



# Independent nursing consultations are a desirable component of healthcare

Samodzielne konsultacje pielęgniarskie pożądaną składową opieką zdrowotnej

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## ABSTRACT

The author of the paper presents the argument that the widespread implementation of a new healthcare service called “independent nursing consultation” will not only improve the functioning of the healthcare system, but also enhance the quality of medical services. Implementing this new service requires modifying the traditional way of organizing healthcare, which assumes that the involvement of a doctor is necessary in every case, limiting the possibilities of promptly initiating and managing treatment.

By advocating the broad implementation of nursing consultations, the author first reviews the training of nurses in Poland and two other countries. Then she attempts to identify the areas of healthcare where providing nursing consultations is highly justified and beneficial. The procedure for independent nursing consultations is illustrated through the example of the activity of a large medical company, such as LUX MED Medical Center. The methods of ensuring the appropriate quality of the provided nursing consultations – by the exemplary institution – are also described.

The paper justifies why the extensive introduction of nursing consultations will increase access to healthcare services, improve their quality, and have a positive impact on the size and development of the nursing workforce.

## KEYWORDS

nursing consultations, healthcare, quality of care, healthcare quality

## STRESZCZENIE

Autorka pracy przedstawia argumentację, iż rozpowszechnienie nowej usługi zdrowotnej, jaką jest „samodzielna konsultacja pielęgniarska”, przyczyni się nie tylko do usprawnienia funkcjonowania systemu służby zdrowia, lecz także poprawi jakość usług medycznych. Wdrażanie tej usługi wymaga zmodyfikowania tradycyjnego sposobu organizowania służby zdrowia, który zakłada, że rozpoczęcie leczenia wymaga w każdym przypadku udziału lekarza, co ogranicza możliwości szybkiego podejmowania leczenia i jego prowadzenia.

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Autorka, postulując szerokie wdrażanie konsultacji pielęgniarskich, dokonuje najpierw przeglądu metod kształcenia pielęgniarek w Polsce oraz dwóch innych krajach. Stara się następnie wskazać te obszary opieki zdrowotnej, w których udzielanie konsultacji pielęgniarskiej jest wysoce uzasadnione i użyteczne. Procedura samodzielnych konsultacji pielęgniarskich jest tu przedstawiona na przykładzie działalności dużej firmy medycznej, jaką jest Centrum Medyczne LUX MED Sp. z o.o. Opisano także sposoby zapewniania – przez przykładową instytucję – właściwej jakości udzielanych konsultacji pielęgniarskich.

W pracy uzasadniono, dlaczego rozpowszechnienie konsultacji pielęgniarskich zwiększy dostępność do usług opieki zdrowotnej, poprawi ich jakość oraz korzystnie wpłynie na liczebność i rozwój kadry pielęgniarskiej.

## SŁOWA KLUCZOWE

konsultacje pielęgniarskie, opieka zdrowotna, jakość opieki, jakość ochrony zdrowia

## INTRODUCTION

In most countries around the world there is a shortage of healthcare professionals, particularly doctors and nurses. According to the traditional way of organizing healthcare in most countries, nurses play a supportive role, focusing only on specialized healthcare services. Until now, it has been primarily the responsibility of doctors to establish diagnoses, prescribe treatment, and oversee its implementation. Considering the fact that the involvement of a doctor is required in every case to initiate treatment, there is a certain bottleneck in terms of the ability to promptly initiate and manage treatment. A detailed analysis of contemporary nursing education reveals that both undergraduate and graduate studies require a comparable number of hours and personal effort, including practical training, similar to those completing medical degrees. Furthermore, the content taught in nursing programs provides knowledge enabling nurses to establish diagnoses and prescribe treatment [1].

The modern way of educating nurses is dictated by changes in Polish law, which in turn is being adjusted to the needs of contemporary society. On September 23, 2019, the Regulation of the Minister of Health came into force, amending the regulation on guaranteed benefits in the field of specialist outpatient care, introducing “nursing consultations” and “midwifery consultations”. The regulation presents a list of guaranteed benefits in the case of nursing and midwifery consultations, as well as defines the conditions for their implementation [2].

The best example of nursing consultations in Primary Health Care is the introduction of a new healthcare service model called coordinated care, which commenced on October 1, 2022. In this model, the primary care for the patient is provided by a nurse. Depending on the type of specialized coordinated care, educational consultations conducted by a nurse can even reach up to 6, while medical consultations might range from 2 to 3, including one comprehensive consultation [3].

The more comprehensive involvement of nurses in delivering healthcare from the initial stages of patient contact in healthcare institutions requires procedural changes, the revision of customs, and an evolution of awareness among both medical staff and patients. Such

changes would be best implemented in stages. In a specific institution in a region, these transformations may be advanced and dependent on the specifics of the healthcare unit and contextual factors, such as the demand for diagnostics, treatment, nursing, and care.

This article presents data that allows assessment of the justification and implementation methods of the first stage of these transformations.

I believe that the practical implementation of so-called nursing consultations can be the first stage of such transformations. In the context of these considerations, it is essential to address the issue of the quality of medical services, taking into account the subjective experiences of patients and community members. Currently, patients are increasingly aware of their rights and are more sensitive to individualized approaches to care and holistic treatment. Furthermore, there is an expectation for medical assistance to be accompanied by understanding and empathy towards patient suffering.

Undeniably, the quality of medical services is directly proportional to the education, competence, experience, and dedication of the medical staff. Considering the high quality of medical care, authors previously presented the possibilities for nurses to pursue advanced professional careers [4].

When considering the potential for development and increased competencies among nurses, I believe that attention should be given to the roles of nurses with bachelor’s and master’s degrees in health education. It is assumed that nurses are capable of and obligated to provide health education. Nevertheless, it is important to note that health education is just one narrow aspect of “information dissemination” and promoting development. There are also activities such as counseling and coaching.

In this article, I aim to present the principles and justification for implementing nursing consultations as a desirable component of healthcare. To do so, I will compare the principles of nursing education in Poland to analogous rules in the United Kingdom and the United States, where the discussed idea is already understood.

An essential argument in favor of implementing nursing consultations as a desirable component of healthcare will also be a brief presentation of the procedure already implemented in a specific national institution.



## OVERVIEW

### Nursing education in Poland and worldwide

#### *Poland*

In Poland, the standard of nursing education is based on the requirements set by the Ministry of Health and the Supreme Council of Nurses and Midwives. Within the framework of nursing education standards in Poland, the curriculum includes both theoretical and practical subjects. Nursing practices take place in hospitals, clinics, nursing homes, and other medical institutions. During their practical training, students learn how to maintain medical documentation, make clinical decisions, diagnose and treat patients. Additionally, there are requirements for the continuous professional development for nurses as part of the nursing education standards in the country. Continuing education, participation in training, conferences, and workshops are expected, enabling nurses to maintain a high level of knowledge and skills [1].

Polish nursing education standards are also based on guidelines set by the European Federation of Nurses Associations (EFN). These guidelines specify the standards of education, requirements for clinical practices, as well as ethical and professional standards for nurses. The EFN is an organization that brings together 37 national nursing organizations from across Europe. Its aim is to promote and support the development of nursing, as well as to represent the interests of nurses in European institutions [1].

Within nursing education in Poland, there are two degrees:

1. Bachelor's degree – lasting 3 years, upon completion of which the title Bachelor of Nursing is awarded. Within the bachelor's degree program, nurses acquire knowledge in anatomy, physiology, pathology, pharmacology, clinical nursing, and specialize in selected areas of nursing, such as pediatric nursing, geriatric nursing, surgical nursing, etc. A nurse with a bachelor's degree in Nursing can, among other things: conduct subjective and objective assessments to establish a nursing diagnosis, as well as prescribe medications, special dietary foods, and the medical devices necessary for the continuation of treatment within the scope of medical orders [1].
2. Master's degree – lasting 2 years, upon completion of which the title Master of Nursing is awarded. Master's degree studies allow the acquisition of more specialized knowledge, for example, in the field of intensive care nursing, oncology nursing, psychiatric nursing, etc. A nurse with a master's degree in Nursing can, among other things: prescribe medications, special dietary foods, and medical devices, including issuing prescriptions or

orders for them, as well as provide independent health advice within the scope of their professional competencies [1].

In Poland, specialization training for nurses typically lasts 2–3 years, depending on the chosen specialization. The number of hours of didactic classes within the specialization training also depends on the selected specialization, but it usually amounts to about 1,800–2,000 hours [5].

During specialization training, nurses acquire practical skills and knowledge in a specific field of nursing, such as anesthesia nursing, pediatric nursing, oncology nursing, or geriatric nursing. During the specialization training, nurses must also acquire practical skills in performing specialized medical and diagnostic procedures [5].

In total, a nurse in Poland who has completed both undergraduate and graduate nursing studies as well as specialization training, undergoes education for approximately 7–8 years. Nonetheless, it should be noted that nursing education is a continuous process that requires regular updating of knowledge and acquiring new skills.

A nurse holding a master's degree in nursing and a specialization in a specific field of nursing obtains the authorization to conduct a physical examination and identify deviations from the norm, taking into account the differences in examining newborns, infants, and older adults in geriatric age. They can also issue referrals for diagnostic tests and prescribe medications containing specific active substances, excluding drugs with very strong effects, narcotics, and psychotropic substances. All these authorizations enable nurses to conduct consultations [1].

Nursing schools in Poland prepare nurses to conduct nursing consultations. Nursing consultations involve the process of diagnosing, planning, and providing nursing advice to both healthy and ill individuals. During a nursing consultation, a nurse analyzes the patient's health status, including physical, mental, and social aspects, as well as their needs and expectations. A nursing education in Poland enables nurses to work in other European Union countries, where all universities strive to standardize the nursing practice system.

#### *The United Kingdom*

In the United Kingdom, similar to Poland, nursing education takes place at higher education institutions at the bachelor's degree level, which is equivalent to the Polish licencjat degree. At this level, nurses can choose from four specializations: adult nursing, pediatric nursing, mental health nursing, and learning disability nursing. To pursue the next level of education, which is a master's degree, nurses in the United Kingdom can do so after a minimum of one year of professional work.



Master's studies are specialized programs that focus on a specific area of nursing [6]:

- Master of Science (MSc), which provides knowledge in a specific field of nursing such as adult nursing, pediatric nursing, or mental health nursing [7].
- Master of Art (MA), which takes a humanistic approach to nursing with a focus on theoretical knowledge [7].
- Master of Nursing (MNurs), where skills are acquired in two out of three nursing specializations [7]. Master's studies can last from 2 to 5 years.

Nurses with a master's degree work as consultants and are not assigned to a specific ward. Their role is to advise the staff on delivering the best possible care, conduct nursing consultations, perform specialized procedures, and prescribe certain medications. It is the specialized nurse who decides on further treatment or the need to refer the patient to a doctor [7].

The United Kingdom offers many opportunities for nursing education, where a nurse can undertake a two-year course in nursing (adult, child, mental health), enhance their knowledge, and obtain a Master of Science degree. They can also pursue specific specializations such as surgical nursing.

Completing education at the doctoral level further deepens knowledge in a specific specialization and involves teaching at an academic level [7].

#### *The United States*

The United States cannot be overlooked when discussing nursing education worldwide. The first educational programs were established as early as 1873 and were based on the ideas of Florence Nightingale, still considered a pioneer in nursing education [8].

Currently in the United States there are three types of nursing levels:

1. Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN), whose main role is to provide basic bedside care under the supervision of registered nurses or physicians [8].
2. Registered Nurse (RN), who leads and makes decisions regarding direct care for both healthy and ill patients [8].
3. Advanced Practice Nurse (APN), who holds a master's or doctoral degree in nursing [8].

The term Advanced Nurse Practitioner (ANP) encompasses various educational pathways, such as master's (MSN), post-master's, and doctoral (DNP) programs. Advanced nursing has several functions, and there are four types of ANP education:

1. Nurse Practitioner – an advanced practice nurse who has the authority to diagnose and treat diseases within one of the available clinical specializations: family, adult-gerontology, women's health, neonatal, pediatrics, psychiatric-mental health [8].
2. Nurse Anesthetist – a nurse specialized in anesthesia who is responsible for independently

administering anesthesia to patients and monitoring its course until the patient wakes up [8].

3. Nurse/Midwife – a nurse/midwife who monitors normal pregnancies and provides antenatal and postnatal care [8].
4. Clinical Nurse Specialist – a specialist in clinical nursing who engages in scientific research, clinical consultations, and coordination of the treatment process [8].

The Nurse Practitioner (NP) system of advanced nursing education has significantly improved the overall health of society. Numerous studies conducted over the years have demonstrated that advanced nursing education has contributed to a reduction in treatment costs. The level of nursing care provided by NPs in the United States has been found to be on par with medical care. Analysis of the methods and effects of treatment by NPs and physicians for conditions such as hypertension, diabetes and asthma did not show any differences. Patient satisfaction and preferences for choosing a clinician were evenly distributed between NPs and doctors. There are also studies indicating greater patient satisfaction with NP consultations. Patients noted significantly longer consultation times, more thorough medical histories, and more effective preventive measures, which in turn increased the number of follow-up visits [8].

#### **Consultations as a new healthcare service**

In some healthcare facilities in Poland, a practice known as “nursing consultations” has already been implemented. These consultations involve the process of providing medical assistance aimed at ensuring comprehensive and effective healthcare for patients. Nurses play a crucial role in the patient care process, and their involvement in consultations aims to improve the quality of care, enhance treatment effectiveness, and increase patient engagement in the healing process. In the case of patients with chronic diseases, nursing consultations aim to monitor the patient's condition, implement appropriate treatment plans, and track therapy outcomes. For geriatric patients, nurses conduct a detailed assessment of the patient's condition, including evaluating the functioning of the urinary, digestive, and respiratory systems. In the care of post-surgical patients, nurses are responsible for monitoring the patient's condition, implementing suitable pain management strategies, and overseeing the wound healing process [1].

There are numerous benefits associated with the use of nursing consultations. Firstly, these consultations enable improvement in the quality of patient care, ensuring that patients receive comprehensive and effective medical attention. Secondly, nursing consultations increase patient engagement in the treatment process, which positively impacts therapeutic outcomes. Thirdly, nursing consultations contribute to



a reduction in healthcare costs by preventing unnecessary hospitalizations and decreasing the number of follow-up visits with physicians.

### **Description of current procedures for conducting nursing consultations at LUX MED Medical Center**

LUX MED Sp. z o.o. is a private medical company that provides medical services through a fee-for-service model, subscription, and public payer. Some time ago, LUX MED facilities introduced a new type of medical service, known as “nursing consultation”. The provision of such a service is legally sanctioned [2]. The practical demand for this service increased during the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) pandemic, as the need for advice in cases of suspected infection was recognized.

When implementing the new healthcare service called “nursing consultation”, emphasis was placed on its quality. Nurses who expressed their willingness to provide this service were advised to familiarize themselves first with the written document detailing the “consultation delivery standard”. For this purpose, a medical standard discussing the principles of medical consultations was utilized [9]. The content of this standard for nursing consultations refers to the principles of conducting in-person medical consultations as well as those based on telemedicine guidelines, including telephone and online consultations. This standard provides a detailed description of the actions a physician takes during the consultation process, starting from initiating the service, conducting subjective and objective examinations, making a diagnosis, providing recommendations, and concluding the consultation. Based on this standard, the guidelines for nursing consultations were developed and implemented in LUX MED Medical Center facilities [9]. These guidelines describe in detail the appropriate approach a nurse should follow when consulting with a patient.

Nurses who possess the qualifications and skills to perform physical examinations, refer for diagnostic tests, and prescribe medications have gained the ability to conduct consultations independently for patients, including those with infections or seeking preventive screenings.

Nurses opting to conduct consultations usually undergo additional training provided by LUX MED. The aforementioned definition of consultation standards is available in the company’s internal application, which allows quick access to essential procedures and standards helpful in the work of nurses employed at the center.

The document defining the standards discusses the guidelines for each stage of the consultation, starting from the interview and ending with the independent prescription of medications. All the stages are described in detail to enable nurses to effectively assess

the patient’s condition without overlooking current symptoms, allergies, chronic diseases, regular medications, pregnancy and/or breastfeeding information. The recommended algorithm covers all the aspects of the physical examination, such as examining the throat in cases of bacterial and viral infections, auscultating the lungs and heart, percussing and palpating the abdomen, as well as assessing Blumberg’s and Chełmoński’s signs [9].

Nurses conducting nursing consultations document their diagnoses using the International Classification of Diseases 11<sup>th</sup> Revision (ICD-11). When making a diagnosis, they rely on the collected medical history, results of the physical examination, analysis of medical records, and review of previous treatments. The most common diagnoses in nursing consultations related to infections include J00 – Acute rhinitis and pharyngitis, J01 – Acute sinusitis, and J20 – Acute bronchitis. During the consultations, nurses prescribe medications from a list of drugs that they are authorized to prescribe independently [9].

For example, within the guidelines entitled “Management of acute nasal and sinus mucosal inflammation”, the use of nebulization, vasoconstrictive agents, and over-the-counter nasal steroids is discussed as part of the treatment [9].

In cases of any doubts during the patient examination, the nurse may consult the facility’s on-duty physician or refer the patient for a medical consultation.

Currently, LUX MED offers its patients an increasingly wide range of consultations conducted by nurses, including Infection Treatment Center consultations for individuals in need of assistance with acute infectious conditions, dermatological consultations for individuals dealing with cosmetic issues, acne, calluses, or warts, and preventive consultations for patients who wish to undergo preventive screenings available through the National Health Fund (*Narodowy Fundusz Zdrowia* – NFZ), a purchased health subscription, or privately.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Objectives and benefits of nursing consultations**

The objectives of nursing consultations are to improve the quality of patient care by:

1. Assessing the patient’s health status – nurses, with their experience can accurately assess the patient’s health status and conduct necessary examinations, allowing the early detection of health problems [10].
2. Educating the patient – nurses can provide patients valuable information about their health condition and guide them on the best ways to take care of their health [11].



3. Enhancing the effectiveness of therapy – nurses can assist in selecting appropriate treatments and advise patients on the best ways to tailor the therapy to their individual needs [12].
4. Providing emotional support – nurses can help patients cope with the emotional aspects of illness and stressful situations [10].
5. Increasing patient engagement in the treatment process – nurses can assist patients in recognizing their role in the treatment process and enhance their engagement in the healing journey [10].

However, implementing nursing consultations into daily medical practice requires adequate preparation of the medical staff and adjustment of the healthcare facilities. It is also necessary to develop appropriate procedures, algorithms, and guidelines that should align with current medical standards and ethical principles.

### **Perspectives on the broad implementation of nursing consultations**

Healthcare services referred to as “nursing consultations” are likely to be increasingly implemented as they seem to be useful in many medical fields. I am convinced that nursing consultations are beneficial in the following areas:

1. Primary care: Nursing consultations are already being practiced here since nurses serve as the first point of contact for patients. Nurses assess patients’ health status, provide advice on healthy lifestyle habits, and refer them to appropriate specialists when needed [13].
2. Chronic care: Individuals with chronic conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, respiratory diseases, or rheumatic diseases benefit from nursing consultations through health monitoring, treatment modifications, and patient education [14].
3. Geriatrics: Nursing consultations are important in geriatric care as seniors require assistance with caregiving, the management of chronic conditions, assessment of mental health, and support in daily functioning [15].
4. Pediatrics: Nursing consultations are helpful in this field for assessing children’s development, monitoring their health status, and educating parents about proper childcare, vaccinations, and a healthy lifestyle [16].
5. Oncology: In oncology, nursing consultations are crucial for monitoring patients’ condition, providing emotional support, coordinating treatment, and educating patients about side effects and self-care [13].
6. Palliative and hospice care: In palliative and hospice care, nursing consultations are beneficial for providing care to patients in the terminal stage of illness, alleviating symptoms, offering emotional support, and educating families [15].
7. Mental health: In the field of mental health, nursing consultations are helpful for assessing patients’ mental health status, providing emotional support, educating about mental health, as well as coordinating pharmacological treatment and psychotherapy [15].
8. Public health: In public health, nursing consultations can play a significant role in preventive actions such as vaccinations, health education, and screening programs. Nurses may also be involved in monitoring and controlling the epidemics of infectious diseases and working towards improving community health [17].
9. Perinatal care: In perinatal care, nursing consultations are useful for monitoring the health of pregnant women, providing education on a healthy lifestyle during pregnancy, preparing for childbirth and newborn care, as well as monitoring the health of the mother and baby after delivery [10].
10. Rehabilitation: In the field of rehabilitation, nursing consultations are important for monitoring patients’ progress in treatment, supporting them in the process of recovery and independence, in addition to providing education on self-care and the prevention of complications [16].

In summary, nursing consultations are helpful in various areas of healthcare. They provide patients with a holistic approach to their health, education on self-care actions related to treatment, emotional support, and the coordination of care with other specialists. Nursing consultations offer patients an opportunity to receive individualized care and advice from qualified personnel. Implementing nursing consultations in these areas contributes to improving the quality of healthcare and patients’ well-being.

### **Nursing consultations can have a positive impact on the development of nursing in Poland**

Implementing independent nursing consultations can influence the development of nursing through:

1. Increasing the role of nurses and midwives by providing advice and delivering healthcare services during nursing consultations. Nurses and midwives gain importance and become more visible as significant members of the healthcare team.
2. Improving the quality of healthcare by emphasizing high-level consultations based on detailed and individual patient care, which can contribute to enhancing the quality of healthcare and increasing patient satisfaction.
3. Developing the skills and competencies of nurses and midwives by providing opportunities for them to enhance their skills and competencies, which will have a positive impact on their work and the quality of the services they provide.
4. Strengthening the healthcare system by complementing medical care and enabling more



efficient and effective healthcare management, which contributes to strengthening the healthcare system in Poland.

5. Increasing health awareness by providing patients with important health information and advice, which can contribute to raising their health awareness.

## CONCLUSIONS

1. Nursing consultations are already an important tool for improving the quality of healthcare. There is a basis for promoting the widespread implementation

of independent nursing consultations in various areas of healthcare.

2. Nursing consultations can contribute to improving treatment effectiveness and increasing patient engagement in the treatment process.
3. Implementing nursing consultations can have a significant impact on reducing healthcare costs and increasing patient satisfaction with medical care.
4. The broad implementation of independent nursing consultations elevates the role of nurses in the healthcare system.
5. As the nursing profession requires continuous education, the introduction of independent nursing consultations provides motivation for ongoing skills development.

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