

## Nursing Care Perceptions of Older Individuals Undergoing Surgery

### Abstract



**Aim:** This qualitative study aimed to identify the nursing care perceptions of older individuals undergoing surgery.

**Methods:** In-depth interviews method were used to collect the data. The study was conducted in adult surgical clinics at a university hospital in Turkey in February 2018. A total of 15 patients who were >65 years of age and had undergone surgery were included in this study. The number of patients in the sample was determined using the purposive sampling method.

**Results:** Seven themes were identified and grouped under three categories in this study. The patients thought that nursing care included spiritual values. The patients expressed the roles of nurses in care as fulfilling the needs of the patients, informing patients, and protecting and advocating patients' rights. It was determined that both positive and negative attitudes of nurses during care also affect the patients' perceptions.

**Conclusion:** Planning and implementing care, taking into account the patients' perceptions of nursing care, will increase the patients' satisfaction with nursing care. The data obtained from this study including the perceptions of older individuals regarding nursing care and nurses' roles in care will contribute to the development of protocols, care maps, and new researches related to nursing care.

**Keywords:** Aging, Nursing care, Patient satisfaction, Perception, Surgery

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### Introduction

It has been estimated that the older individuals will make up 24% of the world population by 2040, and half of these people will require surgical intervention.<sup>1</sup> Surgical morbidity and mortality rates increase with aging due to chronic diseases and physiological changes.<sup>2</sup> Along with this demographic shift, the health care system must be prepared to deliver care that comprehensively addresses the physiological, psychological, and social changes that occur with aging.<sup>3</sup> In particular, surgical care must minimize cardiopulmonary risks associated with decreased vital capacity, decreased diaphragm strength, and diminished perfusion that commonly occurs in older individuals. Addressing problems such as these that might negatively affect surgical outcomes will be crucial to reduce postsurgical morbidity and mortality, as well as maximize quality of life.<sup>4</sup>

Nursing is a profession involving an interpersonal communication process, and its main role is caring. Watson<sup>5</sup> defined nursing care as a scientifically, ethically, aesthetically, and professionally customized interpersonal process resulting from a mutual interaction of two people through physical, mental, spiritual, and sociocultural means. Older individuals, particularly those undergoing surgical intervention, need intensive nursing care due to physiological changes, complications that may develop after surgery, and chronic health problems. Care planning of nurses according to the physiological changes occurring in systems related to aging while planning older individuals care is important in early detection and elimination of problems that may develop after surgery in the older individuals.<sup>6</sup> It is possible to minimize the postoperative complications, increase the survival rate, and maintain the optimum quality of life with an effective, adequate, planned, and quality nursing care that will be given to the vulnerable older individuals undergoing surgical intervention.<sup>7</sup>

Older individuals are treated in hospitals by nurses who are much younger than them. Today, while technological and scientific developments create intergenerational differences, they also cause differences in values, valuation, and value attribution. These differences are reflected in the nursing care services provided by nurses who are from a younger generation.<sup>8</sup>

Patients' satisfaction with nursing care is defined as cognitive and emotional reactions related to the interaction between the patients' expectations of ideal nursing care and actual care perceptions.<sup>9</sup> It is stated in the literature that patients' expectations and satisfaction relate significantly to their perceptions of nursing care.<sup>10,11</sup> Several studies have revealed that there are differences between the perceptions of nursing care and expectations of the patients.<sup>12–14</sup> Patient characteristics including age, gender, and educational level have also been shown to affect their expectations and satisfaction with care.<sup>13,15</sup> There are studies in the literature showing that older individuals have optimistic perceptions and experiences of nursing care<sup>16</sup> and that nurses also have positive perceptions and attitudes toward older individuals.<sup>17</sup>

There are quantitative studies in the literature that have determined the patients' perceptions of nursing care. Studies that deeply examine the patients' perceptions and opinions using qualitative methods are rather limited. No qualitative study evaluating nursing care as perceived by older individuals undergoing surgery has been found in the literature. It is important to deeply examine the perceptions of nursing care in older individuals undergoing surgery and to identify their expectations and opinions and plan nursing services on the basis of the findings that emerge.

**Aim**

This qualitative study was conducted to determine the nursing care perceptions of older individuals undergoing surgery.

**Methods**

**Study Design and Sample**

This study adopted a qualitative descriptive methodology that provides a rich description. Our research question is: what are the perceptions of nursing care for older individuals who underwent surgery and who were cared for by nurses younger than them? The study was conducted in the adult surgical clinics of a foundation university hospital in Turkey. The majority of nurses want to work in public hospitals. For this reason, the nurse circulation in this hospital is high and most of them are newly graduated nurses. The data of the study were collected in February 2018. The study involved 15 patients who were older than 65 years of age, were able to communicate, had undergone surgery under general anesthesia, had received treatment and care for ≥1 week in the hospital, and had agreed to participate in the study. The number of patients in the sample was determined using the purposive sampling method, which is a sampling method used in qualitative studies. Purposive sampling continued until the saturation point of each concept was reached, and data collection was terminated when further data collection could not provide additional information.

**Table 1.** Semi-Structured Questionnaire

1. In your opinion, what is nursing care; what does it mean to you?
2. In your opinion, what are the most important elements of nursing care, and what are the roles of nurses in nursing care?
3. What do you think about nurses' attitudes toward patients while offering care?

**Data Collection**

The sociodemographic characteristics of the patients were collected using a data collection form comprising 11 structured questions. This form was completed by the researchers during the interviews. The perceptions of nursing care in the patients were determined through in-depth interviews. In-depth interviews were conducted by two researchers (first and third) simultaneously, during the interviews, voice recorded and also some notes were taken. Three questions were asked to identify the perceptions of nursing care in the patients (Table 1). Based on the responses to each question, new questions were designed to examine the patients' perceptions of the care offered by nurses who were much younger than the patients, like "Do nurses being younger than older individuals have any effect on the care they offer and attitudes?" Patients were allowed to share their experiences and opinions to clarify and expand on their answers. The questions asked during the in-depth interviews were created by studying professional experiences, literature review, and other qualitative studies. It took approximately 45-60 min to interview each patients. The interviews continued until the data saturation level was reached, and the data collection process was terminated when repetitive answers were heard from the patients. The interviews were conducted at least on the third day after the surgery when they felt physiologically comfortable during the interviews. Additionally, the first three days after surgery is the process of they had recently experienced intensive nursing care and patient/nurse interaction. The interviews were conducted in the patients' rooms and it was ensured that there were no other people in the room during the interviews. It was observed in the interviews that the patients responded to the questions with comfortable expressions.

**Research Team**

A total of three female researchers participated in this study. Second researcher is a professor of surgical nursing at a university and has experience in qualitative research. First and third researchers are assistant professor of medical surgical nursing at a university, and they are trained in qualitative research. All researchers have many years of clinical and intensive care nursing experience and studies on care.

**Data Analysis**

The data were analyzed using Colaizzi's phenomenological methodology.<sup>18</sup> To ensure the validity and reliability of the data, at the end of the interviews, the researchers separately listened to the voice recordings and transcribed each what they heard. The expressions appropriate for the study were selected by each researcher, and

**Table 2.** Categories and Themes About Nursing Care Perceptions of Older Individuals Undergoing Surgery

Categories	Themes
Category 1: Nursing care perceptions of the older individuals undergoing surgery	1. Nursing care involve spiritual values 2. Nursing care means "helping"
Category 2: Perceptions of the older individuals undergoing surgery about the roles of nurses in nursing care	1. Fulfilling the needs of the patients 2. Informing patients 3. Protecting and advocating patients' rights
Category 3: Perceptions of the older individuals undergoing surgery about attitudes of nurses while offering nursing care	1. Positive attitudes and behaviors 2. Negative attitudes and behaviors

the significant expressions were interpreted. The results of the data analysis were brought together to describe the perceptions of nursing care in older individuals. The researchers came together and compared their observations regarding the collected data. In case of any inconsistency, they discussed the results and made corrections as necessary. Categorizations were made according to the meanings obtained from common expressions, which were later divided into theme clusters. Finally, to confirm the descriptions, two randomly selected participants read the definitions, and it was decided whether these analyses properly represented the personal experiences. Common themes were created by bringing similar expressions together for each category. A total of three categories and seven themes emerged during the study (Table 2). The themes were obtained from the explanations, and the data analysis reflected the common perceptions of the patients regarding nursing care.

#### Ethical Considerations

Written and verbal consent were obtained from the patients who volunteered to participate in the study. This study was approved by the Medical and Health Sciences Research Council of the Başkent University. Ethical approval date and number is 12.12.2017, KA 17/329.

#### Results

Fifteen patients included in the study. Eight were male and seven were female, with a mean age of 73 years. Most of the patients (79.0%) were elementary school graduates, and their mean duration of hospital stay was 9 days. The mean age of nurses caring for the patients was  $26.4 \pm 2.37$  year.

### Category 1: Nursing Care Perceptions of the Older Individuals Undergoing Surgery

#### Theme 1: Nursing care involve spiritual values

The patients thought that nursing is sacred because it is a profession that provides care to those who need help. The patients reported that it is not just a profession to help people who need help and cannot take care of themselves, it is voluntary and thus this profession is sacred. It was stated by 12 patients that nursing care includes spiritual values.

*"Nursing is to deal with the patient, to deal with her fever, medicine, food and drink, to make his best, and to organize everything for the patient. Because the person is sick and cannot meet his needs. Good nursing care is to deal with all kinds of patient needs and special care. This attention and help make her caring task a sacred task."* (77-year-old female patient)

#### Theme 2: Nursing care means "helping"

The patients stated that when they could not perform their daily life activities independently, nurses helped them and complemented them by offering such care for them, sometimes even more so than their family members. The patients stated that getting help from nurses who were quite younger than them was effective in seeing nurses as their children.

*"To do everything, to also clean the buttocks of the patient, to also feed the patient, to also reassure, to also caress the patient's hair, to also wipe the patient's sweat, to help the patient. Sometimes I can get help from them, which I cannot get from my son and my daughter."* (74-year-old female patient)

*"Nursing care is the nurse's helping the patient to meet the needs of the patient. The essence of care is to help, because humans cannot fulfill their needs when they are sick, and they need help."* (77-year-old female patient)

### Category 2: Perceptions of the Older Individuals Undergoing Surgery About The Roles of Nurses in Nursing Care

The patients defined the role of the nurse as giving care and educating patients. They also stated that nurses had responsibilities, such as advocacy and protection of their rights. The patients expected nurses to be both theoretically and practically equipped.

#### Theme 1: Fulfilling the needs of the patients

Most patients (14/15 patients) stated that the most important aspect of nursing care is the identification and fulfillment of patients' needs. The patients expressed that their needs were related to treatment and care, which were the responsibility of the nurse to provide.

*"Nursing care is to meet all the needs of the patients. All the needs of a person in his life, from food to drink to the need for a toilet"* (77 years old, female patient)

*"The nurse's job is the hand and face care, medical treatment, foot care, giving injections well, and not hurting the patient while giving injections. The nurse's job is to do all the care of the patient, and not to speak fast. It is to assist the patient by holding his or her arm and walk, to arrange and administer the whole care organization, and to manage the care."* (69-year-old male patient)

In the current study, the patients also stated that nurses should have competencies to fulfill the needs of the patients. They pointed out that for good nursing care, the nurse must be knowledgeable and skillful, have organizational skills, have a good education, and be experienced in the profession. These competencies are indispensable for nurses to fulfill their roles effectively in care interventions to be applied to the patient and informing the patients. A total of 10 patients pointed out that the nursing profession had improved.

*"Nursing care is a broad concept. Nursing care involves nurses being educated and knowledgeable. It does not just mean to administer medicine and leave. They have postures, presentations, conversations, courtesies, knowledge. They inform patients, and they have good manners."* (67-year-old male patient)

#### Theme 2: Informing patients

Most patients (9/15 patients) reported that nurses should inform the patient about important topics and have enough knowledge to do that. The patients stated that the information offered by nurses improved their confidence in nurses and relieved the patient.

*"It is very important for the nurse to provide information to his or her patient during nursing care. I have to trust her. She should inform me in advance about what will be done to me: What will be done that day, which test and procedure will be done, what medication will be started? For that, she must also be knowledgeable herself. She should know about her patient."* (71-year-old female patient)

#### Theme 3: Protecting and advocating patients' rights

According to the patients, nurses role in nursing care is protect and advocate patients' right. A total of 10 patients stated that nurses should make decisions that benefit the patient and help the patient feel confident by protecting the patient. The patients stated that nurses should be together with the patient in the decision-making process and that the patient should protect from the applications that might harm the patient.

*"Nursing care is about protecting the patient, and this is the responsibility of the nurse. The patient is entrusted to the nurse. The nurse must*

keep her patient under observation, and monitor him or her well.” (74-year-old female patient)

“I think that nurses should undertake great responsibilities in the ministry of health. They should be everywhere. They make the best decisions for the benefit of the patient. They should help to make the right decisions for the patients, be able to think about the well-being of patients, protect the patient, and advocate the patient in those duties. This can be accomplished in the best possible way by nurses.” (66-year-old male patient)

### Category 3: Perceptions of Older Individuals Undergoing Surgery About Attitudes of Nurses While Offering Nursing Care

The patients stated that nurses had both positive and negative attitudes and behaviors while providing care. A total of 14 patients described positive attitudes and behaviors, whereas six pointed out negative attitudes and behaviors.

#### Theme 1: Positive attitudes and behaviors

*Theme 1 a: To communicate well and to be cheerful and kind*

The patients emphasized that nurses should communicate well and be cheerful, kind, and respectful. They stated that good communication encouraged the patient and relieved him or her psychologically. The patients also emphasized that positive attitudes and behaviors were not related to the age difference. They emphasized that these behaviors related to their personality and education levels.

“When the nurse is cheerful, you feel happy. You feel valuable. Being cheerful is so important that a cheerful nurse is everything even for a patient who is on his or her deathbed. Then, for that patient, dying is not important anymore, respect and love are.” (69-year-old male patient)

“She does not even warn me. They are so polite. She behaves gently when she needs to give my medicine at night when I am asleep. She gives my injections. She even puts the medicine, which I need to take, to my mouth. Approach, communication, smiling face. May God bless those who have raised them, who have taught them, and who serve. I have my daughter for my needs here, but she is not even needed.” (80-year-old female patient)

#### Theme 2: Negative attitudes and behaviors

The patients listed the negative attitudes and behaviors of nurses as follows: not giving enough time to the patients, delaying treatment, paying more attention to documents, not being polite, and not giving enough information. The patients also emphasized that negative attitudes and behaviors were not related to the age difference.

“Nursing is about helping patients. It is not to get lost in paperwork by being choked in bureaucracy. It is not to prefer communication with patients to bureaucracy.” (69-year-old male patient)

“There have been applications that I have never been satisfied with. There were nurses who searched for a vascular access and could not find it. My arm swelled and did not get better for a long time. One must first learn and then work. One should not learn by trying something on the patient. The patient should not feel like he’s a burden on her back. There have been nurses who left very good traces in my life, the nurses who have shown love and compassion that I will not forget until I die. But, there have been those that I cannot forget who left bad traces and behaved tactlessly; I do not forget them, either. Nurses should be kind, affectionate and cheerful.” (74-year-old female patient)

## Discussion

It is stated in the literature that the perceptions of nursing care in the patients are affected by characteristics such as age, gender, educational status, and income level.<sup>10,13,15</sup> For this reason, it is important to understand the older individuals’ perceptions of care provided by nurses who are at a much younger age than the patients themselves. In our study, the patients regarded nursing as a profession involving spiritual values. There are many quantitative studies on the perception of nursing care in the literature.<sup>10,11,16</sup> However, no studies have been found determining older individuals’ perceptions of nursing care. While many factors affect the patients’ perception of nursing care in studies in the literature, no studies have been found showing that care is an element that involves spiritual values. The fact that the patients regarded care as an element of spiritual values is thought to be caused by cultural and religious factors. In Anatolian culture and Muslims, spiritual values are the prime component of their health belief model and, as such, spiritual needs may take precedence over biopsychosocial needs.<sup>19</sup>

The patients’ satisfaction with nursing care has become established as the most important predictor of overall satisfaction with the service provided in the hospital.<sup>20–22</sup> Awareness of the needs of older individuals undergoing surgery and satisfying these needs are important factors that improve the quality of health care and satisfaction of the patients. It is among the primary roles of nurses to assess the patients’ personal needs and satisfy these needs. One study stated that nurses have deep relationships with the patients and their relatives. It has been emphasized that nurses should have the skills and responsibilities of providing compassion, empathy, and comfort; maintaining and coordinating care; assessing patients; monitoring complications; and educating patients.<sup>23</sup> In our study, the perceptions of older individuals regarding the roles of nurses in care include “fulfilling the needs of patients.” In one study, it was stated that in the geriatric care centers, if there are not enough nurses or insufficient nurses skills, the basic necessities of the patients such as feeding or going to the toilet cannot be met. This finding from the literature confirms why the older individuals in our study attached importance to nurses in terms of fulfillment of their basic needs.<sup>24</sup> In a study conducted by Ahmad and Alasad,<sup>13</sup> it was found that the patients thought that nurses had a satisfactory level of awareness of patient needs. In the study by Şiçe,<sup>25</sup> the patients thought that nurses adequately met their needs and desires. In the current study, the patients also stated that nurses should be competent when fulfilling their needs of care. They pointed out that for good nursing care, the nurse must be knowledgeable and skillful, have organizational skills, have a good education, and be experienced in the profession. In a study conducted by Kol et al.<sup>11</sup> it was determined that the nursing satisfaction of the patients was the highest when nurses were skilled. Gürdoğan, et al.<sup>26</sup> stated that the nursing satisfaction of patients affects their perceptions of nursing care and that offering customized care to each patient improves the patient satisfaction. According to Calman’s study,<sup>27</sup> the patients described the foundation of competent nursing practice as technical care and nursing knowledge. They also stated that technical skills and nursing knowledge is an important component for protecting the patients. In line with these results, it can be thought that the reason why the patients want the nurses to be competent is their desire to trust.

In our study, most of the patients emphasized the importance of nurses exhibiting positive attitudes and behaviors during care. The patients listed positive attitudes and behaviors as exhibiting clear and intelligible communication; taking care of the patients; and being cheerful, affectionate, respectful, and kind. One study stated that depression

has become more common in older individuals due to a lack of social support, presence of chronic illnesses, and insufficiency of care and that depression can be reduced by improving appropriate medical standards and care standards and by improving effective communication.<sup>28</sup> In a study conducted by Girmay et al.,<sup>10</sup> it was found that patients had expectations from nurses to be sensitive, cheerful and behave gently and kindly. The results of this study are similar to the results of our study. Ogunlade et al.<sup>29</sup> evaluated the perceptions of nursing care in patients in their study and found that the patients thought that the nurses communicated in a kindly and friendly manner.

In studies<sup>12,30</sup> similar to our study, it has been reported that informing patients is one of the factors affecting the perceptions of nursing care in patients. Similarly, in the study by Ahmad and Alasad,<sup>13</sup> satisfaction with the information given to patients was among the determinants of the quality of nursing care. Fındık and Yeşilyurt<sup>30</sup> stated that the perceptions of the quality of postoperative nursing care in surgical patients who stated that they were informed by nurses showed a statistically significant increase. Advanced nursing practices improve effective communication between nurses and patients. Effective communication is an important aspect of patient care, which improves nurse-patient relationship and has a profound effect on the patient's perceptions of health care quality and treatment outcomes.<sup>31</sup>

The mean age of nurses caring for the patients was 26.4 ± 2.37 years and the mean age of patients is 73 years. In this study, nurses were much younger than the patients. The age difference between the patients and the nurses is not negatively interpreted for the older individuals who had an operation; on the contrary, they reported that this situation caused the nurse to see her as their child. Turkish society has Anatolian culture and the majority of the society is Muslim. In Muslim community, family and community values, social solidarity, trust, sharing, sacrifice, and emotional attachment to other individuals are important. We think that this view of the patients is due to cultural factors. The patients also emphasized that negative and positive attitudes and behaviors were not related to the age difference; these behaviors related to their personality and education levels.

To improve the quality of nursing care, it is important to understand how patients' perceptions influence nursing care. In this study, which was conducted to determine the perceptions of nursing care in older surgical patients, seven themes were identified in three categories. It was pointed out by the patients that nursing care includes spiritual values. The patients' perceptions regarding the roles of nurses in care included fulfilling the needs of the patients, informing the patient, and protecting and advocating the patients' rights. It was determined that both positive and negative attitudes of nurses during care also affect the patients' perceptions. There are studies in the literature that have examined the perceptions of nursing care by quantitative methods. Qualitative studies are needed in this regard to deeply examine patients' perceptions, expectations, and experiences.

The quality of nursing services and satisfaction of patients will be improved when nurses offer care in accordance with patient needs. The results of this study can increase nurses' awareness of the needs and expectations of older individuals. By organizing in-service training for nurses working with older individuals, the quality of the care they provide can be increased. Using the data obtained from the study will contribute to the development of protocols, care maps and researches on nursing care.

**Ethics Committee Approval:** Ethics committee approval was received for this study from the Medical and Health Sciences Research Council of the Başkent University (KA 17/329).

**Informed Consent:** Written informed consents were obtained from the patients who volunteered to participate in this study.

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