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Nurse-led Interventions to Enhance Adherence to Chronic Medications

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Received 5/10/2022; revised 8/11/2022; accepted 11/12/2022

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Abstract

Introduction: Chronic diseases require long-term medication adherence to achieve optimal health outcomes, yet non-adherence remains a significant challenge. Nurse-led interventions have been proposed as a strategy to enhance adherence. This systematic review aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of nurse-led interventions in improving medication adherence among patients with chronic conditions.

Methods: A comprehensive literature search was conducted across several databases, including PubMed, Embase, CINAHL, Cochrane Library, and PsycINFO, for studies published up to 2022. Only interventional studies and clinical trials led by nurses focusing on chronic medication adherence were included. The selection process involved screening for relevance, assessing methodological quality, and extracting data on adherence rates, intervention types, and patient outcomes.

Results: Eight studies met the inclusion criteria, revealing a variety of nurse-led interventions, such as personalized counseling, telehealth follow-ups, educational workshops, and digital reminders. Sample sizes ranged from 30 to over 500 participants. The interventions demonstrated a significant improvement in medication adherence, with increases ranging from 15% to 25%. Specific interventions, like personalized care plans and technology-enhanced strategies, showed particular promise. Comparative analysis with other non-nurse-led interventions in the literature suggested that nurse-led approaches are at least as effective, with some evidence indicating superior outcomes in certain contexts.

Conclusions: Nurse-led interventions are effective in enhancing medication adherence among patients with chronic diseases. The review highlights the importance of personalized and technology-enhanced approaches within these interventions. Despite limitations such as study heterogeneity and potential publication bias, the findings support the integration of nurse-led strategies into clinical practice to improve chronic disease management. Future research should focus on identifying the most effective components of these interventions across diverse patient populations.

Keywords: Nurse-Led Interventions, Medication Adherence, Chronic Diseases, Clinical Trials, Personalized Care

Introduction

The prevalence of chronic diseases globally has necessitated innovative approaches to healthcare delivery, particularly in enhancing medication adherence among patients. Studies have shown that adherence to chronic medication regimens is crucial for achieving therapeutic goals and improving patient outcomes. Despite the importance, medication non-adherence remains a significant healthcare challenge, with reports indicating that approximately 50% of patients with chronic diseases do not take their medications as prescribed [1]. This lack of adherence not only leads to deteriorating health conditions but also imposes a substantial financial burden on healthcare systems, costing an estimated $100 billion to $289 billion annually in the United States alone [2].

In response to this challenge, nurse-led interventions have emerged as a promising strategy to improve medication adherence. Nurses play a pivotal role in patient care, offering a unique blend of clinical expertise, patient education, and emotional support. The literature suggests that interventions led by nurses, including personalized counseling, follow-up, and educational programs, can significantly enhance adherence rates. For instance, studies have reported improvements in medication adherence by up to 12-19% following nurse-led interventions [3]. Moreover, these interventions have been associated with improved patient satisfaction and health outcomes, highlighting the potential of nursing professionals in addressing this issue [4].

The complexity of medication regimens, coupled with factors such as patient beliefs, understanding of their condition, and the perceived benefits of treatment, contributes to non-adherence. Nurse-led interventions are particularly effective because they address these multifaceted issues through personalized care plans, education, and by fostering a trusting relationship between the patient and healthcare provider [5]. Evidence supports that a tailored approach, which considers the individual needs and circumstances of patients, is more likely to result in sustained medication adherence [6]. However, the effectiveness of nurse-led interventions can vary based on the characteristics of the patient population, the nature of the chronic condition, and the specifics of the intervention itself. A meta-analysis of nurse-led interventions found a wide range of effect sizes, indicating that while some programs are highly effective, others may yield minimal benefits. This variability underscores the need for further research to identify the most effective components of nurse-led interventions for different patient groups [7]. Additionally, integrating technology, such as mobile health applications, into nurse-led interventions has shown promise in further enhancing adherence rates, with some studies reporting a 15% increase in adherence among patients using these technologies [8]. By synthesizing the findings from various studies, the review sought to identify effective strategies and practices that could be implemented in clinical settings to improve medication adherence among patients with chronic diseases [9,10]. The aim was to provide evidence-based recommendations that could inform healthcare policies and practices, ultimately contributing to better health outcomes and reduced healthcare costs..

Methods

The methodological framework of this systematic review was meticulously designed to identify, evaluate, and synthesize all relevant studies on nurse-led interventions aimed at enhancing adherence to chronic medications. The search strategy was developed to capture a comprehensive range of studies, utilizing a combination of keywords and medical subject headings (MeSH) terms. The search terms included combinations of "nurse-led interventions," "medication adherence," "chronic diseases," "patient compliance," and "health outcomes." These terms were used individually and in conjunction with Boolean operators (AND, OR) to broaden the search scope and ensure the inclusion of all pertinent studies. The literature search was conducted across multiple electronic databases to ensure a wide coverage of the available literature. The

databases included PubMed, Embase, CINAHL, Cochrane Library, and PsycINFO. These databases were chosen for their relevance to healthcare, nursing, and psychological aspects of patient care, thus providing a comprehensive view of the research field. The search was limited to articles published in the last years up to 2022, focusing specifically on interventional studies to capture the most recent evidence on the effectiveness of nurse-led interventions in medication adherence.

Inclusion criteria were rigorously defined to select studies that directly addressed the review's objectives. Studies were included if they were interventional studies led by nurses, focused on chronic medication adherence, and reported measurable outcomes related to medication adherence rates or health outcomes. The population of interest included adults with any chronic condition requiring long-term medication therapy. Only studies published in English were considered to ensure the feasibility of thorough analysis and synthesis of the findings.

Exclusion criteria were also established to refine the search results. Studies were excluded if they were observational or qualitative studies, focused on acute conditions or medication adherence in pediatric populations, or if the intervention was not led or co-led by nursing professionals. Reviews, editorials, commentaries, and studies without primary data or clear outcomes related to medication adherence were also excluded. This exclusion criteria ensured the focus remained on direct evidence from interventional studies involving nurse-led initiatives.

The study selection process involved several steps to ensure a rigorous and unbiased review. Initially, titles and abstracts retrieved from the database searches were screened for relevance based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria. This preliminary screening was conducted independently by two reviewers to minimize bias and ensure consistency in study selection. Discrepancies between reviewers were resolved through discussion or, if necessary, consultation with a third reviewer. Following the initial screening, full texts of potentially relevant studies were obtained and assessed for eligibility. This detailed assessment further refined the selection to studies that precisely matched the review criteria. Finally, the methodological quality of the included studies was assessed using standardized critical appraisal tools appropriate for interventional studies. This assessment aimed to evaluate the risk of bias, the validity of the findings, and the strength of the evidence provided by each study. Studies that met a predetermined quality threshold were included in the final review. This rigorous selection and appraisal process ensured that the systematic review was based on high-quality evidence, providing a reliable foundation for conclusions and recommendations regarding nurse-led interventions to enhance medication adherence in chronic disease management.

Results and discussion

The results section of this systematic review encompasses the findings from eight interventional studies and clinical trials that evaluated the effectiveness of nurse-led interventions in enhancing adherence to chronic medications. These studies, conducted between the last few years and 2022, encompassed a diverse range of interventions, sample sizes, and patient populations, providing a rich dataset for analysis.

The sample sizes of the included studies varied widely, ranging from small-scale trials with as few as 30 participants to larger studies encompassing over 500 individuals. This variation in sample size reflects the diverse settings and scopes of the interventions examined, from targeted, community-based programs to broader, hospital-wide initiatives.

The types of nurse-led interventions investigated were multifaceted, including personalized medication counseling, telehealth follow-ups, educational workshops, and the use of digital medication reminders. One study implemented a comprehensive program combining face-to-face counseling sessions with telephonic support, resulting in a significant improvement in medication adherence, with a reported risk ratio (RR) of 1.45 (95% CI, 1.22-1.73) [11]. Another study focused on the use of SMS reminders sent by nurses, which increased adherence rates by 20% (95% CI, 10-30%) compared to the control group [12]. Comparatively, a clinical trial employing a more

traditional approach, through educational workshops led by nurses, reported a smaller yet statistically significant improvement in adherence, with an adherence increase of 15% (95% CI, 5-25%) [13]. This indicates that while technology-enhanced interventions may offer greater convenience and reach, traditional methods still hold substantial value in improving patient outcomes.

A novel intervention design involved the integration of nurse-led medication reviews with patient education sessions. This approach yielded a notable increase in adherence, with a reported effectiveness rate of 18% improvement over baseline (95% CI, 9-27%) [14]. The success of this intervention highlights the importance of personalized, comprehensive care plans in addressing medication adherence. Among the studies, one unique trial utilized a nurse-led, community-based intervention focusing on elderly patients with multiple chronic conditions. This study reported the highest improvement in adherence rates, with a 25% increase compared to controls (95% CI, 15-35%) [15]. This suggests that interventions tailored to specific patient demographics and health conditions can be particularly effective.

The effectiveness of the interventions also varied according to the chronic condition targeted. For example, studies focusing on patients with cardiovascular diseases reported a mean improvement in adherence of 19% (95% CI, 11-27%) [16], whereas those targeting diabetes management reported a slightly lower mean improvement of 17% (95% CI, 8-26%) [17]. This variance underscores the importance of context and disease-specific factors in designing nurse-led interventions. Overall, the included studies demonstrate that nurse-led interventions can significantly improve medication adherence among patients with chronic conditions. The variation in intervention designs, from digital technologies to traditional educational approaches, suggests that multiple strategies can be effective, depending on the patient population and the specific challenges they face in adhering to medication regimens. The discussion of this systematic review critically evaluates the findings from the included studies on nurse-led interventions for enhancing medication adherence in chronic disease management, comparing these outcomes with the broader medical literature on other types of interventions. The included studies revealed a notable variation in effectiveness, with improvements in medication adherence ranging from 15% to 25% across different interventions and patient populations. These findings align with, and in some cases exceed, the results reported in the literature for non-nurse-led interventions.

Comparatively, a study on pharmacist-led interventions reported an average improvement in adherence of approximately 12% [19], slightly lower than the lower range of improvements observed in our review. This difference underscores the potential added value of the nurse-patient relationship and the holistic approach nurses take in patient care, which may contribute to higher adherence rates. Telehealth interventions, which have gained prominence, particularly in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, have shown variable efficacy in the literature. A systematic review of telehealth interventions reported an average improvement in medication adherence of 20% [20], closely matching the effectiveness of some nurse-led digital interventions identified in our review. This suggests that the effectiveness of digital interventions may not be solely attributable to the technology itself but also to the manner in which it is integrated into patient care by healthcare professionals.

Educational interventions have been a cornerstone of efforts to improve medication adherence. Literature outside of nurse-led interventions reports improvements in the range of 10-15% [21], which is comparable to the findings of educational workshops led by nurses in our review. This indicates that the educational content, regardless of the professional background of the provider, is a critical component of improving adherence. Interventions incorporating personalized care plans, including medication reviews and patient education, have demonstrated significant promise in both nurse-led studies and the broader literature. A study focusing on personalized intervention strategies reported a 17% improvement in adherence [22], closely aligning with the outcomes of similar nurse-led interventions in our review. This congruence highlights the effectiveness of personalized care across different healthcare

disciplines. The integration of community-based approaches in nurse-led interventions, particularly for elderly patients with multiple chronic conditions, showed a higher improvement in adherence rates than many community-based interventions reported in the literature, which have shown improvements around 18% [23]. This suggests that nurse-led interventions might be particularly effective in community settings, possibly due to the trust and rapport nurses are able to build with patients. However, it is important to note the variability in the risk differences reported across studies, both within our review and in the broader literature. For instance, some non-nurse-led interventions leveraging novel technologies or behavioral strategies have reported adherence improvements as high as 30% [24], indicating that there remains substantial room for innovation and improvement in adherence interventions.

Tthe findings from this review suggest that nurse-led interventions are at least as effective, if not more so, than other types of interventions aimed at improving medication adherence. The personal connection and holistic approach provided by nurses, coupled with the strategic use of technology and personalized care plans, seem to offer significant benefits. Nonetheless, the variability in effectiveness across different contexts and patient populations underscores the need for tailored interventions. Future research should continue to explore the mechanisms behind the success of these interventions, aiming to refine and optimize strategies for diverse patient needs. The systematic review presents several strengths that underscore its relevance and applicability to clinical practice. First, the inclusion of diverse nurse-led interventions across a range of chronic diseases provides a broad perspective on the effectiveness of these strategies in improving medication adherence [25]. This diversity ensures that the findings are applicable to various patient populations and healthcare settings, from community clinics to hospital-based care. Additionally, the rigorous methodological approach, including the detailed selection criteria and quality assessment of included studies, enhances the reliability of the review's conclusions. The focus on interventional studies and clinical trials, particularly those with measurable outcomes related to medication adherence, ensures

that the evidence base is both robust and directly relevant to clinical outcomes.

However, the review also faces limitations that must be considered when interpreting the findings. The variability in intervention designs, patient populations, and outcomes measured across the included studies introduces challenges in directly comparing the effectiveness of different interventions. This heterogeneity may mask the nuances of how specific intervention components or contextual factors influence adherence. Furthermore, the restriction to English-language publications and the focus on recent studies may have excluded relevant research that could contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the topic.

Conclusions

The findings of the systematic review highlights the significant potential of nurse-led interventions in enhancing medication adherence among patients with chronic conditions. The findings demonstrate a range of improvements in adherence rates, from 15% to 25%, depending on the intervention type and patient population. These results underscore the effectiveness of nurse-led approaches, particularly those leveraging personalized care plans and technology, in addressing a critical aspect of chronic disease management. While acknowledging the limitations related to study heterogeneity and potential biases, the evidence suggests that nurse-led interventions represent a valuable strategy for improving patient outcomes through enhanced medication adherence..

Conflict of interests

The authors declared no conflict of interests.

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Table (1): Summary of the findings of the included studies that aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of nurse-led interventions in improving medication adherence among patients with chronic conditions

Study ID	Sample Size	Population Characteristics	Type of intervention	Effectiveness of the intervention	Study conclusion
[11]	153	Adults with hypertension	Personalized counseling and follow-up calls	RR 1.45 (95% CI, 1.22-1.73)	Personalized counseling significantly improved medication adherence.
[12]	301	Elderly patients with diabetes	SMS reminders	20% increase (95% CI, 10-30%)	SMS reminders were effective in enhancing medication adherence among elderly patients.
[13]	129	Patients with cardiovascular diseases	Educational workshops	15% increase (95% CI, 5-25%)	Educational workshops led to a modest improvement in medication adherence.
[14]	247	Adults with asthma	Medication review and patient education sessions	18% improvement (95% CI, 9-27%)	Medication review combined with education sessions effectively increased adherence.
[15]	515	Elderly with multiple chronic conditions	Community-based personalized care plan	25% increase (95% CI, 15-35%)	Community-based interventions significantly improved adherence in elderly patients with multiple conditions.
[16]	431	Patients with chronic kidney disease	Telehealth sessions	19% improvement (95% CI, 11-27%)	Telehealth sessions were effective in improving medication adherence in chronic kidney disease patients.
[17]	367	Adults with depression	Digital medication reminders	17% increase (95% CI, 8-26%)	Digital reminders showed a significant increase in adherence among adults with depression.
[18]	289	Patients with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease	Face-to-face counseling sessions	22% improvement (95% CI, 12-32%)	Face-to-face counseling sessions effectively improved adherence in COPD patients.