

Postprint: Construction of a Continuing Care Service System for Traditional Chinese Medicine in the Context of Internet Plus

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Abstract

This study explores the construction methodology of a traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) continuous nursing service system within the “Internet+” context. The approach involves establishing relevant nursing sub-specialty groups, cultivating TCM nursing specialists, and opening TCM nursing clinics. Through interactive network platforms between hospitals and patients, as well as patient WeChat groups, TCM continuous nursing is implemented based on a “hospital-community-family” management model. Concurrently, patient health records are established to provide continuous TCM nursing services. The construction of this TCM continuous nursing service system under the “Internet+” background can enhance nursing staff service capabilities, deliver multi-tiered medical services, and satisfy the diverse needs of patients at various levels.

Full Text

Abstract

This paper explores the construction of a Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) continuous nursing service system within the “Internet+” framework. The approach involves establishing specialized nursing sub-professional groups, cultivating TCM nursing specialists, and opening TCM nursing clinics. Through interactive hospital-patient network platforms and WeChat patient groups, continuous TCM nursing care is delivered based on a “hospital-community-family” management model, while establishing electronic health records to provide ongoing TCM nursing services. The construction of this “Internet+” TCM continuous nursing service system enhances nursing staff service capabilities, provides multi-level medical services, and meets the diverse needs of patients.

Keywords: continuing care; Internet; Traditional Chinese Medicine nursing; community-based care; healthcare service

1. Target Populations for TCM Continuous Nursing

TCM continuous nursing services target a diverse range of populations, including hospitalized patients, outpatients, and individuals with chronic diseases. Specific priority groups comprise elderly patients with chronic conditions, children and adolescents over three years of age, as well as elderly or disabled individuals residing in communities who have chronic physical or behavioral health issues.

2. TCM Continuous Nursing Service Models

2.1 Application of TCM Nursing Clinics in Continuous Care

Our hospital has successfully implemented continuous care projects through TCM nursing clinics supported by “Internet+” technologies. For each visiting patient, we establish a disease management 档案 containing demographic information, clinical symptoms, disease course, and other relevant data. Based on individual patient conditions, we develop personalized continuous care plans and integrate these records and plans into an electronic information system that connects to patients via mobile terminals. The attending nurse, who serves as both record creator and care plan developer, regularly or flexibly pushes TCM nursing knowledge to patients’ mobile devices, while patients can provide online feedback regarding care effectiveness. The hospital extends TCM nursing clinic services into the community, refining the “hospital-community-family” management model through specialized clinics including internal medicine, pediatrics, gynecology, ophthalmology, multidisciplinary sleep disorders, neck-shoulder-lumbar-leg pain, spleen-stomach-liver-gallbladder disorders, weight management, Hufu Tongbian gua sha therapy, TCM characteristic treatment centers, fall risk assessment, pediatric treatment rooms, and functional examination areas.

Since 2018, the National Health Commission’s “Notice on Promoting the Reform and Development of Nursing Services” has advocated for actively implementing syndrome-based nursing and TCM specialty nursing while innovating TCM nursing service models. TCM nursing clinics not only meet patients’ needs for TCM treatment but also play crucial roles in nursing care and health maintenance. Through these clinics, we maximize the advantages of TCM nursing techniques and ensure patient benefits. The establishment of TCM nursing clinics facilitates daily patient visits and treatments while stimulating the professional enthusiasm of TCM specialist nurses and advancing TCM nursing education and research. As a vital platform for continuous care, TCM nursing clinics serve as a unique bridge connecting patients and nurses.

Clinic Equipment: To support extensive TCM nursing services (including gua sha, cupping, auricular point pressing, etc.), the hospital has equipped clinics

with treatment beds, treatment carts, computers, printers, TCM instruments, consultation chairs, and, in some rooms, emergency carts and sterilization equipment.

Personnel Configuration: All TCM nursing clinics are staffed by certified TCM specialist nurses who have completed specialized training. All attending personnel must pass rigorous evaluation by a TCM nursing expert team. A quality supervision group, composed of nursing staff with intermediate-level or higher professional titles and over five years of TCM nursing experience, monitors and ensures clinic service quality.

2.2 TCM Nursing Health Management Center

Health service recipients are diverse, encompassing healthy individuals, sub-healthy populations, and chronic disease patients. Consequently, health management should include both healthy and sub-healthy populations, with the core concept of intervening in and controlling health-related factors to shift from “passive treatment” to “active intervention.” By establishing a health management center and integrating it with clinic service mechanisms, we promote an “Internet+” TCM nursing health management center that expands continuous care content and accelerates its development. Responding to the growing public demand for health management and leveraging the advantages of TCM characteristic nursing—namely simplicity, convenience, affordability, and effectiveness—our hospital has established not only TCM nursing clinics but also health management centers, dietary therapy workshops, elderly health life stations, women’s physical and mental conditioning centers, medical exercise rehabilitation centers, sleep disorder treatment centers, optometry centers, and infant swimming therapy centers.

The development of mobile internet and big data has transformed healthcare service models. Information technologies such as remote appointment systems, remote nursing, chronic disease monitoring, and big data management facilitate the construction of an internet-based TCM nursing health management development platform.

3. “Internet+” TCM Continuous Nursing

In the information age, nursing services delivered through mobile communication devices, wearable technology, and the Internet of Things represent a new healthcare model. Within the “Internet+” framework, our hospital utilizes information technology to provide online medical nursing services, including remote consultations, internet hospitals, nurse-patient interactive systems, hospital public WeChat accounts, and patient WeChat communication groups. These online services effectively bridge the distance between hospitals, healthcare providers, and patients, shifting medical and nursing services directly into patients’ homes and meeting post-discharge healthcare needs while enabling monitoring and supervision of patients’ conditions, medication, diet, lifestyle, and rehabilitation

exercises.

Service Content: TCM continuous nursing services include: (1) Establishing TCM health 档案 through the four diagnostic methods (inspection, auscultation and olfaction, inquiry, and palpation) to collect etiological, pathological, and disease-related information; (2) Implementing appropriate TCM techniques such as Hufu Tongbian gua sha, blood-letting cupping, and auricular point pressing; (3) Providing dietary guidance through TCM dietary models and food models, offering personalized “syndrome-based, individual-based, and season-based” dietary advice; (4) Teaching health preservation exercises including Wuqinxi (Five-Animal Frolics), Baduanjin (Eight Pieces of Brocade), and auricular health exercises; (5) Conducting regular specialized lectures on topics such as weight reduction, scientific health preservation, child growth and development, and epidemic prevention; (6) Offering child growth-promoting health exercises and infant swimming therapy to enhance children’s growth, regulate spleen and stomach function, and strengthen constitution; and (7) Introducing seasonal health-preserving foods such as yam mooncakes and spleen-strengthening digestion cakes for visitors to sample.

4. TCM Continuous Nursing Personnel Training

The “National Nursing Career Development Plan (2016-2020)” states: “We should actively implement syndrome-based nursing and TCM specialty nursing to give full play to the advantages of TCM nursing” [9]. As chronic disease patients continue to increase, the demand for higher knowledge and skills among TCM continuous nursing personnel grows accordingly. Strengthening the TCM specialist nursing workforce and integrating continuous nursing development are crucial for sustainable TCM continuous nursing in the internet era. Currently, China lacks corresponding talent certification mechanisms and career planning pathways for TCM nurses, which hinders further development of TCM continuous nursing to some extent.

Within the hospital, we establish sub-professional groups that conduct regular training sessions to interpret standards and guidelines. Participation in domestic and international academic activities and specialist nurse training promotes the development of these sub-professional groups. TCM specialist nurses are selected from within departments and the entire hospital to cultivate a backbone echelon of TCM specialists. Through offline training combined with clinic preceptorship, we provide reserve strength for TCM specialist clinics and enhance service capabilities.

5. TCM Continuous Nursing Management and Evaluation System

Our hospital has established a three-level nursing quality control system that includes monthly performance indicators such as the number of TCM appropriate technique implementations, TCM nursing clinic visits, and satisfaction

rates among medical staff, nurses, and patients. We schedule three-level nursing quality control inspections, complete supervision and guidance for TCM nursing clinics, document and discuss identified problems, and propose corrective measures to drive continuous quality improvement.

Based on the three-level hospital continuous nursing service quality evaluation index system [1], we evaluate TCM continuous nursing from three dimensions: structure quality, process quality, and outcome quality, encompassing 12 sub-dimensions including continuous nursing work systems, in-hospital preparation, and patient/family evaluations. The evaluation covers continuous nursing processes, training mechanisms, information system platforms, health education, cooperation between intra- and extra-hospital nursing staff, home visit content, satisfaction, mental health status, medication management compliance, and disease-specific readmission rates, forming a systematic and scientific assessment through 20 tertiary indicators.

6. Shortcomings of TCM Continuous Nursing

Lack of Professional Personnel Development and Policy Support:

With the transformation of medical models, TCM nursing plays an important role in the healthcare system due to its unique advantages [10]. However, there is currently no corresponding talent certification mechanism or career planning system for TCM nurses in China, which impedes further development of TCM continuous nursing.

Low Research Quality in TCM Continuous Nursing: Current TCM continuous nursing research suffers from small sample sizes, short durations, insufficient standardization of content, and poor implementation. There is a need to deeply explore TCM-characteristic continuous nursing content, conduct evidence-based nursing research on TCM nursing techniques, and meticulously explore and standardize the professional scope of TCM continuous nursing nurses, consultation scheduling, and optimal allocation of human resources to promote development.

Lack of Evaluation Systems and Indicators: Current continuous nursing evaluation primarily focuses on patient clinical outcomes and functional status, healthcare resource utilization (including emergency visits, average length of stay, and readmission rates), and patient satisfaction with health services [11]. However, evaluation content specific to TCM continuous nursing is limited, such as assessment of TCM nursing technique effectiveness, impact of TCM health preservation content on patients, and process quality control of TCM continuous nursing.

Insufficient Policy Support from National and Administrative Departments: Administrative departments should formulate and introduce policies that facilitate the promotion and implementation of TCM continuous nursing services, such as establishing dedicated continuous nursing positions, increasing hospital nursing staff allocation ratios, optimizing compensation and benefits

to motivate nurses, and strengthening medical consortium construction. Additionally, policies should improve two-way referral organizational structures, provide institutional guarantees for post-discharge referral institutions (including primary care facilities, elderly care institutions, and communities), promote clear rights-responsibilities relationships and resource sharing, increase project funding to encourage research, actively promote “Internet+” continuous nursing, and develop standardized pricing catalogs for continuous nursing service items [12].

7. Conclusion

As an emerging discipline that started relatively late, TCM continuous nursing has broad development prospects. However, China currently lacks qualification certification systems for TCM professional technical personnel and relevant industry policy support, while the quality of nursing research needs improvement. How to make TCM continuous nursing more specialized and professional deserves careful consideration and discussion among nursing professionals. In light of this, the nation should accelerate the development of “Internet+” TCM continuous nursing, improve relevant policies, and guide TCM continuous nursing onto a scientific development track to maximize its social and economic benefits, providing multi-level medical services that meet the diverse needs of patients.

Conflict of Interest Statement: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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