

Current Status of Traditional Chinese Medicine Nursing Talent Cultivation: Postprint

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Abstract

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) nursing represents an important component of TCM. The talent pool in the TCM nursing industry continues to expand, with gradual improvement in practitioner quality, continuous strengthening of grassroots talent cultivation, and increasingly prominent scientific and technological achievements among high-end talents, thereby enabling the industry to play an increasingly vital role in health service provision and in spearheading the internationalization of TCM. The cultivation of high-level academic talents constitutes a crucial prerequisite for the sustainable development of the nursing discipline. This article examines the current development status of the talent pool in the TCM nursing industry, aiming to provide references for the construction of TCM nursing talent teams.

Full Text

Preamble

Title: The Cultivation Status of Traditional Chinese Medicine Nurses in China

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Abstract

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) nursing constitutes an essential component of TCM. In recent years, the TCM nursing workforce has expanded continuously, with gradually improving professional quality, sustained strengthening of grassroots talent cultivation, and increasingly prominent scientific and technological achievements among high-end talents. These developments have enabled TCM nursing to play an increasingly vital role in health services and in leading the internationalization of TCM. However, several prominent issues remain: the cultivation of high-level academic talents fails to meet the developmental needs of the nursing discipline, and the scale of clinical talent struggles to satisfy health service demands. This paper discusses the current state of talent team development in TCM nursing to provide references for talent team construction.

Keywords: Traditional Chinese Medicine nursing talents; nursing of integrated traditional Chinese and western medicine; inheritance; continuing education; nursing specialists

1. Institutional Training of TCM Nursing Talent

1.1 Undergraduate Education in TCM Nursing

TCM nursing boasts a robust theoretical foundation and distinctive nursing techniques, offering vast prospects in elderly care, community health, and elderly services. Cultivating TCM nursing talent and strengthening the position of TCM nursing can lay a solid foundation for nursing discipline construction[1]. The *14th Five-Year Plan for TCM Development* emphasizes strengthening the construction of characteristic TCM talent teams, building a high-level talent pipeline connecting leading talents, outstanding talents, and backbone talents, and establishing talent cultivation models aligned with TCM characteristics[2]. The *Beijing 14th Five-Year Plan for TCM Nursing Development* further specifies that during the 14th Five-Year period, a multi-level, specialized, socialized, and widely-covered TCM nursing talent cultivation model should be constructed to leverage academic and professional leadership[3].

TCM nursing has a long history in China, but formal collegiate education only began in the 1980s. After decades of development, a complete higher education system for TCM nursing has been established, though regional disparities persist[4]. In the early 1980s, Nanjing hosted the first TCM nursing training program, marking the beginning of formal TCM nursing education. In 1985, Beijing University of Chinese Medicine pioneered TCM nursing associate degree programs[5]. Subsequently, Guangzhou University of Chinese Medicine, Gansu University of Chinese Medicine, and Guiyang University of Chinese Medicine launched undergraduate TCM nursing programs. By 2017, 29 higher education institutions nationwide offered bachelor's degree programs in TCM nursing[6].

1.2 Postgraduate Education in TCM Nursing

TCM nursing postgraduates represent the future workforce whose academic level, research capacity, and management skills will determine the prospects of TCM nursing[7]. In 2010, Nanjing University of Chinese Medicine enrolled its first cohort of master' s students in integrated TCM and Western medicine nursing. In 2011, Peking University School of Nursing piloted professional master' s degree programs, enrolling 20 students[8]. In 2014, Nanjing University of Chinese Medicine established the nation' s first doctoral program in integrated TCM and Western medicine nursing, creating a complete formal education system spanning from associate and bachelor' s degrees to master' s and doctoral degrees[9].

In 2010, China formally launched professional master' s degree programs in nursing, positioning them as practice-oriented programs focused on enhancing specialized clinical nursing competencies and cultivating high-level, application-oriented, specialized nursing talents. When nursing was elevated to a first-level discipline in 2011, 39 institutions were approved to recruit professional master' s students in nursing. To deepen graduate education reform and improve education quality, the state issued the *Notice on Conducting the Review of Additional Authorized Master' s Degree Programs* in 2014, prompting TCM universities to apply for additional authorization points for professional master' s degrees in nursing[10]. However, TCM universities' professional master' s programs, which began formal cultivation in 2015, have yet to see a graduating cohort, indicating that these programs remain in an exploratory phase[11]. Currently, 24 TCM institutions nationwide recruit nursing master' s students: 8 offer both TCM nursing and integrated TCM-Western medicine nursing directions, 9 offer only TCM nursing, 5 offer only integrated TCM-Western medicine nursing, and 2 have not specified either direction[12].

1.3 Training for Newly Graduated TCM Nurses

Newly graduated nurses refer to those within three years of entering clinical practice who are undergoing standardized training[13]. Historically, most TCM hospitals have implemented two types of training programs involving TCM nursing content for new nurses. The first type, mandated by the National Administration of Traditional Chinese Medicine, provides mandatory TCM knowledge training for nurses graduated from Western medicine institutions, requiring 100 hours annually through in-hospital training, academic conferences, or off-duty study. This "basic literacy" training lacks systematic structure and clear objectives[14]. The second type involves standardized training for new nurses. In May 2016, the National Health and Family Planning Commission issued the *Training Program for Newly Recruited Nurses (Trial)*, which established training objectives and requirements regarding theoretical knowledge, technical operations, and clinical practice skills for new nurses[15]. However, this program did not address TCM nursing content or specify implementation guidelines for TCM or integrated TCM-Western medicine hospitals[16].

Lin Meizhen et al.[17] supplemented the national program according to the cultivation and development characteristics of TCM nursing personnel, developing a standardized training program for new nurses in TCM hospitals that incorporates TCM holistic concepts and syndrome differentiation thinking using educational procedures. In 2018, the National Administration of Traditional Chinese Medicine issued its own *Training Program for Newly Recruited Nurses in TCM Hospitals (Trial)*, prompting multiple TCM medical institutions to launch standardized training initiatives[18]. Research has confirmed that implementing standardized training programs enhances new nurses' TCM clinical thinking and comprehensive quality development[19].

1.4 Cultivation of TCM Nursing Backbone Talent

To implement the *Long-term Talent Development Plan for Medicine and Health* and the *12th Five-Year Plan for TCM Development*, and to cultivate high-level TCM nursing backbone talent, the National Administration of Traditional Chinese Medicine organized the first national TCM nursing backbone talent training project in 2014[20]. The unified selection criteria required candidates to have worked in TCM nursing for over five years, hold at least a junior college degree in nursing, possess intermediate or higher professional titles, and be under 45 years old. This project cultivated a cohort of backbone talents with strong theoretical foundations and exquisite professional skills who could effectively apply TCM knowledge and skills in nursing practice, thereby enhancing the professional quality and service capacity of the TCM nursing workforce and promoting sustainable development[21]. In 2017, the Beijing Administration of Traditional Chinese Medicine launched its first batch of TCM nursing backbone talent cultivation to improve academic and specialized nursing skill levels in the Beijing region[22]. Other provinces subsequently initiated their own backbone talent programs, accumulating valuable experience for regional TCM nursing talent cultivation[23].

1.5 Cultivation of TCM Nursing Inheritance Talent

The inheritance and development of TCM nursing theories and experiences are prerequisites for the modernization and internationalization of TCM nursing. Programs such as “master-apprentice education” and “famous veteran TCM expert inheritance studios” represent important approaches to inheriting, summarizing, and developing TCM nursing academic experience[24]. These initiatives have achieved notable results in recent years. In 2018, the Beijing Administration of Traditional Chinese Medicine officially launched the construction of TCM nursing inheritance studios and workstations, establishing the Wang Min TCM Nursing Inheritance Studio, Gui Meifen TCM Nursing Inheritance Studio, and Feng Yunhua TCM Nursing Inheritance Studio plus workstations[25].

The Wang Min TCM Nursing Inheritance Studio adopted a master-apprentice model to cultivate nursing talent, selecting outstanding nursing staff to form inheritance teams[26]. After its establishment, the hospital formed a project

management group comprising medical, educational, and other experts to guide, manage, and supervise the studio's construction. Apprentices, guided by their mentors and focusing on problems encountered in practice, studied TCM classical texts related to nursing within their specialties. They systematically organized the academic thoughts, clinical experiences, and life insights of three mentor experts, compiling them into academic experience summaries that provide references for TCM nursing development[27]. The Gui Meifen TCM Nursing Inheritance Studio, after five years of practice, compiled the *Q&A on TCM Nursing Knowledge* based on Gui Meifen's experience and the current situation of non-TCM school graduates, and formulated the *Beijing Regional TCM Nursing 100-Hour Training Syllabus* grounded in the "three basics" principle (basic theory, basic knowledge, basic skills)[28]. The team also distilled "famous nursing techniques from Yanjing in surgery, dermatology, breast department, gynecology, and pediatrics," collected typical cases, and co-authored the book *Yanjing Famous Nursing Techniques* with accompanying technique videos, laying a solid foundation for inheriting and developing characteristic TCM nursing techniques[29].

2. Continuing Education for In-service TCM Nurses

2.1 Current State of Continuing Education

Clinical training constitutes a crucial pathway for professional talent development. With increasing demand for TCM nursing talent, on-the-job training has gained significant attention within the profession. TCM hospitals typically implement rotation systems, arranging new nurses to learn in various clinical departments[30]. Studies have confirmed that standardized training programs benefit the development of new nurses' TCM clinical thinking and comprehensive qualities[31].

2.2 Cultivation of TCM Specialist Nurses

Currently, specialist nurse training in ICU, emergency department, and operating room is relatively well-established, while TCM specialist nurse training remains in its infancy[32]. No unified national standard defines the concept of TCM specialist nurses. The currently accepted definition refers to expert clinical nurses with high-level professional knowledge and clinical skills in a specific or specialized nursing field[33]. Chongqing, Guangdong, Xuzhou, and other regions have successively launched TCM specialist nurse training programs. In 2017, Zhejiang Province established the nation's first training base for integrated TCM-Western medicine specialist nurses[34].

Most specialist nurses are trained by designated institutions from provincial health departments or nursing associations, which then issue provincial specialist nurse qualification certificates. For example, Guangdong Province issues the "Guangdong Province TCM Specialist Nurse Completion Certificate," while Sichuan Province issues the "Sichuan Province TCM Specialist Nurse Training

Qualification Certificate.” The coexistence of various certification institutions and training bases at different levels creates independent systems where certification from one province may not be fully recognized in another. This regional nature of specialist nurse certification significantly restricts the growth and development of specialist nurses[35].

During the 13th Five-Year period, China trained 150,000 specialist nurses of various types, with 3,000 obtaining TCM nursing therapy specialist nurse qualifications[36]. By exploring integrated TCM-Western medicine specialist nurse training models, establishing training bases, and utilizing information technology, nurses can proficiently apply the latest theories and professional skills in integrated nursing, use nursing research methods to study and solve clinical nursing problems, and enhance the comprehensive quality of integrated nursing specialist nurses to meet societal and disciplinary demands for high-quality integrated nursing talent[37].

3. Summary

TCM nursing represents an important component of nursing development, and cultivating TCM nursing talent is a crucial measure to ensure the sustainable development of TCM nursing[38]. Currently, TCM nursing talent cultivation has gained widespread clinical attention, with the state formulating a series of policies to strongly support TCM nursing development, presenting a rare opportunity for comprehensive disciplinary advancement[39]. Leveraging the advantages of TCM nursing and constructing an independent and complete TCM nursing discipline system compatible with modern nursing to cultivate advanced nursing talent with TCM characteristics—thereby adapting to social development and meeting growing health demands—represents an important task facing TCM nursing educators[40]. To cultivate high-level TCM nursing talent, we must continuously improve training programs, enhance sustainable development of TCM nursing, strengthen talent cultivation, and intensify specialized training and assessment of TCM nursing techniques to better apply these techniques in clinical practice and fully realize the distinctive features of TCM nursing.

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