

BEYOND A DECADE OF SERVICE: EXPLORING THE EXPERIENCES OF SENIOR NURSES IN EMERGENCY CARE SETTING

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Abstract

Senior Nurses in the Emergency Department are experienced, highly competent registered nurses who contribute significantly to the provision of quality acute care. In high-pressure emergency settings, these professionals perform direct patient care and give clinical leadership and crucial decision-making assistance. Despite their importance, limited research exists on their experiences, particularly in local contexts such as Davao del Norte, Philippines. This study aimed to explore the experiences of senior nurses working in emergency rooms across various institutions, specifically public hospitals of Davao del Norte. A descriptive qualitative design was employed, using a purposive sampling method to select eight senior nurses with extensive experience in emergency care. Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews, which were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and analyzed thematically using Colaizzi's method. Significant statements were extracted and meanings formulated to address the study's objectives. Thematic analysis revealed three main themes: (1) Career growth, (2) Promoting Positive Atmosphere, and (3) Lifelong Growth. The findings underscore the importance of career support and professional development for advanced emergency nurses. Future studies can evaluate the efficacy and availability of formal career progression and leadership education programs. Enhancing these programs can assist in empowering senior nurses to maintain excellence in emergency care and guide the future healthcare workforce.

Keywords: *Social Sciences*, Emergency Care Nurses, Descriptive-Qualitative, Davao del Norte

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Introduction

The healthcare workforce is undergoing a significant demographic shift, with increasing numbers of nurses over the age of 50 still on the job, even in high-pressure settings like the Emergency Room (Enlund, 2022). Such settings expose nurses to challenging,

unpredictable, and emotionally straining situations that demand quick reaction, reliable skills, and stress-coping capacity (Denton, 2024). In such an environment, aging nurses over the age of 50 with a minimum of 10 years of experience are essential to high-quality care, but also for

ensuring workforce sustainability (Stimpfel, 2021).

Globally, studies emphasize the importance of supporting experienced nurses to counteract the growing shortage of healthcare workers. Providing appropriate support can help retain skilled professionals in the workforce (Sousa et al, 2022). According to the study in Sweden, research across the world indicates that senior nurses can be retained in their jobs and be proficient if workplace problems are minimized and support mechanisms are established (Jonsson et al., 2020). Job satisfaction can be enhanced, and nurses retained in their positions for a longer duration through interventions that minimize the physical burden and mental stress in the workplace (Montayre, 2023).

In the Philippine Context, nurses' ages are increasing, with the majority remaining on the job well beyond their 50s (Haddad et al, 2023). Filipino nurses continue on the job despite adversity when valued, fairly paid, and provided with space to develop, even if conditions are suboptimal (Sapar & Oducado, 2021).

Despite existing research on the overall aging workforce in nursing, with broad discussions on retirement, burnout, and workforce shortages. (Slusser et al., 2022). There remains a gap in understanding about the specific challenges, coping strategies, insights, and experiences of senior nurses (aged 50 and above) working in high-stress environments like Emergency Rooms (ERs) (Chen et al, 2024).

This study is focused on senior emergency room nurses in Davao del Norte. It captures their personal and professional narratives through a qualitative approach, thereby addressing a critical gap in both national research and policy development. The findings

aim to inform targeted support systems, retention strategies, and professional development programs tailored to this essential yet under-researched group.

Methods

This study employed the descriptive-qualitative research methodology. This research design is well-suited for the study since it captured rich, in-depth insights into their experiences, perceptions, and decision-making. This approach explored participants' experiences through one-on-one in-depth interviews. Eight senior nurses working in the emergency rooms in Davao del Norte hospitals were selected through purposive sampling, with eligibility criteria including 50 years old or above with at least 10 years of experience in the nursing profession and a minimum of 5 years of experience in the emergency room. Nurses below 50 years of age were excluded from the study.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in a quiet setting and audiotaped for accuracy. The interviews, which were guided by a validated questionnaire, were transcribed verbatim in real-time, and field notes were taken to capture non-verbal cues. The researcher ensured participant confidentiality by using unique codes and adhering to ethical standards, including obtaining informed consent and maintaining privacy throughout the process. Data saturation assessment was done, and the researcher has collected enough data, and any additional data would not significantly contribute to the findings.

Utilizing Colaizzi's descriptive-qualitative approach. The interview data were carefully examined using thematic analysis, allowing the researcher to identify recurring patterns and key

insights from the participants' responses. By organizing and categorizing these themes, the study aimed to capture meaningful experiences and provide a

clear understanding of the challenges and perspectives shared by senior nurses.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of the Respondents

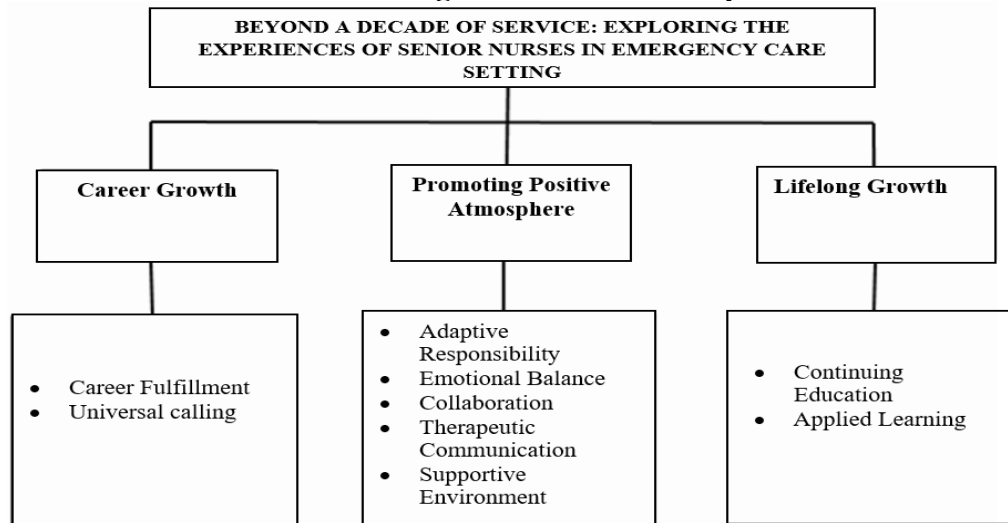
Code Name	Age in Years	Sex	Years as Emergency Nurse	Nursing Experience as a Registered Nurse
Participant 1	54	F	10	32
Participant 2	51	F	5	15
Participant 3	50	F	6	18
Participant 4	51	F	10	29
Participant 5	50	F	5	19
Participant 6	51	F	10	25
Participant 7	54	F	12	30
Participant 8	51	F	8	17

The study selected eight participants who were all females aged between fifty to fifty-four years old. The length of time being a nurse in the emergency room varied from five to 12 years.

Utilizing Colaizzi's descriptive-qualitative approach in data analysis, the study aims to understand the experiences of senior nurses in the emergency care setting. These 8 participants were interviewed using guided questionnaires which explore the three research questions of the study, "What are the experiences of senior nurses in the emergency care settings?", "How do participants cope with the challenges of their experiences?", and "What insights can senior nurses share with colleagues and the nursing practice in general?"

The emergent themes encompass the totality of participants' experiences. The analysis of transcript of the transcript resulted in the three emergent themes that answered the three research questions. The emergent themes are: *Career Growth*, *Promoting Positive Atmosphere*, and *Lifelong Growth*.

Figure 2: Thematic Map



Emergent theme 1: Career growth

The *Career growth* conveys that the senior nurses' experiences in the emergency room (ER) can be both dynamic and rewarding. Their career progression typically involves expanding their expertise, leadership skills, and often, educational qualifications. Personal and professional development are crucial aspects of a nurse's growth, especially for those in high-pressure environments like the emergency room. The nursing profession has long been a cornerstone of our healthcare system, providing the essential care and expertise that patients need during critical moments in their lives. As the demand for highly skilled nurses continues to grow, we must consider the importance of career pathways for nurses and the impact they have on professional development (Nashwan, 2023). The details of senior nurses' experiences in emergency care settings are further substantiated in the cluster themes: *Career Fulfillment and Universal Calling*

Cluster theme 1.1: Career Fulfillment

Career Fulfillment describes the participant's rewarding experiences when they helped to extend the life of their patient. This is a satisfaction of being able to contribute to the healing or comfort of a patient, reinforcing the rewarding aspect of medical or caregiving professions. In essence, it shows how the act of providing care and support can lead to a profound sense of purpose and connection. Below is the statement relevant to this theme:

"The most meaningful experiences for me are those moments when I can revive the

patient."(Participant 1, Transcript 1, Line 3)

"When a patient is relieved, then goes home and does not need admission. It touches my heart when I can help others." (Participant 3, Transcript 3, line 81-82)

Moreover, recognizing and rewarding exceptional performance makes an individual feel valued, sets a higher standard for the entire team to aspire to, and overall raises morale (Millacci, 2023).

Cluster Theme 1.2: Universal calling

The theme *Universal calling* reflects on the deeper meaning and commitment behind being a nurse. They're highlighting that nursing isn't just a job that ends when the shift is over; it's a vocation that requires ongoing dedication, compassion, and personal growth. The statement of the participants below depicts this theme:

"My strength lies in my ability to evaluate situations from a comprehensive perspective, considering everything from the ceiling to the floor, the colleague involved, and the surrounding environment." (Participant 1, Transcript 1, Line 15)

"My suggestion is to truly understand and love the profession. Being a nurse isn't about the money, it's about having a genuine passion and a heart dedicated to caring for others." (Participant 8, Transcript 8, Line 321-322)

Senior nurses in the Emergency Room (ER) bring invaluable experience and dedication to their roles. Their

commitment to patient care is often unwavering, despite the physical demands and challenges that come with the job (Verma, 2025). In the study of Kallio et al. (2022) explored nurses' views on their sense of calling to the profession and the challenges they faced in their work, which they attributed to this calling. It was found that calling provided multidimensional benefits not only to individuals and patients but also to working communities, organizations, and society at large.

Emergent Theme 2: Promoting a Positive Atmosphere

Promoting a Positive Atmosphere represents a crucial role in how senior nurses handle challenging experiences. A positive environment encourages open communication and allows senior nurses to voice concerns, which fosters confidence and growth. This supportive environment also promotes teamwork, ensuring that nurses can collaborate effectively, share tasks, and support each other during stressful moments (He, 2024). Furthermore, a positive setting encourages effective decision-making by building trust and mutual respect among the team, allowing nurses to make quick, informed choices in critical situations (Davis, 2021).

This theme is further discussed by the cluster themes: *Adaptive Responsibility*, *Emotional Balance*, *Collaboration*, *Therapeutic Communication*, and *Supportive Environment*.

Cluster Theme 2.1: Adaptive Responsibility

Theme *Adaptive Responsibility* describes the senior nurse's ability to

assess situations or weaknesses from a broad perspective, looking the multiple angles, including the environment, people involved, and their role. Adaptation in this area often involves critical thinking and relying on experience, sometimes in collaboration with others. This is stated in the following:

"It's been a while since I've been in the ER, but today it feels easier for me thanks to my past experiences. I already know what to do and how to respond, which helps me stay prepared and ready for anything." (Participant 2, Transcript 2, Line 28-29)

"My past experiences build me for who I am today, my mistakes before are the reason I learned to be strong and realized the strategies of doing the right thing." (Participant 3, Transcript 3, Line 88)

Adaptation to experiences is a key skill developed by senior nurses. Through years of hands-on encounters, they have honed techniques and strategies that allow them to manage emergency patients more efficiently and effectively. Furthermore, as noted by Passarelli and Kolb (2020), we cannot learn from experience if we do not first have an experience, and often, automatic routines make it difficult for direct experiencing in the moment to occur.

Cluster Theme 2.2: Emotional Balance

Senior Nurses demonstrate emotional resilience and a strong ability to maintain focus and professionalism under stress. In a high-pressure environment like the ER, where emotions and situations can shift rapidly, this balance is crucial. The ability to

acknowledge personal emotions like sadness or concern while not letting them overwhelm the primary focus of patient care shows a high level of emotional intelligence.

This is reflected in the statements below:

"Before I begin with my shift, I take a moment to set a positive mindset. This will help me to navigate through challenging situations, even when I'm overwhelmed with emergency cases." (Participant 2, Transcript 2, Line 39-40)

"I focus on maintaining a positive mindset before heading into work, ensuring I approach the Emergency Room with a sense of happiness and calm to minimize any moodiness." (Participant 7, Transcript 7, Line 252-253)

Emotional balance allows senior nurses to cope with the experiences in the emergency room because of their ability to feel a wide variety of emotions to the point of not feeling overwhelmed or losing control. Furthermore, emotional balance also involves the recognition, understanding, and management of emotions positively and healthily (Tudor, 2023).

Cluster Theme 2.3: Collaboration

Collaboration is the theme describing the participants' core values of teamwork within the healthcare environment. This theme emphasizes the collective responsibility of all healthcare professionals: doctors, nurses, medics, and Med Techs working together to deliver high-quality care. This kind of teamwork ensures that every member of the healthcare team plays their role effectively that there is seamless, leading

to a seamless approach to patient care. This is described in the following declaration of the participants below:

"We are incredibly grateful for our doctors here because they are approachable and understanding. They offer great support to us nurses, even when we make mistakes, and they handle situations with patience rather than anger." (Participant 3, Transcript 3, Line 94-95)

"I am really satisfied with my work here and the collaboration with my colleagues. The teamwork is strong, and even though the emergency cases can be challenging, my coworkers make it much easier to handle and complete the tasks efficiently." (Participant 5, Transcript 5, Line 160-161)

Collaboration and teamwork play a crucial role in reducing stress for senior nurses, especially in high-pressure environments like the ER (Ultimo, 2024). When colleagues work together efficiently, it not only lightens the workload but also creates a sense of shared responsibility. This can help prevent burnout and reduce stress, allowing nurses to focus more on patient care.

Cluster Theme 2.4: Therapeutic Communication

The theme, *Therapeutic communication*, is such a vital skill for senior nurses, not just in interacting with patients, but also in managing stress and fostering teamwork. They used communication as a tool to support well-being, which is so important. Talking with colleagues and having those open, supportive conversations can help

alleviate stress and build camaraderie. Additionally, it focuses on the importance of treating patients with kindness, respect, and active listening, especially in environments like the ER, where people are often in urgent need of care. Examples of this expressed responses are as follows:

“I provided health teaching on the importance of continuing tepid sponge baths or bathing the patient to help prevent convulsions. My strength lies in effective communication, which allowed me to build rapport with the patients and their caregivers.” (Participant 4, Transcript 4, Line 135-136)

“I reasonably talk to patients and am attentive to patients and their families in the ER, as everyone seeking care requires medical attention. Listening to their concerns fosters respect and trust, which are crucial for delivering the best possible care. (Participant 5, Transcript 5, Line 197-198)

This theme emphasizes the importance of open communication among allied healthcare services to provide efficient and effective patient care. In healthcare settings, communication goes beyond the simple exchange of information; it is a fundamental factor that shapes patient outcomes, satisfaction, and the overall quality of care provided. Effective and transparent communication has significant implications for both patients and healthcare professionals (Buckner, 2025). Effective communication skills were also considered crucial in building rapport with patients and families and, thus, gaining trust, respect, and improved care outcomes (Sharkiyya, 2023).

Cluster Theme 2.5: Supportive Environment

Supportive Environment
highlighting the participant’s positive reinforcement, encouragement, and motivation from others, which contribute to mental and emotional health. Furthermore, a supportive environment in healthcare plays a crucial role in shaping the quality of care provided to patients and the overall well-being of healthcare professionals. This reflected in the participants’ statements below:

“Based on my colleagues, they say that I can manage and can work with them with the same energy despite my age.” (Participant 5, Transcript 5, Line 156)

“I’m grateful for the emotional support I receive from my team, who constantly encourage me and remind me that I’m capable of accomplishing my tasks. Their inspiring words always lift my spirits and motivate me to keep going.” (Participant 7, Transcript 7, Line 259-260)

Supportive environment encompasses the collective values, beliefs, and attitudes that shape the organization. It influences how to interact with both customers and employees. A positive and strong supportive workplace not only attracts top talent but also drives productivity, reduces turnover, and enhances employee engagement (Ganesh, 2025).

Emergent Theme 3: Lifelong Growth

The last emergent theme, Lifelong growth, tackles the participants' overall insights they can share with colleagues, specifically senior nurses,

and with the nursing practice. Participants in this study emphasize learning from experienced individuals, as it builds a foundation of knowledge and skills. Moreover, this theme reflects the importance of continuous learning, personal well-being, and embracing change, particularly as nurses age and advance in their careers.

Lifelong growth for senior nurses is essential for both their career satisfaction and the overall quality of patient care. Continuing education, skill enhancement, and leadership development are key elements of growth for experienced nurses (Mlambo, 2021). This theme is further discussed by the cluster themes: *Continuing education and Applied Learning*.

Cluster Theme 3.1: Continuing Education

The theme of continuing education for senior nurses is essential for maintaining high-quality patient care, professional growth, and adapting to the evolving healthcare environment. Senior nurses' continuing education is vital to sustain and develop their professional skills in a constantly changing healthcare setting. As healthcare evolves with emerging technologies, treatments, and evidence-based interventions, nurses must remain current to deliver optimal patient care. Continuing education also guarantees that Senior nurses meet licensure and certification standards, remaining compliant with regulations while enhancing their clinical abilities. Here's how senior nurses might respond to the value and importance of continuing education in their careers:

"Healthcare and nursing are always changing. Staying curious and open to new ideas helps you improve and provide

better care." (**Participant 3, Transcript 3, Line (109-110).**

"Ongoing education helps us experienced nurses stay updated with changes in healthcare, like new technologies. Attending workshops and seminars keeps our skills sharp and helps us remember important information." (**Participant 8, Transcript 8, Line 327-328).**

Continuing education also improves job satisfaction and career growth by providing opportunities to practice or teach. It also offers the opportunity to treat stress and burnout with resilience and mental health programs. (Hall, 2022).

Cluster 3.2: Applied Learning

The last theme, *Applied Learning*, illustrates the participants' very important points about the role of an emergency room nurse. The experiences they gained as a senior nurse not only help in clinical settings but also enhance personal life. Caring for loved ones, such as sick parents, can often mirror the skills and calmness needed in the ER. They understand firsthand how to manage difficult situations, whether it's balancing care for family or dealing with the emotional stress that can come with such situations. These are how participants narrated their response:

"I will share what I learn with the community, and keep sharing my learnings with my colleagues in the hospital setting" (**Participant 1, Transcript 1, Line 22)**

"My experience as a senior nurse is valuable because the knowledge, I gained helps me take care of my sick mother and

father. I'm thankful for these experiences, as they have shaped who I am today.” (Participant 3, Transcript 3, Line 74-75)

Applied learning with real-world skills is crucial for ensuring that theoretical knowledge is effectively applied to practical situations. This approach helps participants understand the relevance of what they've learned by showing how concepts and skills function in real-life scenarios. As stated by Phillpott (2023), the longer you work, the more diverse and impressive your range of technical and soft skills will be. Through analyzing past experiences, they determine what went right and use those experiences to solve new problems, thus providing effective patient care. (Cherry, 2025).

Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings from this descriptive qualitative study exploring the experiences of senior nurses in the emergency setting offer valuable insights with important implications for nursing practice. The findings emphasize how their career progression is characterized by continuous learning, emotional resilience, adaptability, and a profound sense of purpose. The nurses' ability to find meaning in patient recovery, maintain emotional balance, and foster teamwork under pressure demonstrates their critical role in sustaining high-quality emergency care.

While the study utilized in-depth interviews with a sample size of eight participants from an emergency department in Davao del Norte, future research should consider expanding the scope to include other specialized units and employ additional methods such as focus group discussions. This would

enrich the data and provide a broader understanding of senior nurses' experiences across different clinical settings.

Moreover, the study underscores the importance of developing structured career development and leadership programs tailored to senior emergency nurses. These programs could empower them further, help maintain high standards of care, and enable them to mentor the next generation of nurses.

Finally, healthcare institutions should prioritize continuous professional development to ensure senior nurses remain updated with advancing technologies and evolving practices.

In essence, the experiences of senior ER nurses offer a window into the core of compassionate, skilled, and enduring nursing practice, reminding us that their stories are not only worth telling but vital in shaping the future of emergency care.

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