

# The role of nursing in Palliative Care Approaches for Patients with Chronic Kidney Disease; Review

Raafat Saad Alymani<sup>1</sup>, Mohammad Ali Almhadi<sup>2</sup>, Qasem Mohammed Alamari<sup>3</sup>, Abdullah Abdu Alasmari<sup>4</sup>, Meshari Abdu Alasmari<sup>5</sup>, Mona Ghazi Almajnooni<sup>6</sup>

## Introduction

Chronic kidney disease (CKD) is a global health crisis, affecting millions of individuals and presenting significant challenges to healthcare systems worldwide. Defined as a progressive and usually irreversible decline in kidney function over months or years, CKD can lead to numerous health complications, including cardiovascular disease, metabolic disorders, and ultimately end-stage kidney disease (ESKD), which may necessitate dialysis or transplant (1, 2). The prevalence of CKD is alarmingly high, with estimates suggesting that approximately 14% of adults globally are affected (3). This progressive condition not only diminishes kidney function but also profoundly impacts patients' quality of life due to the multifaceted symptoms associated with kidney deterioration, which include fatigue, pain, pruritus, depression, and a host of other psychological and physical burdens (4). Moreover, as CKD advances, the disease trajectory often leads to complex decision-making regarding treatment options, end-of-life care, and patient autonomy. In this context, palliative care becomes essential—not just at the end stages of disease but throughout the entire continuum of CKD management. Palliative care is a specialized approach that enhances quality of life by providing relief from suffering, addressing patients' psychosocial needs, and assisting with difficult medical decisions. It is an integral aspect of care for individuals living with CKD, who may face complex symptoms and require comprehensive support systems to navigate their illness effectively (5).

Nurses play an indispensable role in the palliative care framework, acting as advocates, educators, and empathetic caregivers. Their involvement is critically important due to their position as frontline healthcare providers who engage with patients regularly, allowing them to build trusting relationships and comprehend the nuances of patients' experiences (6). By conducting thorough assessments that consider physical, emotional, and spiritual dimensions, nurses can identify patient needs and preferences, paving the way for individualized care plans that respect and uphold patients' values (7). Additionally, nurses are pivotal in managing complex symptoms associated with CKD to improve patients' quality of life. This includes pharmacological interventions to alleviate pain and distress, as well as non-pharmacological strategies such as psychosocial support and counseling, helping patients and families grapple with the implications of chronic illness and end-of-life considerations (8). Moreover, given the often unpredictable nature of CKD and its trajectory, nursing education and training must emphasize palliative care principles and competencies, equipping nurses to address the unique challenges this patient population faces. Ultimately, the effective integration of nursing expertise within palliative care for CKD not only enhances care delivery but also promotes a holistic approach that recognizes patients as whole persons rather than mere recipients of medical interventions, thereby striving toward optimal psychosocial outcomes throughout the continuum of care.

## **Comprehensive Patient Assessment**

A fundamental aspect of nursing in palliative care for patients with CKD is the comprehensive assessment of the patient's physical, emotional, social, and spiritual needs. This multi-dimensional approach is essential to anticipating and addressing the challenges that patients may face as they navigate their illness. Nurses routinely monitor renal function through laboratory tests, including serum creatinine levels, electrolyte balance, and urinalysis, to gain insights into the progression of CKD (9). However, physical assessments extend beyond simply monitoring biometrics; they encompass thorough evaluations of the patient's symptoms, functional status, nutritional needs, and overall well-being. For example, nurses utilize assessment tools such as the Edmonton Symptom Assessment System (ESAS) to systematically evaluate and quantify patient-reported symptoms, thereby facilitating targeted interventions to relieve discomfort and distress (10). More than just gathering data, these assessments involve active listening and open communication with patients, encouraging them to articulate their concerns and shared experiences. This element of the nursing process fosters stronger therapeutic relationships and provides a platform for patients to express their desires for care and treatment options.

Moreover, the assessment phase allows nurses not only to monitor for common symptoms associated with CKD, such as fatigue, pruritus, nausea, and pain but also to consider the emotional and psychological sequelae of chronic illness. Depression and anxiety are prevalent in patients with CKD, and nurses are equipped to identify these issues through both the recommended screening tools and their interactions with patients (11). Preliminary studies show that mental health disorders can significantly affect treatment adherence and overall satisfaction in care for CKD patients, making it critical for nurses to address these facets proactively (12). Beyond symptom specifics, the assessment process also incorporates evaluation of the patient's social dynamics, including their family support system, living situation, and access to community resources, all crucial factors that can affect disease management and palliative care (13). Recognition of cultural, spiritual, and personal values is also paramount; nurses must engage in conversations about patients' beliefs and practices that could inform care planning as they move toward end-of-life discussions. Holistic assessments that encompass the full breadth of a patient's experience enable nurses to formulate care plans that are not only effective but also resonate with the complex realities patients face in their chronic illness journey.

## **Symptom Management**

Symptom management in CKD requires a nuanced understanding of the various manifestations of the disease and their impact on patient quality of life. Research has established that patients with CKD experience a wide array of symptoms that can significantly affect their physical comfort and mental well-being (14). One of the roles of nurses is to implement effective pharmacological and non-pharmacological strategies to manage these symptoms without exacerbating other issues. For instance, managing pain and discomfort due to CKD or its treatments is paramount. Nurses play a critical role in administering medications such as analgesics, managing dosing, and monitoring for side effects, particularly because CKD affects how medications are metabolized and eliminated from the body (15). Regularly assessing patients' pain levels through validated pain scales allows nurses to tailor medication regimens to individual needs, balancing efficacy with potential risks.

In addition to pharmacological strategies, nurses employ non-pharmacological interventions that contribute to holistic symptom management. These strategies may include lifestyle modifications, dietary counseling (with input from dietitians), and alternative therapies, such as acupuncture or guided imagery, all aimed at enhancing comfort and alleviating distress (16). For example, adequate nutrition plays a vital role in managing symptoms related to CKD, and nurses often educate patients on dietary restrictions related to fluid intake, potassium, and phosphorus levels, elements that can markedly influence their overall health and quality of life (17). Furthermore, pain management in CKD patients can be complicated by comorbid conditions; interventions must be carefully tailored to not only address the primary symptoms but also consider the complexity of managing overlapping diagnoses such as diabetes or heart disease, thus rendering nurses as pivotal players in the care team (18).

The acknowledgment of psychological symptoms, including anxiety and depression—which can be prevalent among CKD patients due to the chronic nature of their disease—also falls under the purview of nursing practice in palliative care (19). Mental health considerations are integral to effective symptom management, as psychological distress can exacerbate physical symptoms and hinder adherence to treatment regimens. Furthermore, nurses can facilitate referrals to mental health professionals as necessary, ensuring that patients benefit from comprehensive care that encompasses both psychological and physical symptom management (20). It is the combination of these roles—from assessing symptoms and educating patients to coordinating care and advocating for psychosocial support—that illustrates the multifaceted nature of nursing's role in managing chronic kidney disease within a palliative care framework.

### **Advocacy and Education**

Advocacy is a cornerstone of nursing practice, particularly within the context of palliative care for patients with CKD. Nurses are well-positioned to facilitate communication between patients, families, and healthcare providers, fostering a collaborative environment that respects patient autonomy and encourages shared decision-making. Because CKD patients often grapple with complex treatment options, including whether to pursue dialysis or engage in palliative care alone, nurses serve as vital educators, illuminating the pathways available to patients at different stages of their illness (21). By providing clear explanations about the nature of the disease, treatment choices, potential outcomes, and the implications of various decisions, nurses empower patients and their families to make informed decisions. This also includes discussions surrounding advance care planning—an essential aspect of palliative care that helps patients articulate their wishes regarding end-of-life care (22). Conversations about advance directives, do-not-resuscitate orders, and other preferences can be challenging but are crucial for ensuring that care aligns with patients' values and desires.

Additionally, nurses are crucial in addressing the knowledge gaps that often exist among CKD patients regarding their disease and treatment options. The chronic nature of CKD often leads to a lack of clarity about prognosis and the potential benefits of palliative care interventions (23). Through educational initiatives, nurses can inform patients about symptom management techniques, resources for psychosocial support, and the role of palliative care in enhancing quality of life, even in the face of progressive illness. Research indicates that enhancing patient and family education significantly improves patient outcomes, including satisfaction with care and self-

management skills (24). Nurses utilize teach-back methods to confirm patient understanding, ensuring that the information shared is comprehensible and actionable.

Moreover, nurses also take on the role of advocates for integrating palliative care into the overall treatment plan for CKD patients. This includes pushing for institutional policies that support early referral to palliative care specialists, promoting interdisciplinary approaches, and addressing barriers to care access (25). Advocacy extends to the systemic level, with nurses advocating for the necessary resources, training, and support systems that facilitate optimal palliative care delivery. By representing the needs and preferences of their patients, nurses can help shape healthcare policies and practices that prioritize comprehensive, compassionate care for individuals navigating the complexities of chronic kidney disease.

### **Interdisciplinary Collaboration**

The provision of palliative care for CKD patients necessitates an interdisciplinary approach, with nurses playing a pivotal role in collaborating with various healthcare professionals to optimize care delivery. This collaborative model encompasses nephrologists, dietitians, social workers, spiritual care providers, physical therapists, and pharmacists, each contributing their expertise to the patient's care plan. Effective communication among team members is essential for ensuring that all elements of the patient's well-being are addressed, ultimately leading to a holistic care approach. Nurses often act as the keystone in this team, facilitating the exchange of information, coordinating care efforts, and ensuring that treatment plans respect patients' wishes and preferences (26).

Through daily interactions with patients, nurses have the opportunity to gather critical insights about patient experiences, preferences, and symptoms, which they can relay to the rest of the care team. For instance, a nurse may identify social factors affecting a patient's adherence to dietary restrictions or medication regimens—information which can significantly inform the interventions designed by a social worker or dietitian. Additionally, team meetings are integral to discussing complex cases, where nurses provide unique perspectives derived from direct patient interactions, thereby influencing team decisions regarding treatment adjustments and care planning (27). This practice of interdisciplinary collaboration fosters an environment of shared responsibility and accountability, encouraging all team members to contribute meaningfully to patient care.

Furthermore, as the healthcare landscape continues to evolve, there is a growing recognition of the importance of integrating palliative care principles into the management of chronic conditions such as CKD. This recognition underscores the need for ongoing education and training for healthcare providers, including nurses, to ensure they are well-equipped to engage in interdisciplinary collaboration effectively. Studies have shown that interdisciplinary education enhances the teamwork skills of healthcare providers and leads to improved patient outcomes (28). Consequently, nursing professionals must embrace opportunities for collaboration in both educational and clinical settings, ensuring that they remain innovative and up-to-date in their practice.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the role of nursing in palliative care for patients with chronic kidney disease is multifaceted and critical to delivering holistic, patient-centered care. Nurses serve as advocates, educators, and compassionate caregivers, playing a central role in conducting comprehensive assessments, managing symptoms, facilitating communication, and collaborating within interdisciplinary teams. By understanding the complexities of CKD and its impact on patients' lives, nurses can tailor interventions that address the full spectrum of patient needs—physical, emotional, social, and spiritual. Integrating palliative care principles into nursing practice not only improves patient outcomes but also fosters a compassionate healthcare environment that respects and honors the dignity and preferences of individuals navigating the challenges of chronic illness. As the healthcare landscape continues to evolve, ongoing education and support for nursing professionals in palliative care are paramount, ensuring that they are equipped to meet the challenges presented by chronic conditions like CKD, ultimately enhancing the quality of life for those they serve.

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