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## REVIEW

# Demonstration of caring by males in clinical practice: A literature review

Wen Zhang<sup>a</sup>, Yi-Lan Liu<sup>b,\*</sup><sup>a</sup> Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Union Hospital, Tongji Medical College, Huazhong University of Science and Technology, Wuhan, China<sup>b</sup> The Union Hospital, Tongji Medical College, Huazhong University of Science and Technology, Wuhan, China

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## ABSTRACT

Gender stereotyping on the role of male nurses in the use of intimate care, especially the application of touch, was explored. The barriers for men to provide care were determined. Strategies adopted by male nurses to overcome these barriers were discussed. The review of literature showed that role stereotyping is still prevalent within nursing. Public media should recognize the diversity of caring and apply positive materials to shape a new image of nursing. The nursing faculty should develop an atmosphere of acceptance and empower male nursing students in the nursing school and clinic. Male nurses themselves should deeply believe that nursing is a profession suitable for both genders.

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## 1. Introduction

Caring, nursing, and female gender role are strongly synonymous. Women dominate professions involving care. A total of 44,938 males nurses have been registered in China in 2012, accounting for approximately 1.8% of all registered nurses (RNs) [1]. This finding is not unique to China. These statistics support the prevailing notion that male gender role and caring are “mutually exclusive.” Despite this association, the number of men engaged in the nursing profession has been increasing worldwide. This phenomenon challenges the stereotype that

men are incapable of providing intimate and sensitive care to women clients [2]. Reports have suggested that the desire to care for others and provide a meaningful contribution to society are the primary reasons why men chose nursing as a career [3]. Nursing has been strongly associated with caring, which is strongly associated with nursing practice. Several studies have attempted to understand and explain the provision of care by male nurses, but the process by which male nurses care for or care about others, especially the provision of intimate care to women clients, is rarely examined. Therefore, this article will summarize briefly the association between male nurses and caring.

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: [luckyzhangwen@qq.com](mailto:luckyzhangwen@qq.com) (W. Zhang), [yilanl2008@sina.com](mailto:yilanl2008@sina.com) (Y.-L. Liu).

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## 2. Caring from the male perspective

### 2.1. Definition of caring

Caring is a complex phenomenon. Centrality nursing has focused on the concept of caring, but the exact definition and measurement of care needs further elucidation. Thus, caring is very difficult to express.

Nursing is a health profession described as an art as well as a science [4]. Watson concluded that caring consists of “knowledge, thought values, philosophy, commitment, and action, with some degree of passion ... that strive to maintain the dignity or integrity of clients” [5]. Nurse caring has been described as an “interactive process that usually occurs during moments of shared vulnerability between nurse and patient” [6]. Leininger [7] also stated that caring is the essence of nursing as a way to improve human health conditions. Caring has been described from five perspectives, namely, as a human trait, interpersonal interaction, moral imperative, therapeutic intervention, and an effect [8]. The principle of caring has been primarily explored from a feminine perspective because the majority of researchers and theorists who have discussed this concept caring are women. Thus, Colby [9] conducted a descriptive naturalistic inquiry with practicing male RNs. The participants were asked to address the enigma of the essence of nursing. The findings implied that gender may be irrelevant in terms of caring. Male and female can equally provide care as competent and effective nurses.

### 2.2. Traditional gender perspectives of caring

Caring has been historically and persistently associated with women and femininity, which is reinforced by the continued low number of men in nursing [10]. Men, with the drive to feed the family, have been traditionally assumed to lack the competency to care for or care about others. This concept was particularly strengthened by feminists, such as Gilligan and Chodorow, who associated caring with womanhood, not to manhood [11]. Male nurses often consider the learning process of caring as awkward, although these men were primarily motivated to enter nursing because of their desire to care for others. A study on male nurses has suggested that the number of nurses who resigned from the profession was approximately four times as frequent as female nurses, especially during the first four years after graduation [12]. This trend may have been caused by the fact that male nurses find it difficult to work in a profession dominated by women [13]. Moreover, social stigma renders the male nurses in a vulnerable situation when providing intimate care to women clients [14].

### 2.3. Differences in expression of caring

Numerous theories have shown that caring is the core value in practical nursing. The essential components and influences of caring have been extensively studied. Nurse caring is considerably affected by ethics, socialization processes, cultural norms, and philosophical beliefs [15]. These variables have been closely associated with gender, which may influence caring perceptions and behavior. Differences in caring by

gender have been reported. Several reports have included experienced male nurses in examining gender differences in nursing care. Paterson et al. [16] conducted a qualitative study to describe the experience of male student nurses as they learned to care as nurses. The respondents viewed caring by male students as more restrained than caring provided by female students. Similarly, Evans [13] investigated the actual experience of male nurses to describe the differences in caring traits between male and female. The results show that male nurses applied more humor into clinical communication to build mutual trust in the nurse–patient relationship. By contrast, women used more touch with male and female clients. Male participants claimed that their caring is as valuable as that of care provided by females, despite the difference in their expression [16]. Watson and Lea [17] conducted a test of the psychometric properties of a tool called the Caring Dimensions Inventory with 1430 respondents, 11% of whom were male. Respondents were asked to choose the actions that represented caring. The results show that men were obviously more likely to associate psychosocial tasks with caring than women. Whether these male nurses were more likely to implement psychosocial tasks at work than females remains ambiguous.

### 2.4. Barriers to providing caring

Caring for and about others have been considered a “naturally female” activity throughout modern history. An increasing number of men have chosen to enter the nursing profession and became more aware of the importance of demonstrating care to others. However, men still face challenges in fully displaying a caregiver role. Williams [18] who conducted in-depth interviews with 49 female marines and 26 nurses (21 male) reported that male nurses continued to attempt to disassociate themselves from females and stigma being in a female-dominated occupation. Therefore, men generally prefer night shifts because this practice makes them more independent in their work with less medical supervision and fewer arguments with families or female colleagues [19]. Moreover, male nurses tend to specialize with higher prestige, technology, or autonomy, such as acute care, psychiatry, and operating room. Male nurses have avoided pediatrics or gynecology. Several males have emphasized that they demonstrate caring with the same depth and value as females, but deliver caring differently. Whether the actions of these men differ from those of women remain unclear. Specific difference in the expression of caring by both genders was rarely explored. All nurses welcome a gender mix in a unit considering the advantages of diversity in perspectives. Otherwise, men are likely to be more confident and able to formulate decisions than females, focusing on instrumental rather than emotional tasks.

## 3. Male nurses and the use of intimate touch

### 3.1. Problematic nature of male nurses' touch

Touch is a key and demonstrative element of nursing. This practice has numerous significant purposes and meanings

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