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Discussion

Insights on the development of TCM nursing



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 8 March 2016

Received in revised form

30 July 2016

Accepted 2 August 2016

Available online 12 August 2016

ABSTRACT

Background: Traditional Chinese medicine nursing (TCM nursing) is one of the highlights of nursing profession in China, which plays a significant role in Chinese healthcare system. However, bottlenecks exist in TCM nursing development. It's necessary to explore the discipline connotation and advantages of TCM nursing in nursing education and clinical practice and introduce modern nursing concepts.

Methods: We analysis the connotations of TCM nursing, the bottlenecks it faces, and strategies to facilitate TCM nursing development.

Results: Qualitative research method and evidence-based nursing concepts are key strategies to solve the dilemma TCM nursing confronts with and are quite essential in TCM nursing development.

Conclusion: We should embed qualitative research method and evidence-based nursing concepts into TCM nursing advancement so as to facilitate the advancement of TCM nursing and promote its globalization.

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1. Introduction

Nursing science, as characterized by traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), is commonly known as nursing in TCM or TCM nursing. This particular field is one of the highlights of nursing profession in China and plays a significant role in the fields of primary nursing, geriatric nursing, hospice care, and family nursing [1]. As people's literacy on health continues to gain momentum nowadays, TCM nursing theories and

techniques have become more prevalent domestically and internationally. *The outline of the development plan of nursing career in China (2011–2015)* explicitly illustrates that we should strive to develop TCM nursing, improve TCM nursing standards, explore TCM nursing characteristics and advantages to the fullest, and highlight the application of TCM nursing techniques in clinical practices [2]. A general survey conducted in America revealed that 42% of Americans have experienced complementary and alternative medicine treatment [3]; to

Peer review under responsibility of Chinese Nursing Association.

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ijnss.2016.08.006>

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which TCM nursing techniques contribute a great proportion [4]. Obviously, TCM nursing has become highly favored and valued in recent years. Nevertheless, the development of TCM nursing is still confronted with serious obstacles. Papers on TCM nursing are of poor quality generally. Many of these studies are frequently about the summarization of clinical experiences and are seldom about randomized controlled studies [5,6]. In addition, TCM nursing techniques are still not widely used in clinical practices [7,8]. This paper aims to analyze the connotations of TCM nursing, the bottlenecks it faces, and strategies to facilitate TCM nursing development.

2. Determining how TCM nursing can be fully understood in a modern society where modern nursing is prevalent

Admittedly, Western nursing has been prevailing in China for a long time and is the mainstream method of caring for patients. TCM nursing, which is of great value in Chinese medicine, is also of great importance in clinical situations, especially in disease prevention. Thus, exploring the value of TCM nursing has become a crucial problem. Moreover, exploring the discipline connotation and advantages of TCM nursing in nursing education and clinical practices is imperative.

2.1. Discipline connotation of TCM nursing

TCM nursing is a discipline of nursing with the characteristics of TCM. Up to now, TCM nursing does not have a mature and complete theoretical system and practice standards. TCM nursing profession must incorporate modern nursing science as its fundamental basis. TCM nursing makes full use of modern nursing philosophy and social functions. TCM nursing education includes basic modern nursing theories, knowledge, and techniques to meet the demands for the primary nursing care of clients. In addition, TCM nursing should imbibe the essence of TCM theories, and skills and attach importance to TCM features and characteristics to explore the potential of TCM nursing. By utilizing the advantages of both fields, TCM nursing discipline can expand its connotation to a more profound level.

2.2. Characteristics and advantages of TCM nursing

One of the main areas of TCM nursing is the incorporation of philosophies and concepts of life cultivation and rehabilitation into the management of chronic diseases and full utilization of the superiorities of simplicity, convenience, effectiveness, and low cost in TCM nursing [1].

2.2.1. TCM nursing theories and knowledge enrich the content of health education and occupational connotation

According to a new report released by World Health Organization (WHO) in 2015, around 16 million people die before the age of 70 years old from noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) annually [9]. Domestically, the incidences of chronic diseases are rising rapidly. Cardiovascular and cerebrovascular diseases, cancer, and other chronic diseases have become the primary cause of death, accounting for 86.6% of mortality and

nearly 70% of the total burden of disease [10]. However, most of these chronic diseases are preventable and controllable [9]. The TCM concepts of “holism” and “disease prevention” can play a significant role in chronic disease management, especially the concepts of life cultivation and rehabilitation [11]. By incorporating the knowledge of TCM health preservation and natural convalescence (from emotion, diet, exercise, daily life, food, and medicine) into the management of specific chronic diseases, we can greatly improve the patients' quality of life and health condition. TCM nursing, along with the knowledge on the essence of life cultivation and rehabilitation theories and skills, can extend and enrich the discipline and occupational connotation through the full use of those resources in the health education process.

2.2.2. TCM nursing techniques improve nursing skills and nursing values

Another feature of TCM nursing discipline is the usage of various simple nursing techniques, including tuina, scraping, moxibustion, and traditional sports. With the implementation of a series of national revitalization plan in Chinese medicine, most TCM hospitals in China have taken steps to accelerate the implementation of TCM nursing techniques. The advantages and effects of TCM nursing on preventive care, post-operative rehabilitation, and chronic disease care are becoming increasingly distinct and significant, thereby increasing the economic returns for hospitals, improving clients' satisfaction with medical service, and enhancing the sense of achievement of nurses.

3. Bottlenecks in the development of TCM nursing

3.1. Given the complexity of TCM nursing, quantitative research alone is insufficient to measure its effects

First, TCM nursing interventions are complicated. The effects of such interventions result from the combination of various factors, including the establishment of harmonious nurse-client relationship, lingual and non-lingual communication techniques, and instructions on lifestyle, diet, emotion, medication, and exercise. Thus, measuring the frequency and intensity of these interventions is difficult. Second, evaluation of the effectiveness of TCM nursing is a complex matter. Chinese medicine stresses the balance between yin and yang, the regulation of qi and blood, and the harmony of internal organs and external environment. These outcomes become difficult to evaluate when only several quantitative indicators are used. Thus, utilization of quantitative analysis only for TCM nursing performance is not appropriate because of the complexity of the study subjects, interventions, and effect evaluations.

3.2. TCM nursing knowledge is diverse, and TCM nursing health education lacks standardization

Advantages of TCM nursing include health education based on theories and TCM techniques [1]. Most clinical health education materials are obtained from TCM textbooks, especially books on life cultivation and rehabilitation. Such books

basically came from TCM classics, and most are the summarization of ancient clinical experiences. Hence, knowledge on a specific nursing field can be very diverse. Different textbooks sometimes provide inconsistent and even incompatible views on the same subject matter, leading to the dilemma in establishing the reliability of health education.

3.3. TCM nursing techniques lack standardization

Research has shown that most nursing practices are based on how they were taught by senior nurses [12]. When making clinical decisions, nurses use other sources of evidence, such as their own experiences [13]. This kind of dilemma is what TCM nursing techniques are currently facing. TCM nursing techniques are sometimes arbitrary. Although the government has promulgated standards on TCM nursing techniques, these standards are still based on experience and without scientific and rigorous research input. In short, lack of standards hinders the dissemination and globalization of TCM techniques.

4. Determining how the bottlenecks of TCM nursing can be addressed

4.1. Introduction of qualitative research to enrich research methods

Qualitative research is of great significance in the discipline of TCM nursing. TCM nursing highlights the balance between yin and yang within the body and the balance between the internal organs and external environment. Consequently, using only several indicators to evaluate the effect of TCM nursing is difficult and sometimes imprecise and incomplete. The effect is, more often than not, reflected by the mental state, general body state, and emotional state of the patients. In addition, the effect TCM nursing includes an overall evaluation of health. Qualitative research focuses on the knowledge, attitudes, motivations, and expectations of the client, doctors, and nurses. Research on this topic requires observations and records of all the actions taken by healthcare professionals, the doctor-nurse relationship, doctor-nurse-client relationship, the obstacles in the process of the interventions, and the client's full experiences, feelings, and emotions during the interventions [14]. Thus, qualitative research can help elucidate complicated interventions and comprehensively evaluate complex outcomes of health care.

4.2. Application of evidence-based nursing concept in TCM nursing research

Evidence-based concept changes staff nurse practices from experience-based to evidence-based and instruct nurses to search and utilize the best available evidence. This concept would be beneficial in the literature review of TCM nursing research, health education and TCM nursing techniques standardization, and to an extent, may solve the dilemma faced by TCM nursing.

4.2.1. Application of evidence-based nursing concept to the literature review of TCM nursing research

Evidence-based nursing emphasizes that nursing decisions should rely on evidence, clinical experience, and patients' preference. Evidence is the top priority for a smart medical decision, and they should be obtained from research reports published in academic journals or professional websites. Based on primary research evidence, a comprehensive and rigorous systematic review can be accomplished with all the eligible literature related to an identified subject. A systematic review can help assess the subject's current status, clinical efficacy of the interventions, and its clinical applicability; thus, it can serve as evidence for making a clinical decision or for future research [15].

Meanwhile, well-designed and strictly-implemented randomized control trials are scarce in the field of TCM nursing. Most works on this subject are the summarization of clinical experiences or case reports. Although randomized controlled trials or other high quality literature related to TCM nursing is lacking, case reports, expert opinions, Chinese medical classics, and historical data can also be regarded as the currently best evidence available. Utilizing evidence-based nursing concept when analyzing nursing literature is a key step for nurse researchers. Through this way, the level of nursing research can be elevated. The scientific research consciousness can be strengthened, and the quality of nursing research and clinical practice can be improved.

4.2.2. Application of evidence-based nursing concept to research on TCM health education pathways

Clinical Nursing Pathways (CNP) is a nursing management method launched in the USA in the 1980s. Based on evidence-based practices and nursing practice guidelines, CNP helps establish a set of standardized nursing models to normalize nursing actions according to the length of hospital stay. CNP can reduce the arbitrariness of nursing action, lower medical cost, and improve healthcare quality [16]. The method has been introduced by researchers to patients' health education since 2001, and it has revealed that pathways can significantly enhance the quality and effect of health education, increase clients' satisfaction on healthcare, and promote health behaviors and clients' recovery more effectively [16].

As mentioned above, TCM nursing has a great advantage in the health education of patients with chronic diseases and sub-healthy citizens; but admittedly, the related education materials are sometimes unreliable. Conducting research on TCM nursing health education pathways with evidence-based concepts can help normalize and standardize the health education content, thereby reducing the variability in the health education process; it will also greatly improving the nurse's knowledge of and patient's satisfaction level in the nursing profession, which can lead to the further development of TCM nursing discipline.

4.2.3. Application of evidence-based nursing concepts to research on TCM nursing techniques

With traits including simplicity, convenience, effectiveness, and low-cost, TCM nursing techniques are more likely to be accepted by citizens. However, the operation instructions are still based on the level of experience and without any support

from high-level evidence and research. Therefore, the action mechanism and effect studies on TCM nursing techniques are imperative. Furthermore, researchers need to obtain enough reliable evidence and aim to establish TCM nursing techniques operation guidelines using the evidence-based nursing methods before applying TCM nursing techniques.

4.2.4. Application of evidence-based nursing methods to nursing education to cultivate critical thinking ability

First and foremost, evidence-based nursing methodology is a practical and systematic research that can facilitate the self-learning ability of nursing students. Second, evidence-based nursing methods consist of five steps, as follows: inquiry, acquisition, assessment, application, and evaluation. Inquiry requires formulating a specific, appropriate, and answerable clinical question. Acquisition involves the systematic and comprehensive collection of the best available evidence. Assessment includes determining the internal and external reliability and clinical importance of the acquired evidence based on scientific standards. Application combines the collected evidence with specific clinical contexts and clients' preferences and applying them to clinical practices. Evaluation determines the effect of application on clinical practice. Each of the steps is a key point in cultivating critical thinking ability and changing the mode of thinking and practices of nursing students.

5. Summary

With the great improvement of the healthcare system, disease spectrum has already changed from infectious or nutrition deficiency diseases to chronic diseases, such as cardiovascular diseases and tumors. Moreover, the issue of aging has recently become crucial in China. TCM nursing is also gaining much more attention locally and abroad [17]. The connotations and advantages of TCM nursing discipline need to be reflected in nursing education and clinical practices. Application of qualitative research method and evidence-based nursing concept should be highlighted in TCM nursing research to improve TCM nursing and enable its global dissemination.

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