

Lived Experience of Nurses a Pioneering Hospital: A Phenomenological Study

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative descriptive study explored the lived experiences of pioneering nurses in a newly established hospital in Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Grounded in Benner's Novice to Expert Model, Meleis' Transition Theory, and Lazarus and Folkman's Stress and Coping Theory, the study examined how these experiences shaped professional identity, coping mechanisms, leadership development, and healthcare service formation. Fifteen purposely selected pioneering nurses participated in in-depth semi-structured interviews. Data were analyzed using Colaizzi's phenomenological method with the support of NVivo software. Findings revealed seven major themes: expanded professional roles; structural and operational challenges; adaptability and role expansion; coping strategies; contribution to hospital development; commitment to quality and patient safety; and professional growth and identity formation. Participants described assuming multispecialty responsibilities amid limited resources, undefined workflows, and staffing constraints. Despite these challenges, nurses demonstrated resilience through teamwork, communication, and positive cognitive reframing. Importantly, they actively helped establish workflows, safety protocols, and nursing standards, positioning themselves as foundational agents in institutional development.

The study concludes that pioneering nurse's function not only as care providers but also as system builders and emerging leaders. Their lived experiences significantly influence nursing practice, leadership structures, and the sustainability of healthcare services in newly established hospitals.

Keywords: Adaptability, Coping Mechanisms, Healthcare Service Development, Leadership, Patient Safety, Phenomenology, Pioneering Nurses, Professional Identity, Qualitative Research, Resilience

INTRODUCTION

Nurses are essential in shaping healthcare delivery, professional practice, and organizational culture within hospital settings. Among them, pioneering nurses play a particularly critical role in newly established hospitals, where they help lay the foundation for nursing practice, develop leadership structures, and establish healthcare services. Their work occurs in contexts characterized by uncertainty, evolving norms, and limited institutional structures, requiring not only clinical competence but also adaptability, problem-solving, and leadership skills (Gunawan et al., 2021; Jainurakhma et al., 2020; Todt, 2020; Rodrigo & Lopez, 2025). These conditions make pioneering nurses' experiences uniquely transformative, influencing both their professional growth and the development of nascent healthcare institutions.

The primary objective of this study is to explore the lived experiences of pioneering nurses in newly established hospitals, focusing on how these experiences influence

professional identity, coping mechanisms, and contributions to nursing practice, leadership, and the development of healthcare services.

Statement of the Problem

Pioneering nurses play a vital role in establishing nursing practice, leadership, and healthcare services in newly established hospitals. Despite their significant contributions, limited research has explored their lived experiences and how these experiences influence professional identity, coping mechanisms, and the development of healthcare services.

Central Question

1. What lived experiences of pioneering nurses contribute to the development of nursing practice, leadership, and healthcare services in a pioneering hospital?

Probing questions

1. How do pioneering nurses describe their experiences working in a newly established hospital?
2. What challenges do pioneering nurses encounter in their professional practice?
3. How do pioneering nurses cope with and adapt to these challenges?
4. What meanings do pioneering nurses attach to their experiences?
5. How do these experiences influence their professional identity and commitment to nursing?

Scope and Delimitation

This study explores the lived experiences of pioneering nurses working in a newly established hospital in Jeddah, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and how these experiences contribute to the development of nursing practice, leadership, and healthcare services. However, the study has certain limitations. The small sample size and focus on a single hospital limit the generalizability of the findings to other healthcare institutions or contexts. The data are based on participants' personal accounts, which may be influenced by individual perceptions, memory, or bias.

Review of Related Literature

Pioneering nurses are central to establishing nursing practice, leadership structures, and healthcare services in newly formed hospitals. However, scholarly attention has been more directed toward the lived experiences of nurses working in crisis environments, transition phases, global mobility, or evolving professional roles rather than within pioneering hospital settings. The limited research on how pioneering nurses construct professional identity, cope with institutional challenges, and contribute to healthcare development underscores a gap that this study aims to address. The review is organized thematically to align with the study's statement of the problem and research questions, focusing on lived experiences, challenges, coping mechanisms, uncertainty, novelty, and rapid-change conditions that are conceptually similar to pioneering hospital environments. Gunawan et al. (2021) captured the emotional intensity of frontline nursing during a high-pressure healthcare situation, reporting themes of fear, pride, and feeling undervalued.

Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by Benner's Novice to Expert Model, Meleis' Transition Theory, and Lazarus and Folkman's Stress and Coping Theory to understand the experiences of pioneering nurses in a newly established hospital. Benner's model explains how nurses develop skills through experience, especially as they adjust to a new and challenging environment. Meleis' theory helps describe how they adapt to new roles and transitions in the workplace. Lazarus and Folkman's theory focuses on how people cope with stress and challenges through

different coping strategies. Together, these theories help explain how pioneering nurses grow professionally, adapt to change, and manage challenges in their work.

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative research study explores the lived experiences of pioneering nurses in a newly established hospital.

Research design

The study utilized a qualitative approach and a phenomenological research design, a qualitative technique that focuses on comprehending concepts, views, or experiences and may be utilized to acquire in-depth insights into an issue or produce new research ideas (Bhandari, 2020).

Research Steps

This study used a researcher-made semi-structured interview guide with eighteen (18) open-ended questions to explore the lived experiences of pioneering nurses in a newly established hospital. Follow-up questions were included to encourage participants to share their experiences more fully and to clarify their responses. The guide was reviewed by three (3) experts and pre-tested with three (3) nurses who were not part of the actual study.

Data Collection and Sample Selection

Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with nine (9) pioneering nurses. Ethical clearance was obtained from the Ethics Review Board (ERB) of St. Bernadette of Lourdes College (SBLC), and permission from the hospital administration was obtained through an endorsement letter. Interviews were scheduled at the participants' convenience and conducted in a private setting to ensure confidentiality. Each session lasted about 45–60 minutes.

Study Limitations and Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance was obtained from the Ethics Review Board (ERB) of St. Bernadette of Lourdes College (SBLC), and permission to conduct the study was secured from the hospital administration. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants.

Data Analysis Methods

The data collected from the interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using Colaizzi's (1978) method of phenomenological data analysis to systematically explore participants' lived experiences. The researcher first read and re-read all transcripts to gain a deep understanding of the data. Significant statements relevant to the research questions were then extracted and organized into meaningful units. These units were formulated into themes that captured the essence of the participants' experiences.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Based on the thematic analysis of the lived experiences of nurses working in a newly established hospital, the following findings were identified: Nurses assume expanded and multifunctional professional roles. Structural and operational challenges are evident in newly established hospitals. Adaptability and role expansion are central to nursing practice in emerging institutions. Teamwork, communication, and positive mindset serve as primary coping strategies. Nurses actively contribute to hospital development and system formation. Commitment to quality care and patient safety remains a core professional value. Professional growth and identity development emerge from pioneering experiences.

SUMMARY

Overall, the integration of empirical findings and contemporary literature confirms that nurses in newly established hospitals function not only as care providers but also as system builders, safety advocates, and emerging leaders. Their experiences illustrate how professional identity evolves in response to institutional development, reinforcing the essential role of nursing in shaping healthcare transformation.

CONCLUSIONS

In summary, the experiences of nurses in a newly established hospital illustrate that while early-stage institutions present structural challenges, they also offer opportunities for professional growth, leadership development, and institutional contributions. Adaptability, teamwork, and strong professional values enable nurses to navigate uncertainty while maintaining quality patient care.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

By continuously learning and reflecting on their daily experiences, pioneering nurses can build the confidence and resilience needed to lead effectively while leaning on mentors to protect their own well-being. At the same time, hospital administrators must support them by providing clear workflows, open communication, and the fair resources necessary to keep morale high. Nursing schools can mirror these real-world challenges in the classroom through simulation-based training that teaches adaptability, while policymakers create flexible staffing standards and give nurses a meaningful voice in institutional decisions.

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AI DECLARATION STATEMENT

AI-supported tools were used to help improve the grammar, clarity, and organization of this study, as well as to create figures for the theoretical frameworks. However, all data collection, analysis, and interpretation were carried out by the researchers. The authors take full responsibility for the content, accuracy, and conclusions presented in this research.

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