



BRIDGING THE GAP: ADDRESSING THE ABSENCE OF CLINICAL NURSES IN NURSING CONFERENCE LEADERSHIP IN INDIA

Nursing

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ABSTRACT

Clinical nurses form the backbone of the nursing workforce, delivering essential bedside care across diverse healthcare settings. Their work demands critical thinking, swift decision-making, and emotional intelligence. However, despite their frontline contributions, clinical nurses are largely excluded from academic forums, including nursing conferences and professional panels. These platforms, crucial for knowledge exchange and professional growth, are predominantly dominated by academic or administrative nursing professionals. Most nursing conferences are organized by educational institutions or government bodies, which often prioritize speakers with advanced degrees, research credentials, or leadership roles in nursing. This systemic preference sidelines clinical nurses who may lack formal academic achievements but possess rich practical insights. As a result, valuable bedside perspectives are absent from key conversations shaping nursing practice and policy. Addressing this imbalance is important to ensuring inclusive dialogue, recognizing experiential expertise, and promoting a more representative and equitable nursing profession in India. In India, clinical nurses represent the largest segment of the nursing workforce. They are primarily involved in direct patient care across various healthcare settings. Their roles are physically intensive, demanding sharp critical thinking, rapid decision-making, and strong emotional intelligence. Despite their pivotal role in maintaining patient care standards, clinical nurses often remain at the periphery of academic and policy discussions. In contrast, academic nurses or those in administrative positions have higher visibility and access to platforms such as nursing conferences, workshops, and panels. Nursing conferences and workshops are essential for continuous professional development. They enhance clinical competence, promote leadership, foster a culture of learning, and ultimately improve patient care. Engaging in these activities empowers nurses to be informed, skilled, and influential members of the healthcare team. In India, most nursing conferences are planned and managed by nursing colleges, universities, or government health bodies. These events aim to promote research, share best practices, and foster networking among professionals. However, an analysis of speaker line-ups over the past decade shows a striking absence of bedside clinical nurses. The people who lead these events are usually senior officials who work in academic or administrative positions. Because of this, there is often an unspoken preference for inviting speakers who have academic qualifications, research experience, or hold leadership roles. Clinical nurses who work directly with patients in hospitals or clinics are frequently left out, especially if they do not have advanced degrees or a good number of published research. This happens even though many of these nurses have valuable hands-on experience, practical knowledge, and innovative ideas that come from working at the bedside every day. Unfortunately, this results in the voices of clinical nurses being ignored or unheard in professional gatherings where important discussions about nursing practice and healthcare policy take place. Here are some reasons

KEYWORDS

1. Hierarchical Structure In Healthcare

India's healthcare system follows a rigid hierarchical structure, where authority and recognition are closely tied to academic titles and formal qualifications. This often results in greater visibility and speaking opportunities for those holding designations like "Principal" or "Professor," typically from academic or administrative backgrounds. Clinical nurses, despite their critical role in patient care and years of practical experience, may be seen as less suitable for academic platforms simply because they lack such titles. This perception can lead to, limiting their professional voice and reinforcing the gap between academic leadership and frontline nursing practice.

2. Under Recognition For Practical Innovations

At nursing conferences, speakers are usually MSc or PhD-qualified educators or researchers, even if newly qualified. Experienced clinical nurses, like a senior ICU nurse with over 20 years on the job, are often excluded for not publishing research. As a result, conferences focus more on theory and policy, offering little practical value to bedside nurses. This imbalance limits the relevance and applicability of discussions, especially for frontline care.

3. Workload And Staffing Shortages

Despite many recruitment drives and reforms, clinical nursing often face severe staff shortages and overwhelming patient responsibilities, leaving them physically and mentally exhausted. This intense workload leaves little room for professional development or academic engagement. As a result, preparing for conferences, traveling, or delivering presentations becomes highly challenging. These constraints prevent many capable clinical nurses from participating in academic forums, further widening the gap between practice and policy, and limiting their visibility and contributions to the broader nursing profession.

4. No Formal Pathway For Clinical Knowledge Sharing

In many nursing conferences, hands-on clinical experience is not always acknowledged as a credible or valuable source of knowledge. Clinical nurses who introduce effective practices or contribute to better

patient outcomes often do so without formal recognition. This is largely because their work is not documented within academic frameworks or supported by structured reporting systems. Even institutes organizing nursing conferences or workshops invite speakers from other nursing colleges despite the availability of their clinical nursing personnel.

5. Language And Communication Barriers

Language remains a significant barrier for many clinical nurses in India, as most nurses are more fluent in Hindi and regional languages than in English, which is typically the medium of communication at most national and international nursing conferences. This lack of fluency can lead to hesitation or lack of confidence in public speaking and presenting professional experiences. As a result, even highly skilled nurses may avoid participating in such events, fearing judgment or miscommunication.

5. Cost And Accessibility

In India, clinical nurses often struggle with the cost of attending nursing conferences, especially when these events are held in big cities. Unlike academic nurses, who usually get support from their institutions, funded projects, and other agencies, clinical nurses rarely receive such help, making it hard to attend. Because of this, many skilled nurses miss out on these chances, limiting their visibility, and chances of getting connected with leaders of nursing in conferences.

6. Perceptions Of Entitlement Among Academic Nursing

One reason clinical nurses are often underrepresented as speakers at nursing conferences in India is the decisive role played by academic nursing faculty in organizing these events. Those in educational or research positions are frequently regarded as key voices in the profession, which can unintentionally lead to a preference for selecting speakers from similar backgrounds. This perception may overshadow the practical knowledge and patient care expertise that clinical nurses bring to the table. As a result, frontline nurses are often not included in these important discussions, limiting diverse perspectives and hindering more inclusive participation in professional forums.

7. Missing Platform For Clinical Contributions Issue:

Clinical nurses often do not get the opportunity to share their hands-on work, such as quality improvement efforts or case studies, which have been conducted in clinical area because there's no formal platform for them at conferences. For example, a nurse who developed a new infection control method in her hospital was not invited to speak, while a teacher who conducted a study on infection rates with students was given a slot as a speaker.

8. Role Of Organizing Committees

Another issue is that most conference planning committees are made up of academic staff who usually prefer to invite their colleagues. Clinical nurses are usually not part of these committees and have no input in choosing speakers. For example, at a national nursing conference, all organizers might be from nursing colleges, with no hospital-based nurse involved in planning or decision-making.

The Impact Of Excluding Clinical Nurses From Professional Forums

Clinical nurses play a vital role in healthcare, delivering hands-on care to patients every day. Despite their importance, they are often left out of professional development events like conferences and workshops.

The absence of clinical nurses in academic and professional discussions creates a gap between clinical nursing and academic side and affect in patient care. When clinical nurses are not involved, new research often fails to improve their everyday nursing practice. This limits the use of evidence-based care, as clinical nurses miss out on the latest knowledge shared during conferences and workshops. Not participating in these events as a speaker/faculty can also lower nurses' motivation and sense of professional fulfillment, leading to job dissatisfaction and low morale.³

Additionally, conferences provide important opportunities to develop nursing leadership and connect with healthcare policymakers, which clinical nurses may miss if they are excluded. Without the chance to engage in these forums, nurses may feel isolated and sense of inferiority. These events are valuable for clinical nurses to share experiences, learn from day-to-day direct patient care, and feel part of a supportive community, all of which help maintain their enthusiasm and effectiveness in patient care.

To Address These Challenges Health Care Institution Can Adopt The Following Measures:

- 1. Institutional Funding Support:** Financial help in conference fees, travel and accommodation encourage nurses to participate in professional development opportunities. This can be done in the form reimbursement of the bills. Providing financial aid in the form of scholarships and grants will also encourage the participation.
- 2. Organize In-house Workshops And Conferences:** offering in house conferences, workshops, seminars and training sessions provide then nurse a platform to showcase their work.
- 3. Reward The Participants:** If the achievements of clinical nurses are recognized and rewarded the others also get motivation for participation. Acknowledging the efforts the organization reinforces the value to continuous education.

DISCUSSION

Conference organizers often prioritize academic topics over practical, experience-based content, believing scholarly presentations offer more credibility or fulfill continuing education needs. As a result, clinical stories, bedside innovations, and patient care insights are sometimes dismissed as anecdotal, despite their real-world significance. Academic nurses tend to have stronger professional networks with organizers increasing their visibility.⁴ Many attendees also view them as more authoritative due to their frequent presence as speakers reinforce this perception. This creates a cycle where academic voices dominate conference agendas. Consequently, clinical nurses who bring vital, hands-on experience are often excluded, leading to a lack of diverse perspectives and limiting the exploration of practical, implementable solutions in nursing practice. Nowadays many young academic nursing leaders are helping clinical nurses to get involved in medical conferences and organize their academic events.

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