

## An Empirical Study of a Four-in-One Model for Promoting Traditional Chinese Medicine Nursing Techniques to Improve Nursing Economic Efficiency in General Hospitals

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### Abstract

**Objective** To investigate the enhancement of nursing economic effectiveness through a four-in-one promotion model of “organization management-promotion and application-quality control-benefit evaluation” for Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) nursing techniques in municipal general tertiary Grade A hospitals.

**Methods** The current implementation status of TCM nursing techniques was thoroughly assessed, a TCM nursing technique promotion management team was established, scientific management concepts were introduced, training curricula were developed, a promotion model was constructed and implemented, a quality control evaluation system was established, disciplinary development was promoted, and benefit evaluation was conducted.

**Results** Following promotion, the number of TCM nursing technique projects implemented by nursing staff, the frequency of TCM nursing technique implementation, economic benefits of TCM nursing, quality of TCM nursing, humanistic care ability, patient satisfaction with nursing services, and nurses’ sense of work achievement all improved significantly, while the average length of hospital stay decreased markedly, with statistically significant differences compared to pre-promotion levels ( $P < 0.05$ ).

**Conclusion** The implementation of the four-in-one promotion model of “organization management-promotion and application-quality control-benefit evaluation” for TCM nursing techniques significantly enhances the number of TCM nursing technique projects implemented by nursing staff, the frequency of implementation, quality of TCM nursing, humanistic care ability, nursing service satisfaction, and nurses’ sense of work achievement, thereby reducing the average length of hospital stay and improving nursing economic effectiveness.

## Full Text

# A Practical Study on the Four-in-One Traditional Chinese Medicine Nursing Technology Promotion Model for Improving Nursing Economic Effectiveness in General Hospitals

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## Abstract

**Objective:** To investigate how a municipal comprehensive tertiary-grade A hospital can enhance nursing economic effectiveness through an “organization management-promotion and application-quality control-benefit evaluation” four-in-one traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) nursing technology promotion model.

**Methods:** We thoroughly assessed the current status of TCM nursing technology implementation, established a TCM nursing technology promotion management team, introduced scientific management concepts, developed training curricula, constructed a promotion model, implemented the promotion, established a quality control and evaluation system, promoted disciplinary development, and conducted benefit evaluation. The study was conducted at Tai'an Central Hospital from January 2023 to January 2024.

**Results:** Following the promotion, nursing staff demonstrated significant improvements in the number of TCM nursing technology projects implemented, frequency of TCM nursing technology applications, economic benefits generated, quality of TCM nursing care, humanistic care capabilities, patient satisfaction with nursing services, and scores for nursing staff work achievement. Additionally, the average length of hospital stay was significantly reduced. All differences were statistically significant compared with pre-promotion levels ( $<0.05$ ).

**Conclusion:** Implementing the “organization management-promotion and application-quality control-benefit evaluation” four-in-one TCM nursing technology promotion model significantly increases the number of TCM nursing technology projects and their implementation frequency, improves TCM nursing quality, enhances humanistic care capabilities, increases nursing service satisfaction, and elevates nursing staff work achievement, thereby reducing average length of hospital stay and improving nursing economic effectiveness.

**Keywords:** four-in-one TCM nursing technology promotion model; general hospital; nursing economic effectiveness

## Introduction

The “Healthy China 2030” Planning Outline [1] calls for “vigorously developing TCM non-drug therapies to play a unique role in the prevention and treatment of common, frequent, and chronic diseases.” In recent years, in response to national policy initiatives and to improve medical service quality and meet the diverse needs of the population, hospitals across China have actively developed TCM nursing services [2]. TCM nursing appropriate technologies, guided by fundamental TCM theory, represent an important means of disease prevention and treatment in TCM. These technologies offer significant advantages, including notable efficacy, economic feasibility, broad applicability, minimal equipment requirements, and simple operation [3]. The implementation of TCM nursing appropriate technologies not only enhances the TCM service capacity of medical institutions but also meets the growing demand for high-quality clinical services. The “TCM Development Strategic Planning Outline (2016-2030)” indicates that by 2020, TCM services had benefited all residents, helping to alleviate medical burdens and improve subjective well-being [5]. However, research shows that the clinical application of TCM appropriate technologies is uneven, with relatively low utilization rates in general hospitals and limited project variety. This situation primarily stems from insufficient professional competence in TCM nursing theory and operational skills among nursing staff, which severely hinders the promotion and application of TCM nursing appropriate technologies [6]. From January 2023 to January 2024, Tai’an Central Hospital, led by the Nursing Department, promoted TCM nursing appropriate technologies hospital-wide and established a “organization management-promotion and application-quality control-benefit evaluation” four-in-one TCM nursing technology promotion model. This initiative aims to provide scientific reference and support for the sustained advancement of TCM appropriate technologies and has achieved remarkable results, which are now reported as follows.

## Methods

### Study Design and Participants

Tai’an Central Hospital comprises 2,468 nurses and 3,066 beds across multiple campuses, including the main campus, high-tech campus, medical-nursing combined campus, and Yingsheng campus. The nursing staff includes 159 senior-level, 1,129 intermediate-level, and 1,180 junior-level professionals; educational backgrounds consist of 38 graduate degree holders, 1,857 bachelor’s degree holders, and 573 college diploma holders.

**Inclusion criteria:** (1) Registered nurses with valid nursing practice certificates; (2) Ward nurses caring for inpatients. **Exclusion criteria:** (1) Platform departments such as operating rooms, endoscopy, and hemodialysis; (2) Non-ward departments including emergency and outpatient services; (3) Elderly care areas in the medical-nursing combined campus; (4) Intern nurses, trainee nurses, and nurses on official external assignments.

The study employed a quasi-experimental design, comparing outcomes before and after model implementation. We randomly selected 50 nursing personnel who had worked in the hospital from January 1, 2022 to December 31, 2022 (pre-implementation period) as the control group, and 50 nursing personnel who had worked from January 1, 2023 to December 31, 2023 (post-implementation period) as the observation group. The control group included 5 males and 45 females, with a mean age of  $(32.90 \pm 5.24)$  years and mean work experience of  $(10.92 \pm 3.70)$  years. The observation group comprised 8 males and 42 females, with a mean age of  $(32.90 \pm 5.24)$  years and mean work experience of  $(10.92 \pm 3.70)$  years. No statistically significant differences were found between the two groups in terms of age, gender, education level, or work experience ( $p > 0.05$ ).

## Implementation of the Four-in-One Promotion Model

In 2022, the hospital implemented TCM nursing technologies according to its work deployment. In 2023, we advanced a Nursing Department-led TCM nursing technology promotion model. The specific implementation process was as follows:

**2.1 Conducting Needs Assessment and Current Situation Survey** The promotion management team utilized clinical observations and group discussions to understand and analyze the current status of TCM nursing technology promotion and application. The analysis identified the following primary issues: (1) Nearly all hospital nurses were graduates from Western medicine institutions, lacking fundamental TCM nursing theoretical knowledge and subjective motivation to learn TCM theory, consequently unable to implement syndrome differentiation and nursing in practice; (2) Management lacked relevant assessment standards for nurses' TCM nursing theory and skills; (3) Clinical practice lacked clear definitions of diseases suitable for TCM nursing appropriate technology treatment; (4) TCM nursing appropriate technologies lacked standardized operational procedures and efficacy evaluation systems.

**2.2 Implementing the Four-in-One Model** The promotion model was implemented in four phases. **Phase 1 (January 1–March 31, 2023):** Completed relevant training and assessment on TCM nursing appropriate technologies for all hospital nurses. **Phase 2 (April 1–June 30, 2023):** Completed qualification authorization for 1,400 nurses and constructed the promotion model. **Phase 3 (July 1–September 30, 2023):** Each department identified and implemented TCM nursing appropriate technology projects for their specialty based on clinical literature. **Phase 4 (October 1–December 31, 2023):** Established a three-level TCM nursing quality control system for the general hospital.

### 2.2.2 Establishing the TCM Nursing Appropriate Technology Promotion Management Team

- (1) We constructed an organizational structure led by the Nursing Department and centered on TCM nursing backbone personnel, with clearly defined responsibilities and coordinated linkages to comprehensively oversee technology screening and guidance, information communication, and overall supervision. A TCM nursing discipline construction team comprising TCM nursing experts, national-level TCM specialist nurses, and TCM experts was formed to conduct training on TCM nursing appropriate technologies, understand nurses' needs and promotion status, and develop promotion plans. The Nursing Department assumed responsibility for TCM nursing quality control and benefit evaluation, applying the "organization management-promotion and application-quality control-benefit evaluation" four-in-one model to promote TCM nursing appropriate technologies across all departments.
- (2) In accordance with relevant requirements from the National Administration of Traditional Chinese Medicine's "Opinions on Strengthening TCM Nursing Work" and combined with our hospital's clinical needs, we initially identified 16 TCM nursing appropriate technologies for promotion. Based on the "TCM Nursing Technology Operating Procedures," we developed our hospital's "TCM Nursing Appropriate Technology Operation Manual" and produced operation videos uploaded to the hospital-wide nursing staff DingTalk group. **Theoretical training:** Conducted through online or offline methods. The Nursing Department led all hospital nurses in weekly "one acupoint, one herb" learning activities, organized integrated Chinese and Western medicine nursing rounds across all campuses, and required head nurses to lead staff in reading one traditional culture classic book quarterly to enhance nurses' identification with TCM culture. **Practical training:** According to different projects implemented in each department, nurses selected their department's projects for operational training at the clinical skills training center. After achieving proficiency, they completed assessments. Qualified nurses received corresponding TCM nursing appropriate technology qualification authorization from the Nursing Department, conducted once monthly.

### 2.2.3 Constructing the Promotion Model

- (1) Authorized personnel researched common diseases in their departments, communicated with department directors and medical team leaders, consulted the TCM department, and collaboratively identified advantageous disease types suitable for TCM nursing appropriate technologies based on evidence, developing TCM nursing appropriate technology protocols for departmental promotion. (2) Established a TCM nursing outpatient clinic to provide continued TCM nursing appropriate technology services for patients requiring TCM treatment who did not meet inpatient criteria or who needed continued TCM treatment after discharge. (3) Established a TCM day ward to implement over 10 TCM characteristic therapies for

more than 10 disease types. (4) Implemented “Internet + Nursing Services” to provide door-to-door services for patients in need, offering continuity services for 6 TCM nursing appropriate technologies.

**2.2.4 Establishing the TCM Nursing Quality Control System** Based on hospital grade evaluation requirements, we developed the TCM Nursing Technology Operation Manual and TCM Nursing Quality Evaluation Standards, establishing a three-level TCM nursing quality control system for the general hospital.

**2.2.5 Economic Benefits** The Nursing Department publicly announced monthly, in the head nurse group, each department’s implementation of TCM nursing appropriate technology projects, economic benefits, and patient satisfaction. The top 10 departments received head nurse excellence points rewards.

## 2.3 Evaluation Indicators

**2.3.1 TCM Nursing Technology Implementation Status** The number of TCM nursing technology projects, implementation frequency of the top 7 TCM nursing technologies, and economic benefits of TCM nursing were statistically analyzed monthly through the Hospital Information System (HIS).

**2.3.2 Average Length of Hospital Stay** Provided by the hospital statistics department, we used convenience sampling to randomly select 60 patients from the gastrointestinal surgery ward before and after promotion, with 30 cases each in the control and observation groups.

**2.3.3 TCM Nursing Quality** Using a self-developed general hospital TCM nursing quality evaluation form (including four dimensions: TCM fundamental theoretical knowledge, TCM nursing technical operations, TCM health education, and TCM syndrome differentiation nursing; total score 100 points).

**2.3.4 Nursing Staff Humanistic Care Ability** The promotion team reviewed literature on Confucianism-based nursing humanistic care theoretical model construction [7], Confucianism-based nursing humanistic care research [8], and Confucianism-based nursing humanistic care ability evaluation index system construction [9], extracting four categorical themes: “benevolence,” “propriety,” “trustworthiness,” and “harmony” as the spiritual core, implementation carrier, behavioral criterion, and value orientation of nursing humanistic care, respectively, to evaluate nursing staff humanistic care ability.

**2.3.5 Patient Satisfaction with TCM Nursing Technology Implementation** Based on the Inpatient Nursing Satisfaction Scale [10], the Nursing Department developed a satisfaction questionnaire tailored to our hospital’s

context, comprising three dimensions (satisfaction with nurses' technical competence, trust in nursing staff, and satisfaction with nursing staff education relationships), each rated on a 5-level scale from very satisfied to very dissatisfied. We randomly selected 200 patients who received TCM nursing technology operations and voluntarily participated in satisfaction surveys during the pre-implementation period (January–December 2022) as the control group, and 200 patients during the post-implementation period (January–December 2023) as the observation group. Responsibility nurses administered questionnaire surveys via Questionnaire Star after patients completed their TCM nursing technology treatment courses. Background data were extracted to verify consistency between electronic data collection platform entries and actual survey records, with timely feedback on identified issues to ensure data authenticity.

**2.3.6 Work Achievement Scale** Developed by Cheng Gang [11], this scale comprises four dimensions: job content achievement, compensation and benefits achievement, career growth and development achievement, and employee relations achievement, totaling 24 items. Using a 5-point Likert scale, higher scores indicate greater achievement. The overall Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficient was 0.872, with dimension coefficients ranging from 0.620 to 0.834, demonstrating good structural validity. Achievement item mean scores  $>1$  but  $<2$  were considered very poor,  $\$ \$2$  but  $<3$  as poor,  $\$ \$3$  but  $<4$  as moderate, and  $\$ \$4$  as good.

## 2.4 Statistical Methods

Data were entered using Excel and analyzed with SPSS 26.0 software. Categorical data were described using frequencies and percentages, with inter-group comparisons conducted using chi-square tests. Normally distributed continuous data were described using means and standard deviations, with  $<0.05$  indicating statistically significant differences.

## Results

### 3.1 Significant Increase in TCM Nursing Technology Projects

Following promotion, TCM nursing projects increased from 4 to 16 items. The total implementation frequency of the top 7 TCM nursing technologies rose from 2,926 to 27,002 cases, representing an 822.83% increase .

### 3.2 Substantial Improvement in Economic Benefits

Post-promotion economic benefits from the top 7 TCM nursing technologies increased from ¥62,958 to ¥1,246,026, representing a 1,879.14% increase .

### 3.3 Reduction in Average Length of Hospital Stay

Average length of hospital stay in key departments decreased significantly, with statistically significant differences between groups ( $<0.05$ ) .

### **3.4 Significant Improvement in TCM Nursing Quality**

Post-promotion scores for nursing staff's TCM theoretical knowledge, TCM nursing technical operations, TCM health education, and TCM syndrome differentiation nursing were all higher than pre-promotion levels, with statistically significant differences ( $<0.05$ ).

### **3.5 Enhanced Humanistic Care Ability**

Post-promotion scores for nursing staff's abilities in "benevolence," "propriety," "trustworthiness," and "harmony" from traditional TCM culture were all higher than pre-promotion levels, with statistically significant differences ( $<0.05$ ).

### **3.6 Improved Patient Satisfaction**

Implementation significantly improved patient satisfaction with nurses' TCM nursing technology operations, including increased satisfaction with technical competence, trust, and educational relationships, with statistically significant differences ( $<0.05$ ).

### **3.7 Significantly Enhanced Work Achievement**

Post-promotion scores for nursing staff's job content achievement, compensation and benefits achievement, career growth and development achievement, and employee relations achievement were all higher than pre-promotion levels, with statistically significant differences ( $<0.05$ ).

## **Discussion**

### **4.1 The Four-in-One Model Enhances Nursing Economic Effectiveness**

Our study results demonstrate that after implementing the promotion model, the number of TCM nursing technology projects, implementation frequency, and economic benefits all increased substantially, while patient satisfaction improved significantly ( $<0.05$ ) and average length of hospital stay decreased markedly ( $<0.05$ ). TCM emphasizes "preventive treatment," which involves preventing disease occurrence through health preservation and dietary regulation, thereby significantly reducing long-term medical costs [12]. TCM advocates natural therapies and non-pharmacological treatments, often achieving good therapeutic and conditioning effects for chronic and functional diseases at lower costs, thus reducing medical resource consumption. During nursing care, TCM emphasizes treating both body and mind, promoting patients' self-recovery capabilities through harmonizing yin-yang and unblocking meridians, thereby reducing hospitalization time and medical intervention frequency. Additionally, TCM nursing emphasizes individual differences and syndrome differentiation-based nursing, providing personalized care plans that more precisely address problems, avoid resource waste from "one-size-fits-all" approaches, and enhance patient engagement and satisfaction [13]. Average length of hospital stay is a

comprehensive indicator reflecting hospital work efficiency, management level, service quality, medical and nursing technical proficiency, hospital economic benefits, and patient interests [14]. Although Chinese and Western medicine have different philosophical systems, the traditional TCM concept of “preventive treatment” essentially represents a health-centered medical model. TCM follows the “holistic concept,” emphasizing restoration and maintenance of the body’s yin-yang balance and regulation of organ functions through strengthening healthy qi and dispelling pathogenic factors, thereby improving patient symptoms and complementing Western medicine [15]. This aligns with the Healthy China strategy, improves nursing economic effectiveness, demonstrates nurses’ social value, and enhances economic benefits.

#### **4.2 The Model Improves Nurses’ TCM Nursing Service Capacity**

Our findings indicate that after implementing the four-in-one model, nursing staff demonstrated significant improvements in TCM theoretical knowledge, technical operations, health education, and syndrome differentiation abilities ( $<0.05$ ). Multiple training sessions during the promotion process not only broadened Western-trained nurses’ perspectives and improved service quality but also enhanced their professional honor. This fully mobilized their enthusiasm and initiative for efficient daily nursing work [16-17]. While cultivating talent, the number of TCM nursing technology projects and service frequency both increased. Post-implementation, the model enabled nurses to establish TCM thinking characterized by holistic concepts and syndrome differentiation-based nursing. When patients raised TCM-related health needs, nurses could promptly respond and apply TCM techniques to solve problems, strengthening patient trust. TCM’s emphasis on personalized treatment facilitated individualized health guidance for patients, smoothing communication channels between nurses and patients and markedly improving nursing quality. Personalized treatment better meets patient needs, and combining TCM appropriate technologies with modern medical approaches provides comprehensive nursing services that satisfy diverse patient requirements and comprehensively enhance nurses’ TCM nursing service capacity [18].

#### **4.3 The Model Enhances Nurses’ Humanistic Care Ability**

Nursing is a professional and service-oriented healthcare activity, and humanistic care ability is a core competency that modern nurses must possess [19]. TCM embodies rich humanistic and cultural connotations, representing a comprehensive humanistic life science encompassing philosophy, art, and religion. TCM nursing appropriate technologies, based on TCM theory, reflect and carry Chinese traditional culture and humanistic spirit. Grounded in concepts from Chinese traditional culture such as unity of heaven and humanity, dynamic balance, harmony with nature, moderation, yin-yang waxing and waning, and five-element mutual restraint, TCM has constructed a complete theoretical and methodological system for disease prevention through health preservation, hy-

giene, wellness, and strengthening, as well as disease treatment through acupuncture, massage, and herbal formulas [20]. Its inherent traditional cultural connotation of “people-oriented, harmony-valued” can cultivate nurses’ professional qualities [21]. TCM is rooted in Chinese traditional culture, and its thinking patterns align with cultural traditions [22]. Confucian thought on unity of heaven and humanity, Daoist thought on harmony with nature, and Buddhist thought on compassion reflect millennia of traditional cultural accumulation and value orientation in China, aligning with the “benevolence”-centered humanistic care concept under Chinese traditional culture [23]. Cultivating nurses’ TCM cultural thinking strengthened their identification with TCM culture and improved their professional qualities and humanistic care abilities.

#### 4.4 The Model Improves Nursing Staff Work Achievement

Our study shows nurses’ work achievement improved significantly. Work achievement refers to the sense of pleasure, satisfaction, or success obtained when individual work is recognized by oneself or the organization [11]. Achievement level determines nurses’ work passion and motivation. Through learning TCM nursing knowledge, nursing staff broadened their professional knowledge, increased nursing methods, provided more diversified treatment and care options for patients, promoted professional growth and skill diversification, and improved professional qualities. TCM nursing often requires interdisciplinary collaboration, and teamwork enhanced workplace cohesion and belonging, improved work atmosphere and environment, and alleviated nursing staff burnout [24]. This strengthened nursing staff’s professional identity and personal achievement.

In summary, the “organization management-promotion and application-quality control-benefit evaluation” four-in-one TCM nursing technology promotion model plays a crucial role in improving nursing economic effectiveness. In the post-pandemic era, with medical insurance and DRG payment management, hospitals face numerous development challenges. Through model promotion, we have achieved cultural confidence, promoted conversion of hospital economic benefits, improved nursing staff’s TCM nursing service capacity, cultivated TCM traditional cultural thinking, enhanced humanistic care abilities, met patients’ diverse health needs, increased patient satisfaction, and improved nursing economic effectiveness.

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