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APPLICATION OF OREM'S SELF-CARE DEFICIT NURSING THEORY TO OSTOMY EDUCATION: A CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

Natasha Hussain[1], Iram Khadim[2] , Muhammad Umar[3]

[1]Student, Master of Science in Nursing, Diploma in Trauma & Emergency (Dip Card), BSCN, Armed Forces Post Graduate Medical Institute, National University of Medical Sciences (NUMS)

Email: *natasha.hussain1216@gmail.com*

[2]PhD Scholar in Nursing, MScN, Diploma in Trauma & Emergency (Dip Card), Post RN BScN, RM, RN, Principal, Pak College of Nursing Chiniot

Email: *iram.khadim1216@gmail.com*

[3]PhD Scholar in Software Engineering, Lecturer, Department of Software Engineering, National University of Modern Languages (NUML), Islamabad, Faisalabad Campus

Email: *muhammad_umar1222@yahoo.com*

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Abstract

Ostomy surgery requires patients to rapidly acquire complex self-care competencies at a time of significant physical and psychological adjustment. Orem's Self-Care Deficit Nursing Theory (SCDNT) offers a well-established conceptual framework for understanding and addressing this challenge. This paper presents a conceptual analysis of SCDNT as applied to ostomy education, outlining its three core components — self-care theory, self-care deficit theory, and nursing systems theory — and situating structured, nurse-led ostomy education within Orem's supportive-educative nursing system. Drawing on international and Pakistan-specific literature, the analysis argues that supportive-educative interventions, which prioritize patient instruction, demonstration, and reinforcement over direct nurse performance of care, are theoretically well-suited to building self-care agency among ostomates, particularly in low-resource settings where continuous specialist support is unavailable. The paper concludes that SCDNT provides both a coherent theoretical justification and a practical blueprint for designing ostomy education programmes, and recommends its wider use in guiding nursing curricula and clinical protocols.

Keywords: Orem's theory; Self-Care Deficit Nursing Theory; ostomy; self-care agency; supportive-educative system; nursing education.

INTRODUCTION

Adaptation to life with an ostomy requires patients to develop new knowledge, psychomotor skills, and confidence at a time when they are also adjusting to significant physical and emotional change. Theoretical

frameworks are important in guiding how nurses design and deliver the education needed to support this adaptation. Orem's Self-Care Deficit Nursing Theory (SCDNT) is among the most widely applied frameworks in this area, offering a structured way of understanding when and how nursing support should be provided (Orem, 2001). This paper presents a conceptual analysis of SCDNT as it applies specifically to ostomy education, synthesizing theoretical and empirical literature to clarify its relevance to nursing practice.

Overview of Self-Care Deficit Nursing Theory

SCDNT comprises three interrelated theories: the theory of self-care, which describes how individuals maintain their own health and well-being; the theory of self-care deficit, which specifies that nursing is required when an individual's capacity for self-care is outweighed by their therapeutic self-care demand; and the theory of nursing systems, which describes how nurses can meet patients' self-care needs (Orem, 2001; Chen & Ning, 2019). Orem describes three nursing systems reflecting differing degrees of compensation: the wholly compensatory system, in which the nurse assumes full responsibility for the patient's care; the partially compensatory system, in which responsibility is shared between nurse and patient; and the supportive-educative system, in which the nurse's primary role is to facilitate, instruct, and support the patient's own performance of self-care.

The Supportive-Educative System in Ostomy Care

Ostomy care aligns closely with Orem's supportive-educative system. Patients are generally physically capable of performing their own stoma care but lack the specific knowledge, skill, and confidence to do so safely and effectively immediately after surgery. Within this framework, the nurse's role is not to perform care on the patient's behalf but to teach, demonstrate, and reinforce self-care behaviors until the patient can manage independently. This conceptualization is reflected in structured educational interventions that combine interactive teaching, hands-on demonstration, written or multimedia materials, and follow-up support, which international research associates with improved self-efficacy, reduced complications, and better quality of life among ostomates (Ko et al., 2023; Aquichán et al., 2023).

Relevance to Low-Resource Settings

Orem's model is particularly relevant in low-resource settings such as Pakistan, where ostomates often have limited access to specialized ostomy services and face socio-cultural stigma that discourages open discussion of stoma care needs. In such contexts, nurse-led supportive-educative interventions can partially compensate for the absence of dedicated stoma-care services by equipping patients with the skills and confidence needed for independent management (Hussain et al., 2025; Atta & Mohammed, 2022). Emerging evidence also suggests that Orem-based interventions can be extended to telehealth or digital platforms, potentially widening access to supportive-educative care where in-person specialist follow-up is limited (Pate et al., 2022).

Implications for Nursing Practice and Curricula

Framing ostomy education explicitly within SCDNT has practical implications for how nursing education and clinical protocols are designed. Rather than delivering generic, one-time instruction, a supportive-educative approach calls for individualized teaching, opportunities for return demonstration, and structured follow-up aimed at progressively increasing the patient's self-care agency. Nursing curricula that incorporate SCDNT-based ostomy training, alongside simulation-based practice, may better prepare nurses to design and deliver such theory-guided interventions in both well-resourced and resource-limited settings (Zeb et al., 2023; Iwamoto, 2021).

Conclusion

Orem's Self-Care Deficit Nursing Theory provides a coherent and clinically relevant framework for understanding and designing ostomy education. By conceptualizing nursing's role as supportive-educative rather than compensatory, the theory justifies an approach centered on teaching, demonstration, and reinforcement aimed at building patients' self-care agency. This conceptual grounding is particularly valuable in low-resource settings, where structured, theory-guided nurse-led education may be one of the few consistently available forms of support for ostomates. Wider integration of SCDNT into nursing curricula and clinical ostomy-care protocols is recommended.

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