)	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Beck (1993)	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Begum & Slavin (2012)	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Dobrowolska & Palese (2016)	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Kapborg & Berterö (2003)	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Karaoz (2005)	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	can't tell	yes	yes	yes	yes
Petrou et al. (2017)	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Rosser et al. (2019)	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	can't tell	yes	yes	yes	yes
Sapountzi-Krepia et al. (2013)	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	can't tell	yes	yes	yes	yes
Schaefer (2003)	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Sebold et al. (2016)	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Sorrell & Redmond (1997)	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
Wilkes & Wallis (1998)	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	can't tell	yes	yes	yes	yes

Table 2 Table of data extraction characteristic of included studies (Part 1)

Items	
Author (Year)	**Bagdonaite-Stelmokiene et al. (2016)**
Aim	to discover how the meaning of caring is perceived by nursing and social work students
Research design	qualitative descriptive
Sample	60 final year nursing students and 63 final year of nursing students
Data collection	reflective writings (narratives)
Data analysis	qualitative content analysis
Trustworthiness	inter coder reliability
Finding	the definition of caring: collaboration for patient wellbeing and values at work, mission of work, and worker proficiency
Author (Year)	**Beck (1993)**
Aim	to explore the meaning of caring among nursing students and physically or mentally handicapped children in a school setting
Research design	Van Mannen's Phenomeno-logical approach
Sample	22 undergraduate nursing students
Data collection	protocol writing
Data analysis	Van Mannen's Hermeneutic method
Trustworthiness	member checking
Finding	there were five essential themes produced in this study: authentic presence, emotional support, physical comforting, competence, and positive consequence
Author (Year)	**Begum & Slavin (2012)**
Aim	to describe the concept of caring from nursing students' perspective
Research design	exploratory study
Sample	senior nursing students of state nursing college in Pakistan, 8 participants
Data collection	in-depth interview
Data analysis	Cress-well's six-step guide
Trustworthiness	member check
Finding	participants of this study perceived caring as a source of development and empowerment, caring as communication, caring as limit setting, caring as helping attitude, caring as mothering relationship

Table 2 Table of data extraction characteristic of included studies (Part 2)

Items	
Author (Year)	**Dobrowolska & Palese (2016)**
Aim	to describe concept of caring, manifestation of and obstacles to caring, from first year nursing students' perspective, before and after clinical placement
Research design	qualitative study based on analysis of narrative
Sample	sample before clinical placement, 15 participants; sample after clinical placement 15 participants
Data collection	participants' narratives (text diaries from participants)
Data analysis	narrative analysis and content analysis approach
Trustworthiness	stepwise replication
Finding	in the first year of nursing study students' concept and manifestation of caring put emphasis on the expressive dimension, such as caring as sharing, caring as presence; as they moved to the next year, nursing students' perceptions of caring expanded to include both instrumental and expressive dimensions
Author (Year)	**Kapborg & Berterö (2003)**
Aim	to identify and describe the nature of the caring concept
Research design	qualitative content analysis
Sample	novice nursing students in Swedish, 127 participants
Data collection	questionnaire with open ended questions
Data analysis	qualitative content analysis
Trustworthiness	all categories of this study were validated through a systematic review of material from the study
Finding	three categories emerged from this study related to caring concept: professionalism, doing, and being with
Author (Year)	**Karaoz (2005)**
Aim	clarifying nursing students' perceptions of caring
Research design	qualitative approach
Sample	final year undergraduate nursing students, 19 participants
Data collection	individual interviews
Data analysis	thematic analysis
Trustworthiness	member check
Finding	nursing students perceived caring as professional or helping relationship for patients and their families, and technical competency
Author (Year)	**Petrou et al. (2017)**
Aim	to explore nursing students' perceptions of concept of caring
Research design	qualitative approach
Sample	all four study years of Nursing Department of Cypriot University 150 participants
Data collection	questionnaire with open ended questions
Data analysis	content analysis
Trustworthiness	stepwise replication
Finding	caring was perceived as helping others and meeting patient needs, providing health care, and providing emotional and physical support
Author (Year)	**Rosser et al. (2019)**
Aim	to understand the belief and values of caring held by nursing students from entry until completion of education programs
Research design	prospective qualitative longitudinal approach
Sample	year 2013 = 21 nursing students, 12 decided to participate, of which five remained until the end of three year; year 2014 = 27 nursing students, with nine completing the study
Data collection	individual semi-structured interviews
Data analysis	thematic analysis
Trustworthiness	face validity
Finding	five caring themes emerged from this study: caring as personal quality, demonstrating skills to patient, understanding patient needs, examples of uncaring behavior, caring seen through personal experience
Author (Year)	**Sapountzi-Krepia et al. (2013)**
Aim	exploring and understanding nursing students' perceptions of concept of care
Research design	qualitative study with focus group approach
Sample	nursing students in Nursing Department of an Institute of Higher Education in Northern Greece, 24 participants
Data collection	questionnaire with open ended questions and follow up with focus group discussion
Data analysis	qualitative content analysis
Trustworthiness	stepwise replication
Finding	nursing students described caring in multidimensional concepts, such as caring as emotional offer, service, psychological and biological support, constant phenomenon, and caring activities provided to individuals or groups

Table 2 Table of data extraction characteristic of included studies (Part 3)

Items	
Author (Year)	**Schaefer (2003)**
Aim	to provide advance practice nursing students with the opportunity to enrich their aesthetic knowing, and gain an understanding of what caring means in their practice
Research design	narrative approach
Sample	68 nursing students
Data collection	reflective diaries
Data analysis	narrative analysis
Trustworthiness	double coding
Finding	findings of this study indicated nursing students perceived caring as providing support and encouragement to both patients and families who require nursing care
Author (Year)	**Sebold et al. (2016)**
Aim	to understand nursing student's perceptions of caring
Research design	Heidegger's phenomenological approach
Sample	undergraduate nursing students at Federal University of Santa Carina who enrolled in the course Grounds for Professional Care, 21 participants
Data collection	group dynamic
Data analysis	Martin Heid-egger's phenomenological guidelines
Trustworthiness	researcher reflexivity
Finding	caring means presence, being with others, and maintaining self-care
Author (Year)	**Sorrell & Redmond, (1997)**
Aim	to describe the experiences of 23 undergraduate nursing students in relation to their perception of "caring" in their nursing programs
Research design	phenomenological – Heidegger's Hermeneutic approach
Sample	23 nursing students attending a nationwide nursing student conference
Data collection	interviews with open ended questions
Data analysis	Heidegger's Hermeneutic approach
Trustworthiness	inter coder reliability
Finding	findings of this study demonstrated that three themes related to caring: creating a caring place, caring as offering, leaps ahead caring
Author (Year)	**Wilkes & Wallis (1998)**
Aim	to define caring among nursing students across the three years of a tertiary nursing program
Research design	qualitative descriptive
Sample	nursing students on pre-registration program at two tertiary institutions in Sydney
Data collection	questionnaire with open ended questions, followed up with in-depth interview
Data analysis	content analysis
Trustworthiness	participant triangulation, methodological triangulation
Finding	components of caring from nursing students' perspective changed as students move from one year to the next

Results

Six analytical themes were derived based on the results: 1) caring as presence; 2) caring as support; 3) caring as professionalism; 4) caring as communication; 5) caring as establishing interpersonal relations, and 6) patient wellbeing as a positive outcome of caring. The descriptive and analytical themes are summarized in Table 3 and discussed in the following section.

Caring as presence

In this review, nursing students perceived caring as "presence". Presence is described as a kind of nursing practice that involves being there for patients physically and psychologically. Based on the result of the synthesis, nursing students felt that presence is comprised of physical presence and psychological presence.

Physical presence: Nursing students recognized that physical presence is being able to be with patients physically and can be expressed by physical presence with patients – when they spend time with patients, and are there to attend to patients' needs at all times. Statements from nursing students in the primary studies that captured physical presence as caring included: *"Caring means spending time with the patient ..."* (Dobrowolska & Palese, 2016); *"... There were times when I just went in and sat with her, she just wanted someone to sit there, not to do anything ..."* (Wilkes & Wallis, 1998); *"Caring means... to be present ..."* (Sebold et al., 2016).

Psychological presence: Nursing students described "psychological presence" as the cognitive awareness of patients' needs during interactions with patients. In this review, psychological presence was demonstrated by performing sensitively, paying

Table 3 Final analytical theme and descriptive theme

Analytical themes	Descriptive themes
Caring as presence	1. physical presence
	2. psychological presence
Caring as support	1. physical support
	2. emotional support
	3. empowering patient
Caring as professionalism	1. professional skills
	2. professional knowledge
	3. professional ethics
	4. continuing education
	5. nurse self-care
Caring as communication	1. verbal communication
	2. non-verbal communication
Caring as establishing interpersonal relations	1. patient-nurse therapeutic relationship
	2. inter-professional collaboration
Patient wellbeing as a positive outcome of caring	1. obtaining physical wellbeing
	2. obtaining emotional wellbeing

attention, understanding, and listening. Nursing students in the studies expressed this as: *"Being aware of emotional and psychological aspects of care and hospitalization"* (Kapborg & Berterö, 2003); *"Just looking for clues in the way they are acting or speaking"* (Wilkes & Wallis, 1998).

Caring as support

The second theme to emerge based on the analysis was "caring as support". Nursing students viewed caring as the ability to provide support to patients. According to the results, nursing students perceived that holistic support is a significant aspect of providing care and is not limited to physical support – emotional support is considered equally significant.

Physical support: Physical support refers to the types of support given to patients that are intended to help them carry out daily activities that cannot be done independently. In this review, nursing students found that physical support consists of meeting patients' needs and helping them. Nursing students gave various examples of caring as providing physical support including: *"[Taking] the meal tray to the patient's side"* (Karaoz, 2005); *"… Systematic care of a person who cannot cover their own fundamental physical needs …"* (Sapountzi-Krepia et al., 2013).

Emotional support: Nursing students described emotional support as the ability to provide support to patients which can reduce emotional suffering caused by disability or illness. The current review reported that emotional support involved offering hope, providing encouragement, reassuring, and sharing. Examples of how nursing students understood emotional support included: *"We were able to share thoughts and feelings ..."* (Beck, 1993); *"*[It means] *supporting him/her psychologically ..."* (Petrou et al., 2017).

Empowering patients: The empowerment of patients was also an important aspect of caring. It is described as a type of support that enables patients to enhance and promote their ability to self-care according to their current capabilities. This review revealed that nursing students felt that caring in nursing should not make patients dependent on nurses, but should promote patients' ability to take care of themselves, as far as they are able; as one nursing student put it: *"Nursing is not making someone depend on you, nursing is helping someone achieve the best they can with what they have."* (Sorrell & Redmond, 1997).

Caring as professionalism

"Caring as professionalism" was identified as another theme, and is seen as the ability to carry out nursing services with professional skill, which is characterized as professional knowledge accompanied by professional responsibility, without neglecting personal self-care. In this review, nursing students perceived that professionalism was related to nursing students' professional skills, professional knowledge, professional ethics, nurses' self-care, and continuous development of knowledge.

Professional skills: Nursing students explained that professional skills were necessary for carrying out professional duties and attending to patients' needs. Professional skills (which include patient preparation before interventions) should be applied creatively and equally, and with the patients in mind. In order to practice caring, nursing students perceived that professional skills were essential – they needed to be equipped with the ability to perform their professional duties with good skill, confidence, a creative manner, and the ability to use technology. Nursing students in the reviewed articles asserted: *"To be a good caregiver, one needs to have good*

skills acquired in the course of practice" (Bagdonaite-Stelmokiene et al., 2016).

Professional knowledge: Professional knowledge refers to the knowledge possessed by health professionals that is needed for the provision of healthcare services, and which is comprised of practical knowledge and the ability to think critically. The results of this study indicated that professional knowledge played an important role in providing care. At the same time, nurses are expected to apply critical thinking and equip themselves with the knowledge to perform procedural routines. In the primary studies that looked at professional knowledge, nursing students believed that it meant: *"having knowledge, theoretical and practical, to care for a patient in a professional way"* (Kapborg & Berterö, 2003).

Professional ethics: Professional ethics is defined as the regulations and ethical obligations related to the nursing profession that are associated with the provision of nursing care for patients. Nursing students perceived that professional ethics were required when practicing care, and these ethics referred to a sense of duty, respect for human dignity, prioritization of patient interests, and giving equal consideration to all patients. Nursing students understood ethics to mean: *"There is no discrimination; assistance is rendered to the small and young, the old, disabled, homeless, and alcohol-addicted"* (Bagdonaite-Stelmokiene et al., 2016); *"In order to care one must accept responsibility ..."* (Wilkes & Wallis, 1998); *"Treating the patient with dignity and respect ..."* (Kapborg & Berterö, 2003); *"... Putting them first"* (Rosser et al., 2019).

Continuing education: Continuing education is described as the lifelong development of expertise or education in the nursing profession, which aims to improve the quality of nursing services. Improvement in professional knowledge and updating of knowledge should be achieved through continuous education of nurses. In order to perform care in nursing, up-to-date and modern knowledge in nursing expertise is required in perpetuity. Nursing students asserted that the development of knowledge was an important factor in the provision of care to patients: *"You must have diverse knowledge, which has to be updated from time to time"* (Bagdonaite-Stelmokiene et al., 2016).

Nurse self-care: Nursing students perceived nurse self-care to mean taking responsibility for their own personal well-being, which could potentially affect their professional care. In the review, nursing students viewed personal self-care among nurses as important in promoting professional services to patients. Nurses should not neglect their personal self-care while pursuing their careers, and they needed to maintain a work-life balance, drawing a boundary between their workplace and home. Nursing students emphasized the importance of a work-life balance in the practice of caring: *"It is important to learn not to bring the clients' problems back home, but to leave them behind your office door"* (Bagdonaite-Stelmokiene et al., 2016).

Caring as communication

Communication represents the process of creating, sending and receiving messages between patients and nurses in the context of a healthcare setting. The results of the current review indicated that nurses needed to be equipped with the ability to perform verbal and non-verbal communication when delivering healthcare services to patients.

Verbal communication: In the articles reviewed, nursing students appreciated the importance of verbal communication (communication that uses spoken words) in a clinical setting. This included, but was not limited to, delivering explanations to patients about their self-care and level of independence; as one nurse commented: *"A person doing social work should be able to teach the client to function in society independently"* (Bagdonaite-Stelmokiene et al., 2016).

Non-verbal communication: Non-verbal communication is categorized as a type of message transmission between two or more persons using non-verbal expressions, for instance, gestures, tone of voice, facial expression, and touch. Caring can be expressed through non-verbal communication, which is considered an important aspect of providing patient care. Nursing students understood that non-verbal communication could be performed in these ways: *"A look of the eyes, an expression of the face, a tone of voice, [your] body posture and standing strongly affect thoughts and feelings"* (Bagdonaite-Stelmokiene et al., 2016).

Caring as establishing interpersonal relations

In the review of prior research, we found that nursing students perceived caring as closely associated with the ability to build interpersonal relationships (within professional boundaries) in a healthcare context. Interpersonal relations within professional boundaries in a healthcare setting refers to the relationships between nurses and their patients, and the relationships between nurses and other healthcare professionals. In practicing caring, nurses need to build interpersonal relationships and rapport with patients and recognize other health professionals as team members in order to effectively deliver

the services needed by the patients.

Patient-nurse therapeutic relationship: The patient-nurse therapeutic relationship is described as a process of bonding and interaction between patients and nurses that occurs during patient care with the aim of achieving the best outcome for patients and their well-being (while respecting professional boundaries). Nursing students in the included studies asserted that the ability to develop a patient-nurse therapeutic relationship considerably affected the delivery of care to a patient. In this review, patient-nurse therapeutic relationships were established by considering cultural diversity among patients, honesty, trust, interpersonal relations, showing an ability to communicate, and getting to know the patient; and they also realized that cultural aspects played a role in the nurse-patient therapeutic relationship: *"It is important to gain trust from the side of the client"* (Bagdonaite-Stelmokiene et al., 2016); *"A nurse must find the following aspects of secondary importance: race, sex, religious beliefs, age, political affiliation, or status ..."* (Bagdonaite-Stelmokiene et al., 2016).

Inter-professional collaboration: Nursing students viewed inter-professional collaboration as the collaborative practice between two or more health professionals from different educational backgrounds in a healthcare setting. Patient well-being can be achieved through inter-professional collaboration. Nursing students appreciated that establishing inter-professional collaboration when performing care in a clinical context was important for patient well-being: *"The nurse must involve other specialists in his / her activities, and cooperate with different institutions and community members"* (Bagdonaite-Stelmokiene et al., 2016).

Patient wellbeing as a positive outcome of caring: The final theme to emerge from the analysis was patient wellbeing as a positive outcome of caring, which relates to the optimum level of wellbeing that can be expected for the patient as a result of nursing services. Nursing students saw patient wellbeing as the expected outcome of the implementation of care. The patient wellbeing was divided into two main types: physical and emotional wellbeing.

Physical wellbeing: Physical wellbeing was reported as the patient's optimum level of physical comfort as a positive outcome of nursing services. Nursing students in the included studies believed that caring should have a positive impact on patients' physical wellbeing: *"The nurse implements caring meaningfully by helping the patient to recover after illness"* (Bagdonaite-Stelmokiene et al., 2016).

Emotional wellbeing: Emotional well-being is related to patients reaching the optimum level of emotional comfort as a positive outcome of nursing care. Nursing students felt that patients' emotional wellbeing could be achieved by the delivery of care. As one nursing student commented, the concept of caring should involve: *"[promoting]… positive feelings within my patient"* (Wilkes & Wallis, 1998).

Discussion

The aim of this literature review was to explore nursing students' perceptions of caring. According to the review, nursing students perceived caring as presence, support, professionalism, communication, establishing interpersonal relations, and patient wellbeing as a positive outcome of caring. Nursing students associated caring with expressive domains and instrumental domains. The instrumental domains of caring are expressed through technical and physical aspects. The results indicated that the instrumental domain was expressed in the following themes: caring as professionalism, caring as establishing interpersonal relations, and caring as communication. Meanwhile, nursing students regarded the expressive domains as: caring as presence and caring as support. The findings of this review align with results from previous research by Begum and Slavin (2012), Milnar (2010), Woodward (1997), and Zamanzadeh et al. (2014), who also divided the components of caring into the same two main types: instrumental domains (caring action) and expressive domains (psychosocial domain).

Another analytical theme emerged relating to nursing students' perceptions of caring as presence. Similar findings were reported in studies conducted by Bozdoganyesilot and Oz (2016), and Finfgeld-Connett (2008) which found that the concepts of caring and presence displayed high levels of similarity. Nursing students in the current study perceived that total presence is ideal when providing care. Total presence is represented by both physical and emotional presence. Covington (2003) stated that the universal characteristics of caring can be defined as presence and "being with". Meanwhile, Blasdell (2017) and Swanson (1993) identified "being with" as one of the five caring processes. "Being with" refers to having a physical or emotional presence (Swanson, 1993). Brilowski and Wendler (2005) also describe how caring is an intentional and authentic presence. Presence is an aspect of caring (Finfgeld-Connett, 2008; Zerwekh, 1997) that involves the authentic presence of nurses (Hooper, 2013). In caring theory, presence is regarded as an essential part of caring (Connor, 2017; Smith et al., 2013;

Swanson, 1993). The presence of nurses is significant from a patient perspective since a nurse's presence makes them feel cared for, provides help in the recovery process, and, subsequently, enables them to reach a healthier state (Bright, 2015).

Nursing students also perceived caring as support. Supporting a patient is not limited to physical support, but also includes emotional support. This finding is consistent with those of Drahošová and Jarošová (2016), Liu et al. (2006), and Poole and Rowat (1994), who suggest that providing care to patients means supporting patients in both physical and emotional aspects. Andersson et al. (2015) stated that nurses' personalities, availability, and physical and emotional support were important parts of caring. In this review, nursing students listed examples of providing physical support: meeting patients' needs, providing help to patients, etc. Physical support for patients can take the form of helping them to execute their daily activities, to manage the effects of treatment, and to manage symptoms (Leseure & Chongkham-Ang, 2015). The second aspect of the theme "caring as support" is emotional support. Nursing students in the included studies believed that emotional support was a necessary part of caring. According to Andersson et al. (2015), and Drahošová and Jarošová (2016), in addition to physical and emotional support from nurses, availability and reliability are essential qualities in caring for a patient. Liu et al. (2006) identified nurses' attitudes and their responsibilities in the provision of emotional support as a component of caring. The results of this review highlighted the role of emotional support in reducing a patient's psychological stress arising from their health issues and treatments. According to Liu et al. (2006), when faced with a life-threatening disease, patients experience psychological distress, which should be recognized and countered with emotional support. In addition, this review also reported empowering patients as a subtheme that complemented the theme "caring as support". Nursing students saw empowering patients as part of support; however, caring should not increase patients' dependence on nurses, instead patients should be encouraged to achieve the desired outcome by themselves to the best of their abilities. This finding aligns with previous literature by Faulkner (2001), Malin and Teasdale (1991), Mok et al. (2004), Weis et al. (2006), and etc., who also recommend that nurses optimize patient autonomy and minimize patient reliance on nurses. Nursing students in the studies included in the review stated that empowering patients involved encouraging patient independence and patient self-care, a finding consistent with

Faulkner (2001), who asserts that the components of patient empowerment include promoting a patient's independence and being aware of a patient's needs. According to Henderson (1964) and Malin and Teasdale (1991), the role of nurse can be complex as it involves not only the caring for but also the empowerment of patients.

The results of this review indicated that nursing students also perceived caring as professionalism. In order to perform care, a nurse's professional skills need to be supported with professional nursing knowledge, compliance with nursing ethics, continuing education to develop expertise, and the maintenance of self-care. These findings are supported by prior research (Adams & Miller, 2001; Ghadirian et al., 2014) in which professionalism in nursing is described as multifaceted, comprising a knowledge domain and a skill domain (competence), and supported by obedience to nursing ethics, continuing education, participation in professional organizations, self-regulation, and autonomy. Wilkin and Slevin (2004) states that the essential structure of caring is the basis of technical action and competent physical support with affective skill. The main roles of professional ethics are to provide guidance for nurses to work in morally acceptable ways, and to delineate nursing duties and responsibilities (Kangasniemi et al, 2015). In this review, nursing students perceived that caring for others should not mean neglecting self-care. According to Ghebrehiwet (2011), professionals who consider their personal limitations and abilities, and care about their personal health as much as that of the patient, are able to provide the levels of care expected of them by both care providers and care receivers. According to the findings, nursing students considered continuous learning and development of skills were required to ensure the quality of their expertise in order to support their caring services. This agrees with previous studies, in which Rahnama et al. (2012) and Ronald (2015) argue that professionals need to continuously balance their skills and knowledge to support their professional activities.

The current review also discovered that nursing students perceived caring as communication. In nursing, communication is essential since it acts as a medium through which care towards patients can be expressed (Wilkes & Wallis, 1998). In other words, nurses provide and deliver care to patients through communication (Smith, 2013), suggesting that communication, compassion, and caring are interrelated. In fact, nursing students recognized communication to be the primary "caring action"

(Wilkes & Wallis, 1998). Communication is an ideal for caring in nursing, while for Sherko et al. (2013), the purpose of communication in nursing is to help the patient. Communication is an essential component in the nurse-patient relationship (Karaoz, 2005), and in empowering patients, and is also very important in nursing practice for the purpose of communicating with other healthcare professionals. Nursing students perceived that a good patient-nurse relationship is capable of producing excellent nursing care for patients, based on the communication built up between the nurses and patients (Karaoz, 2005).

Establishing interpersonal relations was identified as another concept related to care. In order to provide high-quality care, nursing students highlighted the importance of creating good interpersonal relations, such as establishing a patient-nurse therapeutic relationship and inter-professional collaboration. According to Halldorsdottir (2008), the patient-nurse relationship is the fundamental component for professional nursing care, and is often used to differentiate between caring and uncaring nursing. Studies by Latimer (2014) and Ronald (2015) found that the relationships between nurses and patients are mutual. Patients' expectations of professional care from care providers are important in satisfying patients' needs, whereas for nurses, as care providers, the priority is to respond to their patients' needs. Wright (2010) stated that establishing a positive therapeutic relationship should be acknowledged as central to caring services and therapy. In the literature, Wright (2010), and Zou et al. (2021) suggest that a healthy therapeutic relationship can have a healing effect on patients. In the current review, nursing students believed that interactions between nurses and other health professionals or specialists were essential in providing care to patients. The World Health Organization (1999) stated that teamwork and collaboration between healthcare professionals are required to solve complex health problems when the condition may not be dealt with by one professional alone.

Finally, the theme of patient wellbeing as a positive outcome of caring emerged as a concept related to care. Nursing students involved in the review emphasized that the expected outcome of caring should be patient wellbeing, in both its physical and emotional aspects. In line with prior studies, Finfgeld-Connett (2008) stated that caring can trigger positive outcomes in a client's well-being, physically and emotionally. Bäck-Pettersson (2006) believed that caring was essential for patient wellbeing, and potentially affected a patient's emotional wellbeing, emotional comfort, reassurance, satisfaction with nursing, and healing (Bäck-Pettersson, 2006; Werner et al., 2002), as well as physical wellbeing (Buchanan & Ross, 1995; Finfgeld-Connett, 2008).

Conclusion

This literature review summarized nursing students' perceptions of caring. The results indicated that nursing students have their distinct interpretation of the concept of caring in nursing. The findings showed caring can be defined according to emotional aspects, physical aspects, and professional aspects, and supported with compliance to codes of ethics, and a nurse's ability to maintain a work-life balance. Furthermore, nursing students also reported that caring can be expressed by patient empowerment, which is necessary for reducing a patient's dependence on nurses and optimizing their ability to execute their daily tasks on their own. This review suggested that there is a need for improvement in nursing education in order to improve nursing students' experiences related to caring, which is essential in delivering good quality care and services for the well-being of patients. All studies included were conducted in a western context, and since exploring nursing students' perceptions of caring can lead to an improved conceptualization of a caring curriculum, we recommend that further research be undertaken with the objective of understanding nursing students' perceptions of caring in other context s, such as developing countries.

Limitation of study

This review was limited to published articles in English which may have excluded studies of nursing students' perceptions of caring published in languages other than English. The second limitation of this review is the limited number of databases that were used to retrieve the articles. In the future, we recommend that further reviews be undertaken that involve articles published in languages other than English.

Ethical aspects and conflict of interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

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Author contributions

Conception and design (HM, KJY), data analysis and interpretation (HM, NN), manuscript draft (HM, KJY, SHL), critical revision of manuscript (HM, KJY, SHL), final approval of manuscript (HM, KJY, SHL, NN).

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