LEARNING EXPERIENCES OF NURSING STUDENTS IN PALLIATIVE AND END OF LIFE CARE

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KEYWORDS

Palliative and end of life care, nursing students, learning experiences, student feedback of subject, student feedback of teaching.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY (100 words maximum)

Nurses play an indispensable role in providing care to people with life-limiting illnesses and it is important to equip nursing students with essential knowledge and skills in palliative and end of life care. Little is known about the learning experience of nursing students towards this key area of clinical practice. Surveys were conducted from 2020 to 2025 with 233 nursing students and positive feedback was obtained. Over 98% of students reported that their learning were effective with staff support. Learning palliative care in students' first year of study is vital to prepare them for their first clinical placement.

INTRODUCTION

With medical advances, people lives longer with increasing chronic and life-limiting illnesses. Nurses play a significant role in providing palliative and end of life care; however, most of the nurses are not well prepared. Many nurses may not feel comfortable in providing care for people with life-limiting illnesses. This might be due to a lack of knowledge and skills in palliative and end of life care, especially among student nurses and the newly graduated nurses. This could be related to lack of formal education on palliative care and lack of clinical exposure in their nursing pre-registration programs, either Bachelor of Nursing or Master of Nursing pre-registration programs. Learning palliative and end of life care as a student nurse is vital to develop essential competence, confidence, and emotional resilience in managing complex, death and dying situations. It prepares students to deliver high-quality holistic care, improve patient/family communication, and effectively manage their own emotions in diverse clinical settings. Little is known about the learning experience of nursing students towards this key area of nursing education. The aim of the current survey is to obtain learning experience and feedback from students about the content, delivery, and assessment in the subject of Palliative and End of Life Care in pre-registration nurse education at tertiary level.

HIGHLIGHTS

- In subject survey, 99.11% of students agreed that their learning were effective.
- In teaching survey, 98.37% of students agreed that staff effectively support their learning.
- Different ways of teaching and sharing of experience facilitated learning.
- Dedication, compassion, and knowledgeable are the good qualities of a teacher.
- Learning palliative and end of life care before clinical placement is vital.

METHODOLOGY/ PROCESS

Sample: Convenient sampling was used in the current survey. Students studying the subject of Palliative and End of Life Care in Bachelor of Nursing Program and Master of Nursing Pre-registration Program who were taught by the author were recruited for the survey.

Methods: Two anonymous online surveys - Student Feedback on Subject (SFS) [Table 1] and Student Feedback on Teaching (SFT) [Table 2] were provided to students at the end of the semester via email and via the online teaching platform. Students were reminded by their teacher to complete both SFS and SFT during the last tutorial. Email reminders with the links to survey were provided to students twice.

Measurement Tools: Student Feedback on Subject (SFS) composed of 10 statements asking students whether their learning in the subject was effectively supported or not [Table 1]. Students can choose one of the responses - Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. At the end of the survey, there are two free text questions where the students can write comments on 'Best aspects' of the subject and areas that 'Needs improvement'. Student Feedback on Teaching (SFT) composed of 8 statements asking students to agree or disagree whether the staff member effectively supported their learning or not. Students can choose one of the responses - Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. At the end of the survey, there are two free text questions where the students can write comments on 'Best aspects' of the teaching and areas which 'Needs improvement'.

Data analysis: Descriptive analysis was employed to describe the responses for each question in the SFS survey and SFT survey. Thematic analysis was used to interpret text comments from the students.

RESULTS/ OUTCOMES

A total of 233 students have completed the surveys and the average response rate is 16.6%. There were 73 students responded to the Student Feedback on Subject (SFS) survey from 2023 to 2025 and the average response rate is 15.9%. For the Student Feedback on Teaching (SFT) survey from 2020 to 2025, 160 students responded and the average response rate is 17.3%. In SFS, 99.11% of students agreed or strongly agreed that their learning were effective. In SFT, 98.37% of students agreed or strongly agreed that staff effectively support their learning. Table 3 listed the exact percentage of students who agreed or strongly agreed each statement in the SFS survey. Similarly, in Table 4, the percentage of students who agreed or strongly agreed each statement in the SFT survey is clearly listed.

Themes were extracted from students' comment at the end of the survey. Five themes were emerged as follows: **(1) Cultivating positive learning environment** – students appreciated a welcoming, encouraging and interactive learning environment. They felt safe to express their ideas and feelings which made learning enjoyable. Quotes from student *"Thank you so much [teacher] for being so patient with us. You were always smiling and making the class interesting by engaging us in various activities." "You made students feel comfortable sharing answers. It helped me boost my self-confidence to express myself."* **(2) Education delivered through various methods** – Quote from student *"[Teacher] presented useful information via slides, videos, role play/demonstration, literature etc. which helped me to build my knowledge on palliative care and end of life care."* **(3) Sharing of clinical and personal experience** - Students appreciated learning through experienced staff who could share clinical experience in palliative care and end of life care with them. Students also valued teachers' sharing of personal experiences of death and dying. Quote from students *"I found it very helpful and I learned about resilience when [teacher] had been going through the grief process and guided us how to manage our own emotion." "Her recounted examples of palliative care with her own experience helps to widen the topic of palliative care."* **(4) Quality of good teacher** – Student reported the quality of good teacher which include being kind, understanding etc. Quote from student *"The dedication for teaching, compassion, love and empathy as well as her power of knowledge and excellent teaching skills helped a lot."* **(5) Learning through assessment tasks** - Although most of the students would not enjoy completing assessment tasks, some students says *"I did enjoy researching the topics, increasing the knowledge, and understanding specific areas in palliative care and end of life care."* For example, students could develop a balanced view towards people who agree and disagree voluntary assisted dying by researching the topic. Students appreciated the constructive feedback from teachers on their assessments. Last but not least, students suggested to learn palliative care during their first year of study before their first clinical placement so that they can be well prepared for death and dying, as well as handling difficult conversation with patients and their family.

CONCLUSION

Students reported that the subject of Palliative and End of Life Care helped them to gain insight into the key elements in palliative care, to better understand the role of nurse in improving the quality of life of people with life-limiting illnesses when cure is impossible. When days cannot be added to life, students learned that it is important to add life to days. Learning palliative and end of life care before clinical placement is vital.

Table 1: Student Feedback on Subject (SFS) Survey

Description		SD	D	N	A	SA
1.	My learning in this unit was effectively supported by: Learning activities.					
2.	My learning in this unit was effectively supported by: Learning materials.					
3.	My learning in this unit was effectively supported by: Assessments.					
4.	My learning in this unit was effectively supported by: Opportunities to work with other students.					
5.	My learning in this unit was effectively supported by: Technology.					
6.	My learning in this unit was effectively supported by: Access to timely help and advice.					
7.	My learning in this unit was effectively supported by: A reasonable workload relative to other units.					
8.	What I learnt in this unit: Further developed my critical and analytical skills					
9.	What I learnt in this unit: Included work related knowledge and skills.					
10.	Overall: I was satisfied with the quality of this unit.					

Comments	
Best Aspects	**Needs Improvement**

Responses	
SD	Strongly Disagree
D	Disagree
N	Neutral
A	Agree
SA	Strongly Agree

Table 2: Student Feedback on Teaching (SFT) Survey

The staff member effectively supported my learning by:		**SD**	**D**	**N**	**A**	**SA**
1.	encouraging me to participate in learning activities.					
2.	having an effective teaching style.					
3.	being well prepared.					
4.	being approachable.					
5.	creating a learning environment where staff and students treated each other with fairness and respect.					
6.	providing a variety of perspectives and evidence.					
7.	providing feedback that supported my learning.					
8.	Overall, I was satisfied with the quality of this staff member's teaching.					

Comments	
Best Aspects	**Needs Improvement**

Responses	
SD	Strongly Disagree
D	Disagree
N	Neutral
A	Agree
SA	Strongly Agree

Table 3: Results on Student Feedback on Subject (SFS) Survey

	Description	% of Agree/ Strongly Agree
1.	My learning in this subject was effectively supported by: Learning activities.	99.30%
2.	My learning in this subject was effectively supported by: Learning materials.	99.30%
3.	My learning in this subject was effectively supported by: Assessments.	99.30%
4.	My learning in this subject was effectively supported by: Opportunities to work with other students.	99.30%
5.	My learning in this subject was effectively supported by: Technology.	99.30%
6.	My learning in this subject was effectively supported by: Access to timely help and advice.	100.00%
7.	My learning in this subject was effectively supported by: A reasonable workload relative to other subjects.	100.00%
8.	What I learnt in this subject: Further developed my critical and analytical skills	99.30%
9.	What I learnt in this subject: Included work related knowledge and skills.	99.30%
10.	Overall, I was satisfied with the quality of this subject.	96.00%
	Average	**99.11%**

Table 4: Results on Student Feedback on Teaching (SFT) Survey

	The staff member effectively supported my learning by:	**% of Agree/ Strongly Agree**
1.	encouraging me to participate in learning activities.	99.00%
2.	having an effective teaching style.	97.75%
3.	being well prepared.	98.25%
4.	being approachable.	96.75%
5.	creating a learning environment where staff and students treated each other with fairness and respect.	98.75%
6.	providing a variety of perspectives and evidence.	98.75%
7.	providing feedback that supported my learning.	98.88%
8.	Overall, I was satisfied with the quality of this staff member's teaching.	98.88%
	Average	**98.37%**