

The Art of Nursing: Time to Resuscitate

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Graduate nurses must be knowledgeable, technologically savvy, compassionate, and caring in order to provide optimal care in today's complex healthcare delivery system. They must possess not only technical skills or the science of nursing (hard skills) but also humanistic caring skills or the art of nursing (soft skills) at all times. Nursing care is widely acknowledged to be a blend of art and science. While science (hard skills) can be found in nursing education, research, and practice, art (soft skills) is often overlooked. Although philosophical and theoretical debates on the art of nursing abound, research demonstrating its relevance to nursing practice is lacking.

Science, as a way of understanding, serves as a foundation for the advancement of nursing practice required to continue serving human health needs (1). The four nursing metaparadigm concepts of health, person, environment, and nurse encompass this viewpoint. Empirical knowledge informs professional practice not only through a shared understanding of scientific systematic assessments and observations but also through individuals' subjective experiences and the meaning they place on these events (2). Nursing science informs the evidence base required for the practice arm of the profession, which is critical to improving healthcare and patient outcomes (3). Evidence from scientific studies, as well as patient preferences and nurse expertise, are all part of evidence-based practice. Nurse expertise is often unobserved and only discovered through a deeper understanding of the art of nursing.

Indeed, nursing is both an art and a science. Science can help explain what a nurse does, but art can address the human connections, empathetic communication, dedicated care and compassion that make nursing such an important part of healthcare. Although the science and art of nursing practice are complementary, the worldview of the art of nursing has evolved in recent years. According to emerging scientific evidence, the art of nursing promotes positive physical and psychological effects on healing (4).

Nurses are among the most manifest of all healthcare professionals, allowing them to read patients' emotional cues and establish human connections and relationships. Compassion is inherent in the art of nursing and aligns with nurses' highest professional ideals. The art of nursing or soft skills has become the oxygen requisite in today's healthcare delivery system to resuscitate the apparently dying nursing care quality. In nursing, soft skills are defined as the inherent creative aspect that propels nursing into the spotlight as a caring noble profession.

A study discovered that nursing students and graduate nurses should have nine soft skills: communication skills, social skills and responsibilities, critical thinking skills, problem thinking skills, teamwork skills, leadership skills, professional and ethical decision-making skills, numeracy skills and interpersonal skills in order to provide the holistic care towards patients as well as to get better career development (5).

In Malaysia, the Malaysian Qualification Agency (MQA) has introduced the Malaysian Qualification Framework (MQF) which includes the functional work skills for graduates and all the higher learning institutions' programme learning outcomes abide by MQF. The MQF's functional work skills for graduates are also known as soft skills. Nursing as a profession reflects its scientific nature, with professional standards, regulations, and legislation governing nursing practice. In this paradigm, Malaysian nursing programmes follow the MQF as defined by professional standards. A study also found that the effect of integration on soft skills or the art of nursing in the nursing programme is still unknown (6).

Nursing leaders have grappled with the separation, integration, and synergy of the art and science of the discipline throughout history. In nursing education, nursing academics have more focused on the science of nursing or commonly known as hard skills and the art of nursing or soft skills have become less important for them. Yet, nursing academics often claim that they teach both science and art to their students, coming into the competency skills assessments of nursing students, most of the time nursing academics are focused on the science of nursing and the art of nursing is again missing. A study reported that graduate nurses were not prepared as holistic nurses at the end of their nursing education programme and without giving focus on adequate soft skills assessment, students are graduating unprepared to be successful in the workplace (7). Recent studies also highlighted that soft skills assessments are really important for nursing students to revive the art of nursing (8,9). After all, nursing is a caring profession, and caring remains central to nurses' values, even above their accountability for it, but they tend to dismiss caring as unimportant in favour of other tasks deemed more important. Thus, it is time to resuscitate the art of nursing and bring it back together with the science of nursing in the current healthcare delivery system.

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