

KNOWLEDGE AND ATTITUDE TOWARDS PALLIATIVE  
CARE AMONG UNDERGRADUATE NURSING STUDENTS  
AT UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA (USM)

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By

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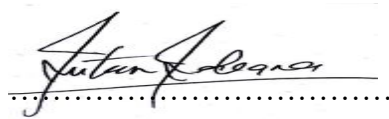
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the requirements for the degree of  
Bachelor in Nursing with Honours

AUGUST 2024

## CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled "Knowledge and Attitude Toward Palliative Care Among Undergraduate Nursing Students at Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM)" is the genuine record of research conducted by Ms. Erra Venessa Binti Join under my supervision from October 2023 to August 2024. I have thoroughly reviewed this dissertation and confirm that it meets the recognized standards of scholarly presentation. It is comprehensive and of sufficient quality to be submitted as partial fulfillment for the degree of Bachelor of Nursing (Honours).

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## DECLARATION

I hereby affirm that this dissertation represents the outcome of my research, except where acknowledged and duly referenced. Furthermore, I confirm that it has not been previously submitted, in whole or in part, for any other degrees at Universiti Sains Malaysia or any other institution. I grant Universiti Sains Malaysia permission to utilize this dissertation for educational, research, and promotional purposes.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

PC	:	Palliative care
USM	:	Universiti Sains Malaysia
WHO	:	World Health Organization
NHPCO	:	National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization
PCQN	:	Palliative Care Quiz for Nursing
TPB	:	Theory of Planned Behavior
FATCOD	:	Frommelt Attitude Toward Care of the Dying Scale
SPSS	:	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
HREC	:	Human Research Ethics Committee

**PENGETAHUAN DAN SIKAP TERHADAP PENJAGAAN PALIATIF DALAM  
KALANGAN PELAJAR KEJURURAWATAN PRASISWAZAH  
DI UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA (USM)**

**ABSTRAK**

Penyelidikan ini menyiasat tahap pengetahuan dan sikap terhadap penjagaan paliatif dalam kalangan pelajar kejururawatan tahun akhir di Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM). Memahami tahap pengetahuan dan sikap pelajar kejururawatan adalah penting untuk meningkatkan pendidikan penjagaan paliatif dan memastikan jururawat masa depan bersedia untuk memberikan penjagaan akhir hayat yang berperikemanusiaan dan berkesan. Tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk mengenal pasti pengetahuan dan sikap pelajar-pelajar ini mengenai penjagaan paliatif, bertujuan untuk memaklumkan dan meningkatkan kurikulum kejururawatan di USM. Reka bentuk deskriptif rentas keratan telah digunakan, melibatkan sampel bertujuan 130 pelajar kejururawatan tahun akhir dari Kampus Kesihatan USM. Peserta melengkapkan soal selidik 50-item yang menilai pemahaman dan perspektif mereka mengenai penjagaan paliatif. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa 13.1% pelajar mempunyai pengetahuan yang baik, 81.5% mempunyai pengetahuan sederhana, dan 5.4% mempunyai pengetahuan yang lemah mengenai penjagaan paliatif. Mengenai sikap, 29.2% menunjukkan sikap positif, manakala 70.8% bersikap neutral; tiada sikap negatif dilaporkan. Hubungan positif yang signifikan ( $r=0.332$ ,  $p<0.000$ ) ditemui antara pengetahuan dan sikap, mencadangkan bahawa pendidikan yang dipertingkatkan boleh memperbaiki sikap terhadap penjagaan paliatif dalam kalangan pelajar kejururawatan. Penemuan ini menekankan keperluan untuk intervensi pendidikan yang disasarkan dalam kurikulum kejururawatan untuk lebih mempersiapkan pelajar dalam memberikan penjagaan paliatif yang berkualiti tinggi. Menyemak semula modul pendidikan semasa untuk merangkumi liputan menyeluruh

mengenai pengetahuan teori dan kemahiran praktikal dalam penjagaan paliatif adalah penting untuk memenuhi permintaan yang semakin meningkat untuk perkhidmatan penjagaan paliatif yang berkesan di Malaysia dan memastikan graduan kejururawatan dilengkapi dengan baik untuk peranan mereka.

**KNOWLEDGE AND ATTITUDE OF PALLIATIVE CARE AMONG  
UNDERGRADUATE NURSING STUDENTS AT UNIVERSITI SAINS  
MALAYSIA (USM)**

**ABSTRACT**

This study investigates the knowledge and attitudes toward palliative care among final-year undergraduate nursing students at Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM). Understanding the level of knowledge and attitudes of nursing students is crucial for improving palliative care education and ensuring that future nurses are well-prepared to provide compassionate and effective end-of-life care. The purpose of this study is to identify the knowledge and attitudes of these students regarding palliative care, aiming to inform and enhance the nursing curriculum at USM. A descriptive cross-sectional design was employed, involving a purposive sample of 130 final-year undergraduate nursing students from the Health Campus of USM. Participants completed a 50-item survey evaluating their understanding and perspectives on palliative care. The results indicated that 13.1% of students had good knowledge, 81.5% had moderate knowledge, and 5.4% had poor knowledge of palliative care. Regarding attitudes, 29.2% displayed a positive stance, while 70.8% were neutral; no negative attitudes were reported. A significant positive correlation ( $r=0.332$ ,  $p<0.000$ ) was found between knowledge and attitudes, suggesting that enhanced education could improve attitudes toward palliative care among nursing students. These findings underscore the need for targeted educational interventions within the nursing curriculum to better prepare students for delivering high-quality palliative care. Revising current educational modules to include comprehensive coverage of both theoretical knowledge and practical skills in palliative care is essential

to meet the growing demand for effective palliative care services in Malaysia and ensure that nursing graduates are well-equipped for their roles.

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.0 Background of the Study

Taking care of people with serious illnesses for a long time and helping them as they approach the end of their lives has shown that it's important to teach and train healthcare professionals in palliative care (WHO, 2020). Palliative care means helping patients and their families deal with serious diseases. It involves finding and stopping the patients' pain and other problems to make them feel more comfortable and improve their quality of life while they are sick (Buss et al., 2017; WHO, 2020). Palliative care (PC) seeks to improve the lives of patients with severe and life-threatening illnesses. These illnesses can include things like heart problems, cancer, chronic lung diseases, or neurological disorders. The goal is to enhance the well-being of the patients and their families (Schroeder & Lorenz, 2018; WHO, 2020).

As more and more people get older and have long-lasting health problems, the need for palliative care keeps growing (Knaul et al., 2018). Every year, around 56.8 million people need palliative care, and among them, 25.7 million are in the final year of their lives. However, globally, only about 14% of those who need palliative care do so, which means that a lot of people who require palliative care aren't getting the assistance they require (Connor et al., 2020; WHO, 2020). By 2060, the need for palliative care is predicted to become twice as great as it is now. This makes the need for palliative care experts and services a significant global public health issue (Kumar P et al., 2022).

Even though we know that education is important for raising awareness and skill levels in palliative care for healthcare workers, there's not much evidence that nursing schools are teaching it (Kav et al., 2018). More and more people need experienced nurses



in palliative care, so nursing schools must ensure their students are ready to meet this demand (Yoong et al., 2023). Nurses are pivotal in delivering palliative care due to their continuous interaction with patients. They are responsible for managing symptoms, providing emotional support, and coordinating care among different healthcare providers. Therefore, comprehensive training in palliative care is essential for nursing students to ensure they are prepared to meet the needs of patients (Chow & Dahlin, 2018). "Nurses are important in the palliative care team, and they need to give very good care (Chow & Dahlin, 2018). Palliative care is very important for nurses. Nurses are highly valued in the palliative care team, and they take care of the physical, practical, social, and spiritual aspects of patient care. In the healthcare field, nurses often deal with patients who are dying, especially in critical care units. So, nurses play a crucial role in end-of-life care, and they need to know how to care for dying patients correctly (Abate et al., 2019; Mallory, 2003). One key thing that affects how well palliative care is given is what nurses know and how they feel about taking care of patients who are dying (Paice et al., 2021; Pasacreta, 2003). Regrettably, many nurses don't have enough knowledge about palliative care, and providing really good palliative care is still a big problem (Altarawneh et al., 2023; Etafa et al., 2020). The reason for this is that nurses haven't had enough education and training, which makes it hard for them to provide the right kind of palliative care (Hao et al., 2021). Additionally, when nurses don't know much about palliative care and have a negative attitude toward it, it's a big obstacle to providing good palliative care (Etafa et al., 2020).

So, nurses should have the latest training in palliative care. In addition, students studying to become nurses need to be properly trained and educated so that they can provide excellent palliative care to patients with chronic illnesses. Their understanding of palliative care and how they feel about caring for dying patients will have a big impact

on the quality of care for those who are dying. These future nurses play a crucial role in providing palliative care to patients who are very ill because they spend a lot of time by the patient's bedsides (Guthrie et al., 2012; Smith et al., 2018; Thi Thanh Vu et al., 2019).

The summary does not emphasize the potential impact on nursing education and patients. By identifying the current knowledge and attitudes of nursing students towards palliative care, this study aims to inform curriculum development and enhance training programs. Ultimately, this can lead to improved palliative care services and better patient outcomes.

## **1.2 Problem Statements**

The World Health Organization (WHO) says that every year, around 56.8 million people need palliative care, and more than 40% of them are over 70 years old. Out of those, about 25.7 million people need it in the last year of their lives. But the problem is that only 14% of the people who need palliative care are getting it. This could be even more of a problem as the population gets older (Connor et al., 2020; WHO, 2020).

A lot of research shows that many nursing students don't know much about palliative care. For example, in one study of student nurses, more than half (54%) had low scores when it came to their knowledge of palliative care (Chacko, 2021). In some places, nurses are not ready to take care of patients who are very sick and close to the end of their lives. They haven't had enough education and training, which makes it hard for them to provide the right kind of palliative care (Hao et al., 2021). This is a big problem because the demand for really good palliative care is growing all around the world. More and more people are getting older and having long-lasting health problems, and they want a better quality of life (Kim et al., 2020). This shows that it's really important to make sure nursing students know more about palliative care and understand it better. In

addition, a different study showed that nurses were very sure of how to handle pain and symptoms, but they needed more education on how to manage the people and things needed to give palliative care. This means that even though nursing students might feel confident about some parts of palliative care, they still have a lot to learn in other areas (Kim et al., 2020). Emphasize how assessing this knowledge is critical to developing better educational strategies. For example, "assessing the level of knowledge is crucial to identifying gaps and developing targeted educational interventions to enhance nursing students' competencies in palliative care.

In addition, numerous studies show that nursing students don't always have a positive attitude when it comes to taking care of patients who are dying. For example, in one study of student nurses, their attitudes toward death and dying were different from one student to another (Sanger, 2018). A few studies found that nursing students don't always have a very good or caring attitude when it comes to taking care of patients who are dying. This is worrying because there's a growing need for palliative care in many places (Zahran et al., 2022). The way nursing students think about taking care of patients at the end of their lives can be affected by different things. These include how much they know about palliative care, their personal experiences with death, and what they learn during their nursing training (Haroen et al., 2023; Younis et al., 2022). A study on nursing students found that they often feel upset or troubled when they have to take care of patients who are dying (Jafari et al., 2015). Another study found that, out of 32 students, 30 took part in the study (which is 94% of them). Only 20% of these students said they had cared for patients who were dying during their clinical training. These students had somewhat negative or neutral feelings about taking care of patients who were dying (Sampaio et al., 2015). In addition, the study discovered that nursing students tended to avoid thinking about or dealing with patients who were dying (A'la et al., 2018).

Evaluating attitudes towards palliative care is crucial, as these attitudes directly impact the quality of care provided to terminally ill patients. Positive attitudes foster compassionate, patient-centered care, enhancing communication, trust, and emotional support. They also ensure comprehensive and holistic care, considering physical, emotional, social, and spiritual needs. Addressing attitudes helps identify biases, promotes cultural sensitivity, and supports ethical practice, leading to better patient outcomes. Therefore, understanding and improving nursing students' attitudes toward palliative care is essential for developing effective educational strategies and improving end-of-life care.

Understanding the correlation between knowledge and attitudes toward palliative care among nursing students is crucial because it can provide insights into whether enhancing knowledge through education can positively influence attitudes toward palliative care. This objective is important because it can help identify the factors that contribute to the development of a positive attitude towards palliative care among nursing students, ultimately leading to better patient care and improved quality of life for those receiving end-of-life care (Alwawi et al., 2022; Chacko, 2021). Studies have consistently shown that nursing students often lack knowledge about palliative care, which can negatively impact their attitudes toward it. For instance, a study in New Delhi found that 54% of student nurses had inadequate knowledge scores, but their attitude toward palliative care was generally good (Chacko, 2021). Similarly, a study in Palestine found that nursing students lacked knowledge about palliative care, although they had a favorable attitude toward palliative care (Alwawi et al., 2022). The association between knowledge and attitudes is significant because it can inform the development of educational programs that aim to improve nursing students' understanding of palliative care. By identifying the factors that influence knowledge and attitudes, educators can

design targeted interventions that enhance both knowledge and attitudes, ultimately leading to better patient care and an improved quality of life.

Therefore, this study aims to assess the level of knowledge and attitudes towards palliative care among undergraduate nursing students at USM and to identify the association between these two factors.

### **1.3 Research Question**

1. What is the level of knowledge of palliative care among undergraduate nursing students at USM?
2. What is the level of attitudes toward palliative care among undergraduate nursing students at USM?
3. Is there any association between knowledge and attitude toward palliative care among undergraduate nursing students at USM?

### **1.4 Research Objective**

#### **1.4.1 General Objective**

To determine the level of knowledge and attitude toward palliative care among undergraduate nursing students at USM.

#### **1.4.2 Specific Objectives**

1. To determine the level of knowledge toward palliative care among undergraduate nursing students at USM.
2. To determine the level of attitudes toward palliative care among undergraduate nursing students at USM.
3. To identify the association between the level of knowledge and attitude toward palliative care among undergraduate nursing students at USM.

## **1.5 Hypothesis**

H<sub>0</sub>: There is no significant association between knowledge and attitude toward palliative care among undergraduate nursing students at USM.

H<sub>A</sub>: There is a significant association between knowledge and attitude towards palliative care among undergraduate nursing students at USM.

## **1.6 Conceptual and Operational Definitions**

Definitions for operational terms used in this research proposal are as shown below:

### **1.6.1 Knowledge**

- Knowledge about a subject acquired through study or experience that is shared by a single individual or a larger group of people (Cambridge Dictionary, 2023).
- In this study, knowledge refers to the nursing student's knowledge regarding palliative care in three domains: philosophy and principles of palliative care; pain and symptoms management; and psychosocial aspects of care (Al-Ansari et al., 2019).

### **1.6.2 Attitude**

- An attitude in psychology is a collection of feelings, convictions, and actions directed towards a certain item, person, object, or occasion (Bizer et al., 2006).
- In this study, an attitude refers to the nursing student's attitude regarding palliative care in three dimensions: cognitive (perceptions and beliefs), affective (likes and dislikes, sensations or triggered emotions), and behavioral (actions or declared intentions towards the object based on "cognitive" and "affective" reactions) (Vargas-Sánchez et al., 2016).

### **1.6.3 Palliative Care**

- Palliative care is a way of caring for patients with serious illnesses, intending to make their lives better by managing their symptoms and reducing their suffering (Alhamdoun et al., 2021).
- In this study palliative care refers to taking care of patients and their families when they're dealing with serious, life-threatening diseases in three domains: Physical Aspects of Care, Psychosocial Aspects of Care, and Cultural Aspects of Care (Buss et al., 2017).

### **1.7 Significance of Study**

Studying what nursing students know and how they feel about palliative care is very important, and it has many different aspects. First, it's about making patient care better. Understanding and improving what nursing students know and how they feel about palliative care can lead to better care for patients who are very sick (Ferri et al., 2021). This can make the patients and their families feel better and have a higher quality of life. Secondly, it's about having the right attitude. How nursing students feel about palliative care can make a big difference in the care they give to patients. If they have a good attitude, it usually means better care for patients. So, it's important to understand what makes their attitudes and help them have a positive one (Schelin et al., 2023). Third, it's about getting ready for the future. The world is getting older, and more people have long-lasting illnesses. This means we need more nurses who know about palliative care. Studying what nursing students know and how they feel about it can help the healthcare system get ready for these future challenges (Durojaiye et al., 2023). Lastly, it's about making patients and their families happier. When nursing students understand palliative care better and have a good attitude, it usually means patients and their families are more

satisfied. And when they're satisfied, they usually have better experiences and outcomes in their healthcare (Paul et al., 2019).

To sum it up, looking at what nursing students know and how they feel about palliative care is super important. It can be helpful to thoroughly understand what nursing students know and how they feel about palliative care. To improve nursing students' skills in palliative care, we need to understand their current knowledge and feelings about this type of care. We can then identify areas where more education and training are needed. This could include understanding the disease, managing symptoms, communicating with patients and their families, and dealing with the emotional aspects of care. By improving these skills, nursing students will be better prepared to care for patients with life-limiting illnesses. Our goal is to fill the gap in their knowledge, improve how they learn about palliative care, and, as a result, make sure patients with serious illnesses have better care and a better quality of life.

Identifying the association between knowledge and attitudes towards palliative care can provide valuable insights into how educational programs can be designed to simultaneously enhance knowledge and foster positive attitudes, ensuring a holistic approach to palliative care education. Understanding the relationship between knowledge and attitudes towards palliative care is of paramount importance in nursing education. This relationship provides critical insights into whether educational interventions that enhance knowledge can also positively influence attitudes (Chacko, 2021). By identifying and analyzing this correlation, educators can develop targeted educational strategies that address knowledge deficiencies and promote positive attitudes, leading to more effective and compassionate care for terminally ill patients (Jiang et al., 2019). Moreover, understanding this relationship aids in the creation of a comprehensive curriculum that integrates both theoretical knowledge and attitudinal training, ensuring that nursing



students are well-prepared to provide holistic, patient-centered care (Schroeder & Lorenz, 2018).

Additionally, this understanding supports the development of sustainable educational practices and informs policy advocacy, ultimately contributing to the cultivation of competent, empathetic healthcare professionals (Chacko, 2021; Karkada et al., 2011; Smith et al., 2018). Therefore, exploring the association between knowledge and attitudes towards palliative care is essential for improving nursing education and enhancing the quality of palliative care.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this review is to gather and explain what other research has found about the topic. We want to know what nursing students know and how they feel about palliative care. This chapter looks at various aspects, such as the concept of palliative care, nursing students' knowledge of palliative care, nursing students attitudes toward palliative care, and the association between the level of knowledge and attitude toward palliative care among nursing students.

#### **2.2 Conceptual of Palliative Care**

People who are very sick, no matter how long they've been sick, can get help from palliative care. Palliative care means taking good care of patients with serious illnesses that may not be curable, and it's not limited by time. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), it's an approach that makes life better for patients and their families by identifying and treating pain and other problems, both physical and emotional, early and very well (WHO, 2020). Montoya (2017) says that the idea of palliative care began in the 1960s in the United Kingdom when they first used the term "hospice care." The words "hospice" and "palliative care" meant the same thing until the late 1980s and early 1990s (Montoya, 2017). Palliative care is when the focus is on making someone with a serious illness feel more comfortable and have a better quality of life.

The National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization (NHPCO) says that the activities in palliative care are decided together by the person who is sick, their doctor, the main caregiver, and the hospice team. They work together to relieve any painful or

distressing symptoms and improve the person's quality of life (NHPCO, 2021). The World Health Organization (WHO) has highlighted ten important facts about palliative care.

Firstly, palliative care aims to provide a better end-of-life experience for patients and support their families. It focuses on making the final stages of life more comfortable and less distressing. Secondly, there is a need to further develop policies that promote palliative care. These policies help ensure that people in need can access these services. Thirdly, palliative care can be provided in a person's home or hospital by healthcare experts. This flexibility in the delivery of care is essential to meeting the diverse needs of patients. Fourthly, palliative care is not only for individuals at the very end of their lives. It can benefit people at various stages of a serious illness, providing relief and support when needed. Fifthly, laws related to the use of opioids, which are powerful pain-relieving medications, play a significant role in palliative medicine. Access to these medications is crucial for effective pain management.

Sixth, access to pediatric palliative care, which is care for seriously ill children, is limited, especially in low- and middle-income countries. This needs improvement to help children with life-limiting conditions. Seventh, palliative care is centered around the needs and preferences of the individuals receiving care. It is a personalized approach that respects the choices of the patients. Eighth, there is a significant gap in the availability and quality of palliative care between high-income countries and low- and middle-income countries. Efforts are needed to bridge this disparity. Ninth, the number of people in need of palliative care is growing due to the increasing prevalence of chronic diseases and longer life expectancy. This highlights the growing importance of palliative care services.

Finally, palliative care provided at home not only improves the quality of life for patients but also saves money for healthcare systems. It can be a cost-effective approach

to care delivery. In summary, palliative care is a crucial aspect of healthcare that focuses on improving the quality of life for individuals with serious illnesses, and these ten facts highlight its significance and the need for further development and access to these services (WHO, 2018).

### **2.3 Nursing Student Knowledge of Palliative Care**

Palliative care is a specialized form of medical care designed for individuals with serious or life-threatening illnesses (Etafa et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2020). Despite its critical importance, research indicates that nurses frequently lack sufficient knowledge in this area (Kim et al., 2020). This review article aims to assess the extent of nursing students' knowledge about palliative care and identify the factors that influence their understanding.

Numerous studies have evaluated the level of knowledge nursing students possess regarding palliative care. For instance, a study by Hao et al. (2021) revealed that only 20.8% of nursing students demonstrated good knowledge about palliative care (Hao et al., 2021). Similarly, research conducted by Karkada et al. (2011) indicated that a significant majority, approximately 79.5%, had a limited understanding of palliative care (Karkada et al., 2011). These findings highlight a substantial gap in the knowledge of nursing students concerning palliative care, underscoring the need for improved educational strategies in this area.

The Cao et al. (2023) study showed that there was a connection between different things; they found that the average score for what nursing students knew about palliative care was 9.04. This score could go from 2 to 16, and it means that, on average, students got about 45.2% of the questions right. This shows that nursing students don't know a lot about palliative care. The study also used a test called PCQN-C. In this test, the part about

managing pain and symptoms had the right answers; about 50.76% of them were correct. But the part about taking care of a patient's emotional and spiritual needs had the fewest right answers; only about 25.67% of them were correct (Cao et al., 2023).

Recent studies have looked at what nursing students know about palliative care, and they found that their knowledge is not enough. For example, in Saudi Arabia, even though palliative care has been around for 30 years, nursing students still don't know much about it (Aboshaiqah, 2020). In Greece, nursing students also had low knowledge about how to manage symptoms and provide care for a patient's emotional and spiritual needs. They also didn't feel very comfortable taking care of dying patients (Dimoula et al., 2019). In China, the study showed that the nursing students there also didn't know enough about palliative care (Jiang et al., 2019). But it's important to remember that each country has its unique situation that affects how they approach palliative care. This includes things like what the government thinks about palliative care, how the education system is set up, and the influence of culture and religion.

Many things can affect how much nursing students know about palliative care. One of the biggest factors is education. Research has proven that when nursing students learn about palliative care, they know more and have a better attitude about end-of-life care (Haroen et al., 2023; Kim et al., 2020). But the problem is that not all nursing students get this kind of training. Only 59.4% of them have received palliative care training (Kim et al., 2020). Another thing that matters is experience. Nurses who have learned about taking care of patients at the end of life have more confidence (Kim et al., 2020). However, some nurses stay away from these topics because they're unsure about death (Haroen et al., 2023). This shows that nursing students should be better prepared to deal with the challenges of palliative care. Making sure nursing students know more about palliative care is good for several reasons. First, it means patients with serious or life-

threatening illnesses get better care. Second, it helps students grow personally and understand themselves better, which makes them better at their jobs (Kim et al., 2020). Lastly, it helps meet the growing need for palliative care because the world's population is getting older and more people have long-lasting illnesses (Hao et al., 2021).

To sum it up, nursing students don't know enough about palliative care. Education and experience are important in how much they know. If we make sure nursing students know more about palliative care, it can make patient care better, help students grow personally, and get the healthcare system ready for the future. Therefore, more efforts should be made to improve palliative care education and training for nursing students.

The existing research indicates significant gaps in nursing students' knowledge of palliative care. Understanding these gaps is crucial for developing targeted educational interventions for USM nursing students to enhance their knowledge and competencies in this field.

#### **2.4 Nursing Student Attitude on Palliative Care**

Palliative care is really important in healthcare because it helps patients feel better and lessens their suffering (Chacko, 2021). But many nursing students don't know enough about it, and they might not feel comfortable taking care of dying patients (Hao et al., 2021). This article looks at what other studies have found about this issue and shows that nursing students need better education and training in palliative care.

Ferri et al.'s (2021) study showed that the scores from the students' attitudes toward caring for dying patients were in the middle, which means they had neither positive nor negative attitudes. There was a difference in scores between the three groups of students, but other things like age, gender, year of study, religious beliefs, and previous experiences with dying patients did not make a big difference in the scores (Ferri et al.,

2021). In a study done by Jafri in 2015, out of 32 students, 30 took part in the study (a participation rate of 94%). Only 20% of the students had experience with patients who were dying during their clinical training. The students had attitudes that were somewhere between negative and neutral when it came to taking care of dying patients. However, their attitudes improved after getting an education on the subject. Before the education, their average attitude score was 3.5, and after the education, it increased to 4.7, which was a significant improvement (Jafari et al., 2015).

Nursing students' attitudes are really important when they take care of patients who are dying. One study showed that these students generally had good attitudes about death and taking care of patients at the end of life. However, if they were afraid of death, tried to avoid it, or didn't want to think about it, these feelings made it harder for them to take care of dying patients (Sanger, 2018). Additionally, previous studies have reported that when nurses had negative feelings about death, it caused them to feel stressed, anxious, sad, tired, and unable to help. This made it hard for them to take care of their patients completely and effectively (Gurdogan et al., 2019).

Teaching is very important in changing how nursing students feel about taking care of patients who are dying. A method called e-learning, which uses electronic tools to teach, was shown to work well in improving students' knowledge and attitudes about palliative care (Barnett et al., 2021). After a three-week teaching program using this method, there was a big increase in the scores on two tests: the Palliative Care Quiz of Nursing (PCQN) and the Frommelt Attitude Toward Care of the Dying Scale Form B (FATCOD-B). These higher scores were compared to how the students did before the teaching program started (Hao et al., 2021).

To sum it up, what we know from existing research is that nursing students generally have a good attitude when it comes to caring for patients at the end of life. However, they don't know enough about it. So, it's really important to include lessons about palliative care in the training of nurses. We also need more research to figure out the best ways to teach this important part of healthcare.

Existing research reveals notable gaps in nursing students' attitudes towards palliative care. Understanding these attitudinal gaps is essential for developing targeted educational interventions at USM to enhance students' empathy, understanding, and overall disposition toward palliative care. Addressing these gaps will help foster more compassionate and effective care practices among future nursing professionals.

## **2.5 Association between the level of Knowledge and Attitude Toward Palliative Care among Nursing Students**

As the frontline of healthcare, nursing students are often exposed to palliative care practices during their training. Their knowledge and attitudes towards this care can significantly impact the quality of care provided to patients. This article looks at what other studies have found about this issue and shows that nursing students need better education and training in palliative care.

In a study done by Chacko (2020), it was found that a significant association exists between the knowledge score and selected sociodemographic variables such as the nursing course, area of residence, and religion. The study revealed that a maximum of 54% of student nurses had inadequate knowledge scores, but their attitude towards palliative care was good (58%) (Chacko, 2021).

A different study found that 63.10% of students scored seven points or more on attitudes regarding palliative care. However, the median knowledge was 11.00 (9.00,



12.00), and among the four areas of knowledge, the use of pain medication and psychosocial and spiritual care were less correct, 29.9% and 43.3%, respectively (Cao et al., 2023). Additionally, researchers found that almost 76.1% of nursing students had insufficient knowledge about dying patients, while the majority of them (82.61%) held a positive attitude toward them. The study also revealed a significant correlation between nursing students who had prior experience with dying individuals and their overall knowledge score. However, there was no significant association between the attitude of nursing students and their level of knowledge (Elsaman, 2017).

Another study conducted by Karkada (2011) showed that the majority (79.5%) of students had poor knowledge of palliative care, but they had a favorable attitude towards palliative care. There exists a negative correlation between the knowledge and attitude scores of nursing students in palliative care (Karkada et al., 2011).

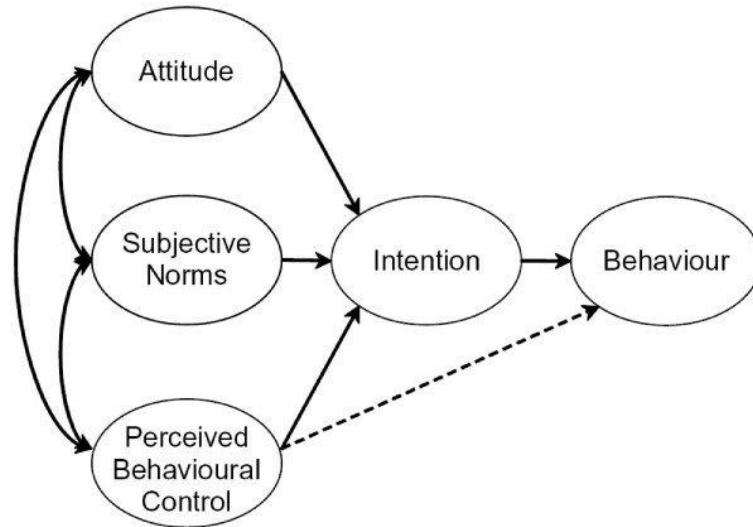
In conclusion, while the study of knowledge and attitudes toward palliative care among student nurses is crucial, several limitations must be acknowledged. These include potential biases in self-reported data, variability in educational backgrounds, and limited sample sizes that may not fully represent the broader nursing population. Despite these constraints, understanding and addressing the gaps in palliative care education is essential, as it directly impacts the quality of care provided to patients with life-limiting conditions. Enhancing student nurses' competence and attitudes towards palliative care can ultimately lead to improved patient outcomes and more compassionate care practices, underscoring the need for targeted educational interventions and further research in this area.

## **2.5 Theoretical and Conceptual Framework of The Study**

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) began as the Theory of Reasoned Action in 1980. It was created to help predict why someone intends to do a certain thing at a particular time and place. This theory was meant to explain all the things people can control and decide for themselves. The main part of this theory is the idea of "behavioral intent." It means what someone plans to do is influenced by how they feel about the chances of that action having the expected results and what they think are the risks and benefits of that result. In simple terms, it's a way to figure out why people decide to do something based on what they think will happen and whether they see it as good or bad (Ajzen, 2012). The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) is built on three main ideas.

The first is attitude. This is how someone feels about doing something. If they have a positive attitude, they're more likely to do it. The second is subjective norms. This is about what someone thinks others expect them to do. If they believe people want them to do something, it can influence their behavior. Last but not least is perceived behavioral control. This is about how much control someone thinks they have over something. If they believe they can do it and have control, they're more likely to take action (Kagee & Freeman, 2008). The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) is a way to understand why people do what they do. It says that our actions are influenced by three main things: The first is our attitude. This means how we feel about something. If we like it, we're more likely to do it. The second is what others think. We're also influenced by what we think others expect us to do. If we believe people want us to do something, we might do it. Thirdly, how much control do we think we have? If we believe we can do something and have control over it, we're more likely to do it. The TPB helps us understand why people make certain choices and predict what they might do in the future based on these three factors: their attitude, what they think others want, and how much control they think they

have. It's like a tool for figuring out why people act the way they do (Worthington, 2021). Figure 2.1 provides more detailed information on this topic.



**FIGURE 2. 1 :** The Theoretical Framework of The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) [Source(Ajzen, 1991)]

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) will be instrumental in guiding this study by providing a comprehensive framework to examine the components that shape nursing students' knowledge and attitudes toward palliative care. According to TPB, behavior is driven by intentions, which are influenced by three primary factors: attitudes toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. Figure 2.2 provides more detailed information on this topic.

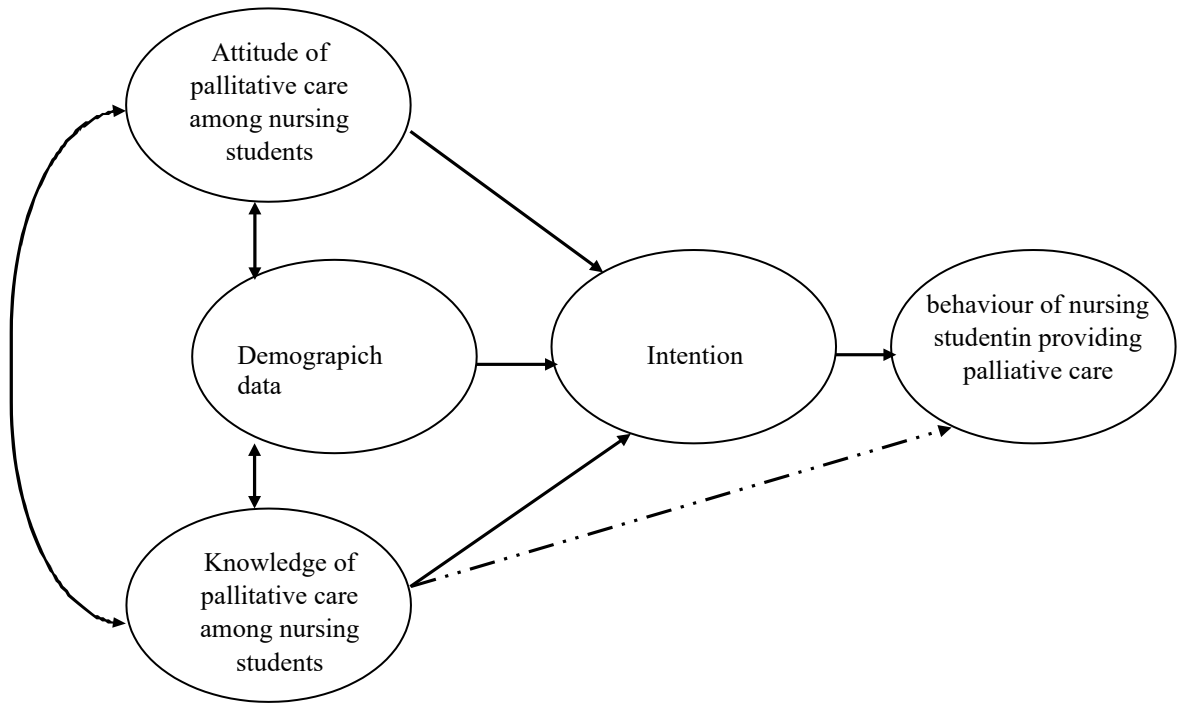
Firstly, attitudes towards palliative care refer to the students' overall evaluations of palliative care, encompassing their beliefs about its benefits and challenges. By exploring these attitudes, the study can identify positive and negative perceptions that may affect students' willingness to engage in palliative care practices. For instance, if students perceive palliative care as a rewarding and essential aspect of nursing, their attitudes are likely to be more favorable, enhancing their commitment to learning and

applying palliative care principles. Understanding these attitudes will help in designing interventions to reinforce positive views and address misconceptions.

Secondly, subjective norms involve the perceived social pressures to engage or not engage in palliative care practices, influenced by the attitudes and behaviors of significant others, such as educators, peers, and healthcare professionals. This aspect of TPB will help the study assess how the attitudes and expectations of influential figures at USM shape students' views and behaviors regarding palliative care. For example, if there is a strong cultural or institutional emphasis on palliative care within the nursing program, students may be more likely to adopt positive attitudes and prioritize this area in their education and practice.

Lastly, perceived behavioral control pertains to the students' perceptions of their ability to perform palliative care tasks, influenced by their confidence in their skills, knowledge, and available resources. This factor is crucial for understanding barriers that may hinder students from engaging effectively in palliative care. By evaluating perceived behavioral control, the study can identify areas where students feel underprepared or unsupported, thus highlighting the need for targeted educational support and resources. Enhancing students' perceived control over their ability to provide palliative care can lead to greater confidence and competence in this critical area of nursing practice.

In summary, the TPB will help unravel the intricate relationships between attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control, allowing the study to pinpoint specific factors that influence nursing students' knowledge and attitudes toward palliative care. This insight is essential for developing focused educational strategies that can improve palliative care competencies and attitudes among USM nursing students, ultimately leading to better patient care outcomes.



**FIGURE 2. 2:** Theoretical Framework of the Study Adapted from Theory of Planned Behavior  
 [Source(Ajzen, 1991)]

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

This chapter will explain the approach and rationale used to support the chosen research methodology. Determining and understanding an appropriate research design is crucial for achieving the aims of the study. The chapter begins with a description of a cross-sectional design and a justification for choosing to use this approach. The section is followed by a description of the study setting, population, participant selection criteria, sampling plan, and instrumentation, including ethical considerations right through data collection methods. This chapter will also involve a section explaining the proposed statistical analyses used with the quantitative data.

#### **3.1 Research Design**

The research design selected for this study is a cross-sectional study using a questionnaire. This helps to assess the level of knowledge and attitude towards palliative care among undergraduate nursing students at Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM). This method was chosen because it's flexible and covers a lot of different topics. The advantages of a cross-sectional study include that it is not costly to perform, does not require a lot of time, and can be carried out at a one-time point or over a short period (Setia, 2016).

#### **3.2 Study Setting and Population**

The goal of this study is to find out the level of knowledge and attitude of undergraduate nursing students in palliative care. To do this, this research will be conducted at the Health Campus of Universiti Sains Malaysia in Kubang Kerian.

The goal of this study is to find out the knowledge and attitude of undergraduate nursing students toward palliative care. At USM, they offer two types of nursing

programs: one leads to a degree, and the other leads to a diploma. These programs have different sets of courses and content. Diploma students begin their palliative care course in the first semester of their first year, whereas degree students commence these courses in the first semester of their third year. The study population for this study was nursing students at USM (diploma year 2, diploma year 3, degree year 3, and degree year 4). First-year Diploma in Nursing and Degree in Nursing students were excluded as they are still fresh and not fully immersed in the nursing course (Dimoula et al., 2019)). The total number of nursing students is 167. The population meets the study selection criteria

### **3.3 Sampling Plan**

#### **3.3.1 Sample Criteria**

When conducting a research study, certain inclusion and exclusion were considered in selecting an eligible participant from the population.

##### a) Inclusion

Subjects were selected as participants as follows:

- Nursing students from year two, and year three in diploma of nursing and from year three and year four in degree in nursing will be chosen. (This is because they had completely learned about the Palliative Care in Nursing course. Also, they have been exposed to the clinical training areas at Hospital Universiti Sains Malaysia).

##### b) Exclusion criteria

Subjects were not selected as participants as follows:

- Diploma in Renal Nursing
- Postgraduate students of the Nursing program