

Therapeutic Communication in Elderly Patients: A Systematic Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

The aging process can cause changes in physical, cognitive, and social aspects. Some seniors may experience memory problems, speech difficulties, or hearing difficulties. These factors can affect their ability to communicate effectively, especially in a medical environment that is often complex and full of technical terms. In addition to physical challenges, older adults may also face feelings of loneliness, social isolation, or feelings of being unappreciated. This study aimed to explore the principles and strategies of effective therapeutic communication in interacting with the elderly. The literature search process was carried out on various databases (PubMed, Web of Sciences, EMBASE, Cochrane Libraries, and Google Scholar) regarding therapeutic communication in the elderly. This study follows the preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-Analysis (PRISMA) recommendations. Therapeutic communication with the elderly is a communication approach that is empathetic, caring, respects patient autonomy, and uses language that is simple, clear, and easy to understand. Honesty and openness in conveying information about health conditions and prognosis are also important. Avoid giving false hope, but keep focusing on efforts and steps that can be taken to improve the quality of life for the elderly.

1. Introduction

Increases in life expectancy and improvements in the healthcare system have seen the elderly population increase rapidly in recent decades. It is estimated that the number of elderly people will continue to grow in the coming years. At the same time, age-related physical and mental health problems are increasingly complex and varied. In facing this challenge, it is important for health professionals to understand and apply effective therapeutic communication when interacting with the elderly. Therapeutic communication is an empathetic and understanding communication approach that aims to create a trusting relationship between patients and medical personnel. For the elderly, the therapeutic

communication aspect is very important because it can affect their overall quality of life, as well as affect the effectiveness of the treatment and care provided.^{1,2}

The aging process can cause changes in physical, cognitive, and social aspects. Some seniors may experience memory problems, speech difficulties, or hearing difficulties. These factors can affect their ability to communicate effectively, especially in a medical environment that is often complex and full of technical terms. In addition to physical challenges, older adults may also face feelings of loneliness, social isolation, or feelings of being unappreciated. Therefore, a communication approach that acknowledges and respects their feelings is very important to create meaningful relationships and help



the elderly feel heard and cared for. In the application of therapeutic communication to the elderly, it is important to avoid paternalistic attitudes that might limit their participation in making decisions about their own health. Instead, the role of the health professional is to be a good listener, respect older people's perspectives, and seek a deeper understanding of their needs and preferences.^{3,4}

This can help create a more inclusive and empathetic environment, which in turn will improve the quality of care and satisfaction of the elderly with the services provided. This study aimed to explore the principles and strategies of effective therapeutic communication in interacting with the elderly. This study aims to describe the importance of empathy, patience, the use of simple and understandable language, and ways to support the elderly to remain active and involved in their own care process. By understanding therapeutic communication with the elderly, healthcare professionals can improve service quality and build more meaningful relationships with these valued patients.

2. Methods

The literature search process was carried out on various databases (PubMed, Web of Sciences, EMBASE, Cochrane Libraries, and Google Scholar) regarding therapeutic communication in the elderly. The search was performed using the terms: (1) "communication" OR "therapeutic" OR "elderly" OR "effective" AND (2) "methods." The literature is limited to clinical studies and published in English. The literature selection criteria are articles published in the form of original articles, an experimental study about therapeutic communication in the elderly, studies conducted in a timeframe from 2013-2023, and the main outcome was therapeutic communication in the elderly. Meanwhile, the exclusion criteria were studies that were not related to therapeutic communication in the elderly and duplication of publications. This study follows the preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analysis (PRISMA) recommendations.

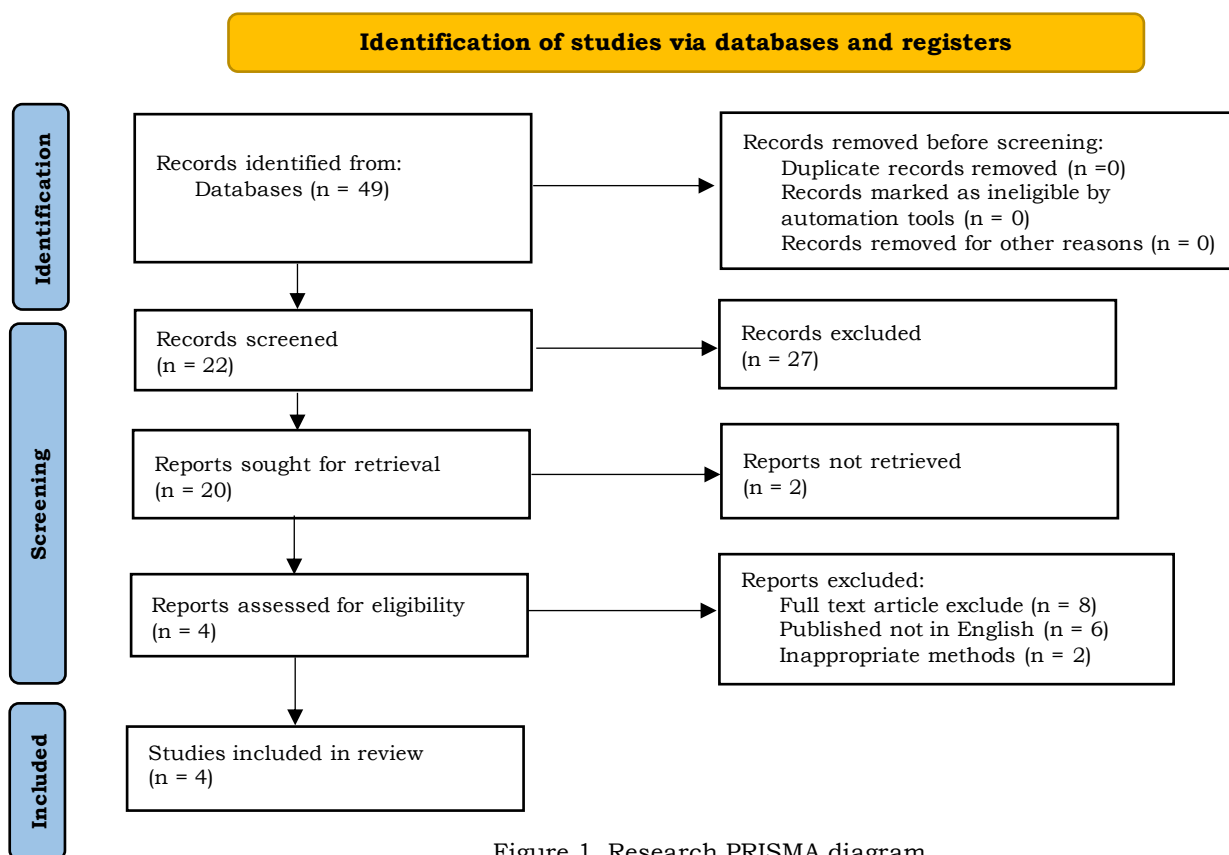


Figure 1. Research PRISMA diagram.



3. Results and Discussion

Empathy and patience

Listening with empathy and patience plays a key role in therapeutic communication with the elderly. Good listening skills will help create a trusting relationship and will greatly benefit the care and well-being of the elderly. Older adults may feel vulnerable and anxious about health care and the changes that are taking place in their bodies and minds. When health professionals listen empathetically, seniors feel more cared for, understood, and valued. This can help build trust between the elderly and medical personnel, which is essential for collaboration in treatment and following medical instructions. Every senior has unique experiences and needs. By listening with empathy, health professionals can understand more deeply the feelings and concerns experienced by the elderly and see their perspective on care and quality of life. By understanding these individual needs, medical personnel can provide more personalized and relevant care. The elderly often experience hearing loss or certain cognitive problems. Listening with empathy and patience gives older people time to process information and respond better. In addition, the use of language that is simple and easy to understand also helps to increase the effectiveness of communication. Older adults can deal with feelings of loneliness and social isolation, especially if they feel they are not being heard or valued. Listening with empathy and patience helps create an emotional bond and ensures that older adults feel heard and cared for, which can reduce feelings of loneliness and improve their overall well-being. The elderly who feel heard and valued are more likely to be satisfied with the care provided. They tend to be more adherent to treatment, participate more actively in decision-making about their health, and are more open in talking about their health problems.^{5,6}

Simple language and easy to understand

The elderly often have difficulty understanding complex or technical language, especially if they have cognitive decline or hearing loss. Therefore, the use of language that is simple, clear, and easy to understand is very important in therapeutic communication with the elderly. Complex or technical language can cause confusion in the elderly, which in turn can make it difficult for them to understand the information conveyed. By using simple language, older people are more likely to understand messages better and feel more confident in dealing with care and treatment. The elderly will be more involved in communication if the language used is easy to understand. Simple language helps them feel more comfortable and motivated to talk about their feelings and health experiences, thereby increasing interaction and collaboration between the elderly and medical personnel. The elderly often have to face important health decisions. Clear and understandable language makes it easier for them to understand the treatment options available, the risks and benefits and allows them to participate actively in making decisions about their own health. The use of complex or technical language can cause misunderstandings that have a negative impact on the care and lifestyle changes of the elderly. Simple and clear language helps reduce the risk of misunderstandings and ensures that the information conveyed is received correctly. Seniors often interact with their families or carers on health and care issues. By using easy-to-understand language, the information provided by health professionals can be more easily understood and relayed back to families or carers for further monitoring and support. Simple language does not mean belittling or ignoring the elderly. The purpose of using easy-to-understand language is so that information and messages can be conveyed effectively and enable the elderly to actively participate in the process of care and decision-making about their health. Thus, good therapeutic communication with the right language will help



improve the quality of care and satisfaction of the elderly with the medical services provided.⁷⁻⁹

Strength of hearing and sight

Older people often experience hearing or vision impairment, and this can affect their ability to communicate effectively. When talking to older adults who may have hearing problems, be sure to speak clearly and clearly, without shouting. Don't speak too fast or too slow. Give them time to process the information conveyed. Try to communicate in a calm and distraction-free environment. Noisy backgrounds can make it difficult for the elderly to hear and understand the messages conveyed. Facial expressions and body movements can provide additional information in communication, especially for the elderly, who rely on body language to understand the context of the conversation. So, speak with clear facial expressions and use appropriate gestures to convey the message better. If the elderly use hearing aids or glasses, make sure these devices function properly and are appropriate. If possible, sit in front of them so they can see you better. After delivering the message, be sure to confirm whether the senior has understood what you said. You can ask them to repeat or respond to what has been said. As well as speaking in a clear voice, body language can also help improve understanding. If possible, use hand gestures or visual cues to support what you're saying.^{9,10}

Create a comfortable environment

A comfortable physical and social environment is very important in communicating with the elderly. Avoid noisy or crowded environments. Loud and excessive noise can distract the elderly and make it difficult for them to concentrate or listen properly. Try to communicate in a quiet and peaceful place. Make sure the room has enough lighting so that your face and body movements are clearly visible. Adequate lighting will help seniors see your facial expressions

and body language, which are important in communication. Make sure that the chairs and other facilities in the room are comfortable for the elderly. Also, make sure that the environment is safe and free of things that could cause injury or worry to the elderly. Show a friendly, caring, and polite attitude when communicating with the elderly. Greet them with a smile and speak in a gentle tone of voice. A friendly and warm environment will help seniors feel more relaxed and open to talking. Try to reduce distractions from electronic devices or other activities while communicating with the elderly. Focus your full attention on the elderly so they feel valued and well-heard. If possible, encourage active participation from the elderly in conversations or activities. Create an enabling environment to talk and share their experiences. This will help create a deeper bond in the communication relationship. It is important to respect the privacy of the elderly and provide opportunities for them to speak without pressure. Speak attentively and don't force personal questions if the elderly don't want to talk about it. Creating a comfortable physical and social environment is an important step in creating effective therapeutic communication with the elderly. By creating an environment that is calm, friendly, and free from distractions, the elderly will feel more relaxed, comfortable, and open to communicating better. All of this can have a positive impact on the quality of care and interactions between the elderly and health professionals.^{11,12}

Open and reflective questions

Asking open-ended questions and using reflection are therapeutic communication skills that are especially useful when interacting with older adults. Open questions are questions that require the elderly to provide more detailed and in-depth answers than just "yes" or "no". By asking open-ended questions, you give older adults the opportunity to talk more about their feelings, experiences, and perspectives. This helps create a deeper connection and allows



seniors to feel heard and valued. The elderly often have complex feelings and emotions related to health problems and changes that occur to them. By asking open-ended questions, you give them the opportunity to express their emotions more freely and openly. This can help them deal with any feelings of stress, anxiety, or loneliness they may be experiencing. Open-ended questions allow you to get more information about older people's health problems or needs. You can better understand what is most important to them in care and how you can help meet those needs. Reflection is the skill to repeat or conclude what the elderly have said. By using reflection, you show that you are really listening and understanding what they are saying. This helps validate their feelings and experiences and creates a stronger emotional bond. By asking open-ended questions and using reflection, you create an environment for communication that is open, trusting, and mutually supportive. The elderly will feel more comfortable and motivated to talk and share information with you, thereby strengthening the relationship between you as a medical professional and them as a patient. Listening carefully and using open-ended questions and reflection can help you understand more deeply the health conditions and needs of older adults. This allows you to provide more appropriate and effective care according to the situation and individual preferences of the elderly.^{13,14}

Respect for autonomy and participation

Respecting the autonomy of the elderly and giving them the opportunity to participate in making decisions about their care are important aspects of therapeutic communication with the elderly. The elderly are individuals who have the human right to have autonomy over themselves. They have unique experiences, values, and preferences. By respecting their autonomy, you acknowledge that they are valuable individuals and deserve to have some control over their lives and care. Providing an opportunity for the elderly to participate in making decisions about

their care gives them confidence. They feel valued and have an active role in their health care. This can increase their motivation and courage to face changes or overcome health challenges. Older adults who are involved in making decisions about their care tend to have a better understanding of information about their health conditions and available treatment options. They will ask more questions, seek information, and consider all options better, which can ultimately lead to more informed treatment decisions that match their preferences. Health care can often cause fear and anxiety, especially for the elderly who may be dealing with serious health conditions. By giving them control over the treatment process, you help reduce feelings of uncertainty and empower them to better deal with changes or challenges. The elderly who feel they have control over their care are more likely to comply with medical instructions and treatment plans. They will feel more motivated to follow the treatment plan and more actively involved in their care process. By empowering the elderly to participate in decision-making, the relationship between patients and medical personnel can become more collaborative and trusting. This creates a better communication environment and helps create meaningful relationships in long-term healthcare.^{15,16}

Convey realistic expectations

Reliability and honesty in conveying information about health conditions and prognosis are important principles in therapeutic communication with the elderly. Honesty and accuracy in providing information help build trust between the elderly and medical personnel. Older adults will feel more confident and comfortable talking about their concerns and feelings if they know that the information provided is honest and trustworthy. By conveying clear and realistic information about health conditions, the elderly and their families can make appropriate preparations and plan treatment better. This enables them to take the necessary steps to better



face the future. Giving false hope to the elderly will only cause disappointment and disappointment if these expectations are not met. Being honest about health conditions and prognosis helps prevent unrealistic expectations and ensures that older adults have an accurate understanding of their situation. Even though it is realistic in conveying information, stay focused on efforts and steps that can be taken to improve the quality of life of the elderly. This includes looking for ways to reduce symptoms, manage health conditions, and increase their independence. Focusing on these efforts can provide positive encouragement and hope for the elderly. The elderly have the right to know about their health condition, even though it may be difficult to deal with. Hiding or withholding important information does not respect their rights to get a clear and complete explanation about their health. By having honest information about their health condition, the elderly can make meaningful decisions about their care and lifestyle. They can participate actively in decisions about care and have control over the course of their care.^{17,18}

Overcome feelings of loneliness and isolation

The elderly often experience feelings of loneliness and social isolation, especially if they have physical or mobility limitations that limit social interaction. Therapeutic communication can be a very useful tool for addressing these issues and helping seniors feel more connected and valued. Through empathetic therapeutic communication, the elderly feel heard and understood. You can show empathy and concern for their feelings, thereby helping to reduce feelings of loneliness and provide much-needed emotional support. Seniors feel more connected when they feel someone is really listening and caring about them. Therapeutic communication helps create a strong emotional bond between the elderly and medical personnel or people who care for them. Therapeutic communication provides an opportunity for older people to talk and interact with others, especially if

they are living in a care facility or facing social isolation. These interactions can provide a sense of social connection and reduce feelings of loneliness. When older people feel heard, valued, and involved in the communication process, they feel more meaningful and more connected to the world around them. This can reduce feelings of isolation and feel that they have an important role in their lives. Therapeutic communication can provide older adults with the information and resources needed to overcome feelings of loneliness and social isolation. For example, you could provide information about local senior clubs or social programs they can join. Through positive and supportive therapeutic communication, seniors can feel more motivated to participate in social and recreational activities. This can help reduce feelings of loneliness and improve their overall quality of life. By using good therapeutic communication, you can help the elderly feel more connected to others, feel valued, and reduce the psychological burden they feel due to feelings of loneliness and social isolation. Empathetic and supportive communication can have a huge positive impact on the mental and emotional well-being of older people.¹⁹

Motivate and provide support

As medical personnel, their role in providing motivation and emotional support to the elderly is no less important than providing medical care. Praise and recognition for their efforts in dealing with health challenges can have a huge positive impact on the enthusiasm and motivation of the elderly to keep fighting and improving their quality of life. Praise and recognition for the effort and persistence of the elderly in overcoming their health problems provide a positive sense of self-esteem. Seniors feel valued and acknowledged for their efforts, which helps increase self-confidence and reduce feelings of inferiority. Positive emotional support can raise the spirit of the elderly and motivate them to keep fighting in facing health challenges. This can help them be more



enthusiastic about undergoing treatment and participating in activities that improve their quality of life. Praise and recognition give seniors the feeling that someone cares about them and appreciates their efforts. It can reduce feelings of loneliness and provide a positive sense of connection and emotional attachment. The elderly tend to be more open and collaborate with medical personnel who provide positive emotional support. They feel more comfortable talking about their concerns and feelings, which helps in planning and managing treatment effectively. Praise and emotional support can motivate the elderly to involve themselves in social and recreational activities. By participating in these activities, the elderly can feel more connected to others and reduce social isolation. Motivation and positive emotional support contribute to improving the quality of life of the elderly. High spirits and positive feelings about themselves help seniors cope better with health challenges and feel happier.²⁰

4. Conclusion

Therapeutic communication with the elderly is a communication approach that is empathetic, caring, respects patient autonomy, and uses language that is simple, clear, and easy to understand. Honesty and openness in conveying information about health conditions and prognosis are also important. Avoid giving false hope, but keep focusing on efforts and steps that can be taken to improve the quality of life for the elderly.

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