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Career Prospects of Specialized Dental Nurses (Postprint)

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Abstract

Oral health is a significant public health concern. The training of specialized oral nurses will help mitigate the supply-demand imbalance in oral healthcare services and enhance the delivery of preventive oral health services to residents. This paper summarizes and analyzes the current training status and future career development of specialized oral nurses, aiming to provide a reference for further standardizing the specialized nurse training system.

Full Text

Occupational Outlook for Specialist Dental Nurses

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Abstract

Oral health is a major public concern. The cultivation of specialist dental nurses can help alleviate the imbalance between supply and demand in oral healthcare services and improve the delivery of oral preventive care. This paper reviews the current status of specialist dental nurse cultivation and future career prospects, aiming to provide references for further standardizing the specialist nurse training system.

Keywords: stomatology; specialist nurse cultivation; occupation; preventive healthcare; multidisciplinary collaboration

Introduction

With the rapid development of specialized nursing, cultivating specialist nurses has become an essential trend for improving nursing quality and standards. In 2002, the Chinese Nursing Association, Peking Union Medical College School of

Nursing, and Hong Kong Association of Critical Care Nurses jointly launched the first critical care specialist nurse training program in mainland China. The National Nursing Development Plan (2016-2020) issued by the National Health Commission explicitly called for strengthening specialist nurse training to continuously improve specialized nursing levels. The National Nursing Development Plan (2021-2025) further proposed meeting the clinical nursing needs of major diseases and key populations as the orientation, strengthening nursing discipline construction, and using discipline development to drive nursing talent cultivation and service capacity improvement. Since its launch in 2017, dental specialist nurse training has also ushered in new development opportunities. This article reviews the current development status of domestic dental specialist nurses.

1. Concept of Specialist Nurses

Specialist nurses refer to personnel with appropriate qualifications who, after specialized training, possess advanced professional knowledge and proficient nursing skills, and can provide high-level nursing practice. The development of specialist nurses is an inevitable requirement of nursing specialization and an important manifestation of nurses' value. The clinical role and professional value of specialist nurses are mainly reflected in the following aspects: solving complex clinical problems, innovating specialized nursing teaching and research, and participating in major public health emergencies.

2. International Development Status

The term "Clinical Nurse Specialist (CNS)" was first proposed in the United States, and to date, a comprehensive training and certification system for specialist nurses has been established. Specialist nurses have become nursing experts in specific fields, possessing extensive professional knowledge and skills to provide high-quality specialized nursing services for patients. They also undertake responsibilities such as assessing hospital management issues, developing clinical pathways, and conducting case management. Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, and other countries have successively launched specialist nurse training programs and established corresponding certification systems and core competency evaluation standards. Japan passed the "Specialist Nurse Qualification System" and has developed specialist nurse training across multiple nursing specialty areas.

3. Domestic Development Status and Dental Specialist Nurse Training Status

3.1 Domestic Specialist Nurse Development Status

Domestic specialist nurse training started relatively late. In the 1980s, experts successively proposed developing specialized nursing and cultivating specialist

nurses. By the late 1990s, literature began reporting on specialist nurse-related content. In 2005, the General Office of the Ministry of Health issued the “Nurse Training Guidelines for Specialized Nursing Fields,” which standardized training for clinically technical nursing specialties. Subsequently, specialist nurse training was vigorously developed across the country, and specialized nursing began to flourish. To date, the Chinese Nursing Association’s specialist nurse training program has covered multiple specialty areas and has cumulatively trained numerous specialist nurses.

3.2 Domestic Dental Specialist Nurse Training Status

Dental nursing is highly specialized. In addition to proficient basic nursing techniques and knowledge, dental specialist nurses must possess comprehensive capabilities in four-handed dental operation techniques, oral preventive care, dental equipment and materials management, and oral nosocomial infection control. Currently, dental specialist nurse development is still in its initial stage. Since the first batch of Chinese Nursing Association dental specialist nurse training began in 2017, nursing research on standardized cultivation, management, core competencies, and teaching base training systems has become a new hotspot. Several cohorts of dental specialist nurses have played important roles as discipline leaders and specialized nursing pioneers in their positions, improving the level of dental nursing services. However, problems remain in dental specialist nurse training, including lack of systematic and standardized training systems, non-unified assessment and certification systems, and scope of responsibilities that need expansion. Additionally, there is a lack of policy guidance regarding the utilization, continuing education, promotion, and compensation of specialist nurses.

4. Future Development Directions

4.1 Different Dental Specialty Directions

With the rapid development of various dental specialties, dental specialist nurse training will be further refined according to disease types and specialty nursing coordination requirements. In the future, specialized roles such as periodontal specialist nurses, dental implant specialist nurses, and orthodontic specialist nurses will emerge to meet clinical needs and provide high-quality, high-level nursing care.

4.2 Different Nursing Field Directions

In the future, dental specialist nurses will first become clinical nursing experts in dental specialty care, playing leading roles in four-handed nursing operation coordination, innovative dental nursing techniques, and improving dental nursing standards. Additionally, with the implementation of tiered training for dental specialist nurses, their job responsibilities and scope will continuously expand.

Future roles will include dental nursing education experts, dental nursing research experts, and oral infection control experts.

4.3 Multidisciplinary Collaboration

Dental specialist nurses can collaborate with other specialist nurses in the future to conduct multidisciplinary nursing consultations, remote diagnosis and treatment, and nursing referrals. They will play important roles in oral health management for patients undergoing cancer chemoradiotherapy, chronic disease management, geriatric care, diabetes care, and those with physical disabilities.

4.4 Oral Preventive Care Direction

With the continuous advancement of “Internet+Nursing Services” and growing social demand, dental specialist nurses will play an irreplaceable role in whole-life cycle health management and preventive care. The National Health Commission’s “Healthy Oral Action Plan (2019-2025)” proposes a prevention-first, combination of prevention and treatment approach to improve residents’ oral health levels. Drawing on the training and practical experience of foreign dental assistants and oral hygienists, cultivating dental preventive care specialist nurses with high theoretical and skill levels who can perform primary oral preventive care functions will help alleviate the contradiction between supply and demand in oral healthcare and better deliver residents’ oral preventive care.

5. Summary

Currently, China is still in the initial stage of specialist nurse cultivation. Most specialist nurses only fulfill clinical roles, while their capacities as educators, researchers, managers, and consultants have been weakened and neglected. As the overall educational level of the nursing workforce continues to improve, we must actively explore tiered training and utilization of specialist nurses to meet the diverse needs of medical institutions at all levels. We need to clarify career development pathways for specialist nurses, establish advancement systems for different levels, and expand training models for advanced practice nurses to further enhance specialized nursing levels and provide comprehensive, full-life cycle health services.

Relying on standardized training and certification systems established by authoritative organizations such as the Chinese Nursing Association and local nursing associations, we should develop unified admission standards and standardize specialist nurse training, assessment, certification, and recertification to promote the healthy and orderly development of dental specialist nurse cultivation. Simultaneously, we should increase training efforts in key areas emphasized in national strategic development, including geriatric care, community nursing, rehabilitation nursing, and chronic disease management, to meet the diverse and multi-level service needs of the population.

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