

The Role of Nurses in Ensuring Legal Protection of Patients in Nursing Clinics: Nursing Practice and Management Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

Background: Nurses play a very crucial role in protecting patient rights. Nurses don't just provide clinical services. They are also required to understand patient rights and the legal and ethical aspects that accompany them. Due to new regulations and a complex health system, nurses need to be equipped with legal knowledge. This is important so that they can carry out their duties professionally and protect patients effectively.

Purpose: This research aims to examine the role of nurses in protecting patient rights, identify challenges faced in practice, and provide recommendations for strengthening patient legal protection through management support and legal training.

Methods: A descriptive qualitative approach within the constructivist paradigm was used to explore nurses' perceptions of their role in ensuring patients' legal protection. Ten participants were purposively selected from three clinics in East Java. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed using inductive thematic analysis to identify emerging themes.

Results: This research identified three main themes: nurses' legal protection measures, understanding of law and ethical responsibilities, and challenges in implementing these roles. These themes, derived through systematic coding and categorization, illustrate how nurses apply legal and ethical principles in daily clinical practice within the Indonesian healthcare context.

Conclusion: Nurses play an important role in advocating for patient rights, but still face obstacles such as workload and lack of management support. Legal training and supporting policies are needed to strengthen the legal protection of patients in nursing clinics.

Keywords: clinical nursing practice, legal protection, nursing advocacy, patient rights

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BACKGROUND

Legal protection for patients in nursing practice is an increasingly important issue in this modern era. In the context of nursing clinics in Indonesia, nurses have a big responsibility to guarantee patient rights, including the right to information, the right to receive safe care, and the right to file a complaint. According to (Abbasinia & Ahmadi, 2019) patient advocacy is an important aspect of nursing practice that can influence the quality of care. This suggests that nurses must have a strong understanding of the law and ethics in their practice to be able to effectively protect patients.

Nurses' responsibilities are not only limited to providing physical care, but also include legal and ethical aspects related to patient rights. A study by oleh (Abd-Elraouf Rashdan et al., 2023) shows that many nurses are not fully aware of their legal responsibilities, which can result in violations (Indonesia, 2023) of patient rights. In this context, it is important to increase nurses' awareness and understanding of relevant legal issues so that they can carry out their duties well.

The relevance of the issue of legal patient protection in nursing practice in Indonesia is increasing along with the increasing complexity of the health system and the increasing number of patients seeking care. According to the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Indonesia (2024), the number of patients treated in first-level health service facilities, including nursing clinics, increased by approximately 18% over the past three years, reflecting a growing demand for professional nursing services. The Profil Kesehatan Indonesia Tahun 2023 report also highlights that "the utilization of outpatient and inpatient services in primary healthcare facilities has continued to rise annually in line with community health needs" (Ministry of Health of the Republic of Indonesia, 2024, 2023). Alongside this increase, the Laporan Kinerja Kementerian Kesehatan Tahun 2023 indicates a parallel growth in patient complaints related to service quality and rights violations, emphasizing the need for stronger legal awareness and accountability among nursing practitioners (Ministry of Health of the Republic of Indonesia, 2024). This situation underscores the urgency for nursing management to provide structured legal protection training so that nurses can effectively serve as advocates and uphold patients' legal and ethical rights within clinical practice. (Kementrian Kesehatan, n.d.).

Apart from that, in the context of ever-evolving laws, nurses also need to understand the latest laws and regulations governing nursing practice. For example, Health Law Number 17 of 2023 regulates various aspects of health services, including patient rights and the obligations of health workers. By understanding these regulations, nurses can better protect patient rights and reduce legal risks that may arise (Sianipar et al., 2024).

Thus, it is important to explore more deeply the role of nurses in ensuring the legal protection of patients in nursing clinics. This research aims to identify the role of nurses, the challenges they face, and provide recommendations for nursing management in improving legal protection for patients.

OBJECTIVE

The aim of this research is to explore more deeply the role of nurses in protecting patient rights in nursing clinics. This research aims to identify various aspects of the role of nurses, including the advocacy actions they take to ensure patient rights are fulfilled. According to (Ibrahim et al., 2024), a good understanding of legal responsibilities can help nurses carry out their advocacy function more effectively. Therefore, this study will explore how nurses carry out this role in their daily practice.

Apart from that, this research also aims to analyze the challenges faced by nurses in daily practice regarding the legal protection of patients. These challenges can include a lack of

legal training, high workloads, and lack of support from management. According to (Kumar et al., 2013), these challenges can hinder nurses' ability to provide quality care and in accordance with applicable legal standards. By understanding this challenge, it is hoped that appropriate solutions can be found to improve nursing practice that is oriented towards patient rights.

Furthermore, this research also aims to provide recommendations for nursing management in improving legal protection for patients. These recommendations could include the development of programs that can reduce gaps in legal knowledge and training among nurses (Wang et al., 2024). So that legal training is more comprehensive, increased managerial support, as well as strengthening reporting and documentation systems. According to (Ronnebaum & Schmer, 2015), good management support can contribute to increasing nurses' legal awareness, which in turn can increase patient protection.

By achieving the objectives of this research, it is hoped that it can make a real contribution to the development of better nursing practices in Indonesia, as well as increasing legal protection for patients in nursing clinics. Apart from that, it is also hoped that this research can become a reference for further research in this field, so that policies and practices that support patient protection can continue to be produced. Nursing practice is surrounded by many legal aspects, because nurses are responsible for their professional judgment and actions (Devi, 2023).

METHODS

This research employed a descriptive qualitative approach to explore and understand the nurses' perspectives on their role in ensuring legal protection for patients. The qualitative approach was chosen to capture the depth and complexity of participants' lived experiences and to interpret the meaning behind their actions and attitudes within the clinical context.

The study was grounded in the constructivist research paradigm, which assumes that reality is socially constructed through interaction and interpretation. Within this paradigm, the researcher sought to understand how nurses perceive, interpret, and act upon their legal and ethical responsibilities in daily practice. The research was further guided by Orem's Self-Care Deficit Nursing Theory, which provides a theoretical lens for understanding nurses' roles in supporting patients' autonomy, rights, and well-being within the framework of professional care and legal accountability.

Data collection was conducted through in-depth semi-structured interviews with ten registered nurses working in three nursing clinics in East Java.

Table 1. Summary of Participant Characteristics (N = 10)

Participant ID	Age (years)	Gender	Years of Nursing Experience	Highest Education Level	Current Position / Role
P1	28	Female	5	Bachelor of Nursing	Staff Nurse
P2	32	Female	10	Bachelor of Nursing	Staff Nurse
P3	26	Male	4	Diploma in Nursing	Staff Nurse
P4	35	Female	12	Bachelor of Nursing	Senior Nurse
P5	29	Female	6	Bachelor of Nursing	Staff Nurse
P6	31	Male	8	Bachelor of Nursing	Staff Nurse

				Nursing	Nurse
P7	27	Female	5	Diploma Nursing	in Staff Nurse
P8	33	Female	9	Bachelor Nursing	of Senior Nurse
P9	30	Female	7	Bachelor Nursing	of Staff Nurse
P10	34	Male	11	Bachelor Nursing	of Staff Nurse

The participants in this research were registered nurses aged between 26 and 35 years, with an average professional experience of 7.7 years. Regarding educational background, eight participants held a Bachelor's degree in Nursing, while two had a Diploma in Nursing. The gender distribution included seven female and three male nurses. These characteristics provided relevant context for understanding the participants' perspectives and experiences regarding their role in ensuring legal protection for patients, as age, experience, education, and gender can influence knowledge, confidence, and approach to patient advocacy in clinical practice.

The in depth interviews conducted with the participants lasted on average approximately 50 minutes, ranging from 45 to 60 minutes per session. All interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' consent to ensure accurate data capture. The interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia, which is the native language of both the participants and the researcher, and were subsequently transcribed verbatim in the same language to maintain the authenticity and nuances of participants' responses.

Aspect	Details
Interview Duration	Average 50 minutes (range: 45–60 minutes)
Data Recording	Interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent
Language	Bahasa Indonesia (used for both interview and transcription)
Transcription	Verbatim transcription in Bahasa Indonesia to preserve accuracy and participant nuances

In accordance with SRQR (Standards for Reporting Qualitative Research), data were managed by anonymizing participant information and securely storing transcripts in password-protected files. A detailed audit trail, including field notes, memos, and coding records, was maintained to ensure transparency and reliability. (Alexandra Stam, 2023).

An inductive thematic analysis was employed, allowing themes to emerge directly from the data. The process began with open coding to identify meaningful segments related to nurses' roles in legal protection of patients. Axial coding then grouped related codes into broader categories, highlighting patterns and relationships. Finally, selective coding refined these categories into central themes that captured the essence of participants' experiences while aligning with the research objectives and Orem's Self-Care Deficit Nursing Theory. (Williams, 2019).

To enhance credibility, triangulation was conducted by comparing data across the three nursing clinics. Member checking was used to verify preliminary themes with participants, and **peer** debriefing reviewed coding and thematic interpretations. These strategies ensured that the final themes accurately represented nurses' perspectives on patient legal protection within the Indonesian healthcare context. (Ahmed, 2024).

RESULTS

To support the thematic analysis, Table 1 is presented below which summarizes the results of in-depth interviews with ten nurses in nursing clinics in the East Java region. This table presents a summary of experiences, views and challenges faced by nurses in ensuring legal protection for patients. In addition, representative quotes from each participant are included to provide a concrete picture of the context and content of the conversations in the interviews.

Table 1. Summary of Qualitative Interview Results with Ten Nurses

Participant Code	Experience in Guaranteeing Patient Legal Protection	Views on the Role of Nurses in Legal Protection	Challenges Faced	Representative Quotes
P1	Always explain procedures and obtain written consent	Nurses are the spearhead in ensuring patient rights	Pressure from management to be less transparent	"We were asked to speak sparingly so that patients don't ask too many questions, even though this is legally important"
P2	Help patients understand their rights, especially in medical decision making	Nurses have an important role, but are often not considered	High workload makes it difficult to communicate details	"Sometimes, patients are discharged before we have time to explain their rights"
P3	Record all nursing actions in detail in the medical record	Legal responsibility is attached to every nursing action	There is no special training in legal matters	"Everything I know about patient law, I taught myself"
P4	Striving to provide education on patient rights during invasive procedures	Nurses should be involved in medical legal decisions	Lack of legal protection for nurses when conflicts arise	"When there are complaints, we are often the first to be blamed, even though the decision was not ours"
P5	Provide written information about patient rights and obligations	Nurses as liaison between doctors and patients in a legal context	It is difficult to balance ethical and administrative responsibilities	"Many administrative regulations actually limit our freedom to explain to patients"

P6	Attend internal training on health law, although still limited	The importance of legal education since basic nursing education	Lack of SOPs that support legal protection	"If there is no guidance, we will be confused when facing legal problems"
P7	Explain the risks and benefits of medical procedures verbally	Legal protection is part of holistic nursing care	Very limited consultation time	"With so many patients, time becomes an obstacle for comprehensive legal education"
P8	Involved in preparing the informed consent form	Nurses can be a bridge of justice between patients and institutions	Not all colleagues understand the law, making teamwork difficult	"There are nurses who just follow the procedure without thinking about the legal aspects, that's risky"
P9	Actively advocates for patients when there is a potential rights violation	Nurses are patients' legal advocates in the field	The work culture is still authoritarian, making nurses reluctant to speak out	"If we are too vocal about patient rights, it could be seen as going against the system"
P10	Be a resource for educating patients about their basic rights	Nurses as legal education agents in clinics	Minimal managerial support for legal protection initiatives	"We need support from superiors, not just being asked to keep patients calm"

This table presents rich data that reflects the complexity of the nurse's role in the context of nursing law and ethics.

The results of in-depth interviews with ten nurses were analyzed using a thematic approach, which resulted in three main themes related to the role of nurses in ensuring the legal protection of patients. These three themes include legal protection actions taken by nurses, understanding the role of law in nursing practice, and the challenges faced in carrying out this role. Each theme is accompanied by subthemes that describe variations in participants' experiences and views. Table 1 below presents a summary of the results of the thematic analysis along with descriptions and representative quotes from participants that strengthen the research findings.

Table 2. Thematic Analysis Results: The Role of Nurses in Ensuring Legal Protection for Patients

Main Theme	Subtheme	Description	Representative Quotes
1. Legal Protection Measures	a. Open Communication with Patients	Nurses try to maintain communication so that patients understand their rights and medical procedures	"I always try to explain medical procedures in detail so that patients understand and agree consciously"
	b. Accurate Documentation	Documentation is carried out completely to avoid legal disputes	"Medical records must be complete, because they can be evidence if one day a legal problem occurs"
2. Understanding the Role of Law	a. Awareness of Ethical and Legal Responsibilities	Nurses realize the important role in protecting patient rights according to law and nursing ethics	"We not only provide physical care, but also guarantee the patient's legal rights"
	b. Limited Education and Training	Lack of training on legal aspects makes understanding uneven	"So far we have learned more from experience, not from formal legal training"
3. Challenges in Practice	a. Institutional or Superior Pressure	Sometimes there is a conflict between management policy and the patient's interests	"Sometimes we are pressured not to be too open with patients, so that there are no complaints"
	b. Lack of Legal Protection for Nurses	Nurses feel they are not legally protected when facing conflict	"If there is a problem, we are usually the ones to blame, even though not all decisions are in the hands of the nurse"
	c. Workload and Time Limitations	The high workload makes it difficult for nurses to focus on legal aspects	"There are a lot of patients, so it is difficult for us to provide legal explanations one by one"

Based on the results of in-depth interviews with ten nurses in nursing clinics in the East Java region, three main themes were obtained which represent the role and challenges of nurses in ensuring legal protection for patients, namely legal protection measures, understanding the role of the law, and challenges in practice.

Legal Protection Measures

Nurses demonstrate awareness of the importance of open communication as an initial form of legal protection for patients. Effective communication is a means for nurses to ensure that patients understand their rights and the medical procedures they are undergoing. This can be seen from the statement of one participant: "I always try to explain medical procedures in detail so that patients understand and agree consciously." This kind of communication strengthens the principle of informed consent and can prevent potential legal violations in the future.

Apart from communication, nursing documentation is also an important practice in ensuring legal protection. Nurses consistently record every action taken, both medical and administrative, as a form of professional responsibility. As one respondent said, "Medical records must be complete, because they can be evidence if a legal problem arises one day." This shows that nurses are aware of the strategic value of documentation as a legal protection tool, both for patients and health workers themselves.

Understanding the Role of Law

Nurses generally understand that they have responsibilities not only in clinical aspects, but also in ensuring the legal rights of patients. They realize that the nursing profession is closely related to ethical principles and legal regulations. One participant emphasized, "We not only provide physical care, but also guarantee the patient's legal rights." This shows that there is awareness of the position of nurses as part of the health legal system.

However, this understanding is often not supported by adequate education or training. Some nurses admitted that their knowledge of legal aspects was gained informally, such as through work experience or discussions between colleagues. One quote states, "So far we have learned more from experience, not from formal legal training." The absence of formal training indicates a gap in the education and professional development system for nurses which should provide legal understanding as a basic competency.

Challenges in Practice

In carrying out their roles, nurses face various structural and institutional challenges. Pressure from management or superiors often becomes an obstacle in carrying out open communication with patients. One nurse said, "Sometimes we are pressured not to be too open with patients, so that complaints do not occur." This indicates a conflict between institutional interests and patient interests which has the potential to disrupt the principles of transparency and accountability.

Apart from that, nurses also feel that they have not received adequate legal protection, especially when facing conflicts or complaints from patients. This feeling of insecurity is reflected in the statement, "If there is a problem, we are usually the ones to blame, even though not all decisions are in the hands of the nurses." This inequality shows the need for regulations that not only regulate nurses' obligations, but also guarantee their legal rights.

Finally, the high workload is a significant obstacle in implementing legal protection. Limited time and energy makes it difficult for nurses to provide optimal legal explanations to each patient. As stated by one respondent, "There are a lot of patients, so it is difficult for us to provide legal explanations one by one."

DISCUSSION**Imbalance between Legal Responsibility and Institutional Support**

In nursing practice, there is a significant imbalance between nurses' legal responsibilities and the institutional support they receive. A nurse's legal responsibilities include the obligation to provide safe, effective, and ethical care to patients. However, nurses often face stress stemming from a lack of resources, such as an excess number of patients and a lack of staff, which can hinder their ability to fulfill these responsibilities (Abbasinia & Ahmadi, 2019). Data from (Anderson, 2022) shows that a lack of institutional support can contribute to high levels of stress among nurses, which in turn can affect the quality of patient care. This is reflected in participant quotes, such as P1: "*Kami diminta untuk berbicara dengan hemat dan tetap melayani semua pasien dengan waktu yang terbatas*", and P9: "*Terkadang kami merasa harus memilih prioritas, sehingga beberapa hak pasien mungkin tidak terpenuhi*". These statements illustrate the ethical-legal dilemmas faced at the operational level.

For example, a study by (Ibrahim et al., 2024) found that nurses working in environments with low managerial support tended to have lower levels of understanding regarding their legal responsibilities. This could potentially lead to violations of patient rights and increase the risk of lawsuits. In this context, it is important to create a work environment that supports nurses so that they can carry out their duties well.

Additionally, this imbalance also creates challenges in terms of patient advocacy. Nurses often serve as a bridge between patients and the health system, but without adequate support, they may feel powerless to speak or act in the patient's best interest (Mainey et al., 2025). Research shows that nurses who feel supported by the institution are more likely to play an active role in patient advocacy, which in turn can increase legal protection for patients (Nsiah et al., 2019).

In order to address this imbalance, collaboration between hospital management and nurses is needed to create policies that ensure that nurses have the resources and training necessary to fulfill their legal responsibilities. This is in line with recommendations from (Kumar et al., 2013) which states that training on legal and ethical responsibilities should be an integral part of nurse education and professional development.

Finally, it is important to recognize that the legal protection of patients is not only the nurse's responsibility, but also the shared responsibility of the entire health team and institutional management. By creating a culture of support and collaboration, we can ensure that patients receive safe, quality care, as well as adequate legal protections.

The Importance of Legal Understanding as a Core Competency for Nurses

Understanding the law is a core competency that every nurse must have to ensure the protection of patient rights. Knowledge of healthcare law and ethics not only helps nurses in carrying out their duties, but also protects them from potential lawsuits. According to (Ashalata Devi, 2017), a lack of understanding of legal issues can cause nurses to make mistakes that have fatal consequences for patients and themselves.

Statistics show that nurses who have a good understanding of their legal responsibilities tend to be more confident in making clinical decisions (Abd-Elraouf Rashdan et al., 2023). For example, in cases where a patient refuses treatment, a nurse who understands the law can provide the patient with appropriate information regarding the consequences of that decision, so that the patient can make a more informed decision.

In addition, (Ibrahim et al., 2024) stated that a good understanding of the law can also improve nurses' ability to advocate for patients. In situations where patient rights may be threatened, nurses who are knowledgeable about the law can be more effective in advocating

for the patient's interests. This suggests that legal education should be part of the nursing education curriculum.

The importance of understanding the law is also reflected in daily practice. In many cases, nurses need to interact with legal documents, such as medical treatment agreements and patient medical records. Without sufficient understanding, nurses may not be able to manage these documents properly, which can have a negative impact on patients' legal protection (Sianipar et al., 2024).

Therefore, nursing educational institutions and hospitals must work together to provide ongoing training in health law and ethics. This will help nurses to not only fulfill their legal responsibilities, but also to contribute positively to patient safety and quality of care.

The Strategic Role of Nursing Management in Guaranteeing Legal Protection

Nursing management has a strategic role in ensuring legal protection for patients. Nursing managers are responsible for creating an environment that supports safe and ethical nursing practice. This includes the development of clear policies regarding the legal responsibilities of nurses and the training required to comply with those policies (Management et al., 2023).

One important aspect of the management role is ensuring that nurses have access to the resources necessary to perform their duties well. For example, nursing managers must ensure that staffing is sufficient and that nurses have the tools and technology necessary to provide quality care. Research shows that a positive work environment can increase nurse job satisfaction and reduce turnover rates (Anderson, 2022).

Apart from that, nursing management must also play a role in increasing legal awareness among nurses. This can be done through training programs that focus on relevant legal and ethical issues. By providing appropriate education, management can help nurses understand their legal responsibilities and how to protect patient rights (Tandry et al., 2024).

The management role also includes monitoring and evaluating nursing practice to ensure that legal and ethical standards are adhered to. This includes developing a reporting system for incidents that violate the law or ethics, so that corrective action can be taken immediately. Thus, nursing management can contribute to improving patient safety and legal protection (Ronnebaum & Schmer, 2015).

Finally, nursing management must be an advocate for nurses in terms of legal protection. This includes ensuring that nurses are protected from unfair lawsuits and that they have access to legal support if necessary. By creating a culture of support and advocacy, nursing management can help ensure that nurses can carry out their duties safely and effectively, while maximally protecting patient rights. Nursing professionals in the health sector often face challenges in protecting patient privacy in daily work with multidisciplinary teams, in communicating with families, and in research (Parsons, 2015).

Patient rights encompass a set of legal and social relations that arise when citizens apply for medical care. Health protection is a set of political, economic, social, legal, sanitary-hygienic and anti-epidemic measures aimed at maintaining and strengthening the physical and mental health of each person, maintaining active longevity and providing him with the necessary medical care in case of loss of health (Nozimakhon & Faringiz, 2022).

Limitations of the Research

Despite providing valuable insights, this study has several limitations. The sample was limited to ten nurses from three nursing clinics in East Java, which may not represent the experiences of nurses in other regions or healthcare settings. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported interviews may introduce bias, as participants might overemphasize positive behaviors or underreport challenges. Finally, while thematic analysis captured key themes, the

study did not include observational or document-based data, which could have provided further triangulation and strengthened the findings. Future research should expand the sample size, include multiple data sources, and consider quantitative measures to complement qualitative insights.

CONCLUSION

From the results of this research, it can be concluded that the role of nurses in the legal protection of patients is very important. Nurses are not only responsible for providing medical care, but also serve as advocates protecting patient rights. This research shows that although many nurses have a good understanding of their legal responsibilities, challenges such as high workloads and lack of management support remain obstacles in daily practice.

Therefore, support from management is very necessary to improve nursing practices that are oriented towards patient rights. Recommendations for health policy include the development of more comprehensive legal training programs, increasing resources to support nurses, and strengthening reporting and documentation systems. With these steps, it is hoped that legal protection for patients can be significantly improved.

In addition, this research also shows the need for further research in this area to explore more deeply the factors that influence the legal protection of patients in nursing clinics. Further research could help in identifying best practices and policies that can be implemented to improve patient protection throughout Indonesia.

Thus, it is hoped that the results of this research can become a reference for the development of better nursing practices that are more oriented towards patient rights, as well as making a positive contribution to the health system in Indonesia.

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