

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Digital Nursing: A SWOT Analysis of "Internet Plus Nursing Services" in China

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Keywords: SWOT analysis; Internet Plus Nursing Services; nursing care; review

ABSTRACT

Objective: Against the backdrop of China's aging population and the "Healthy China Strategy", promoting the reform of the nursing industry is becoming increasingly important. The "Internet + Nursing Service" model is becoming a new trend. This study aims to provide a reference for the high-quality development of "Internet + Nursing Service"..

Method: Utilize the SWOT analysis method to deeply understand and analyze the advantages and disadvantages, current development status, and existing policy issues of the "Internet + Nursing Service" model in China. And relevant targeted suggestions and proactive countermeasures were put forward.

Result: "Internet + Nursing services" has become a new trend in the development of nursing.

Conclusion: Currently, the "Internet + Nursing Service" model in China not only has the advantages of breaking the industry barriers of traditional nursing, extending the radius of nursing services, and meeting diverse and multi-level health needs, but also can encourage nurses to utilize their spare time, give full play to their skills, and serve the society more. It not only reflects professional advantages, but also demonstrates the autonomy and flexibility of services. However, there are also deficiencies such as a shortage of nursing human resources and the elderly's lack of access to networks. Only by constantly playing to strengths and making up for weaknesses and improving the management system can "Internet + Nursing services" achieve better development.

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What do we already know about this topic?

Through analysis, the advantages and disadvantages, current development status and existing policy problems of the "Internet + Nursing Service" model in China are discovered. China should break through the industry barriers of traditional nursing, extend the radius of nursing services, and take advantage of the diverse and multi-level health needs. This will encourage nurses to make use of their spare time, leverage their skills, and serve the society more, demonstrating the autonomy and flexibility of services. Only by constantly playing to strengths and making up for weaknesses and improving the management system can "Internet + Nursing services" achieve better development.

What is the main contribution to Evidence-Based Practice from this article?

To enable medical staff and the national level to have a clearer understanding of the current social nursing needs, thereby promoting the integration of the Internet into clinical nursing work, facilitating the training of intelligent nursing services, enhancing the quality of nursing services, and promoting overall health.

What are this research's implications towards health policy?

The state should promote the development of "Internet + nursing services" in regions, and diversify the forms of online platforms, such as mobile apps, wechat mini-programs or official accounts, etc. We provided patients with a range of care services, including intravenous infusion, nebulized inhalation, wound care, stoma care, and PICC catheter maintenance. Establish more public hospitals, strictly train nurses, and reduce potential safety hazards.

Authors' Contributions Statement:

W.Y and C.SN made significant contributions to the relevant concepts and explanations. W.Y and X.X.M. draft articles or critically revise important intellectual content; W.Y. and Q.X.J assisted with interpretation and manuscript editing. X.X.M finally approved the version to be published.

Introduction

"Internet Plus Nursing Services" refers to nursing services provided by registered nurses from medical institutions, leveraging information technologies such as the internet, primarily through an "online application and offline service" model, targeting discharged patients or individuals with mobility limitations due to illness. Currently, China's "Internet Plus Nursing Services" remains in its early stage, with its service system still requiring improvement and broader implementation. SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) is an acronym for a strategic analysis tool first proposed by American management scholars. It evaluates internal and external environmental factors to develop systematic approaches and support decision-making. Initially applied in strategic management, it has been widely adopted in healthcare management in recent years (Huang, Y., Zeng, C., & Jin, Y, 2010). This study employs SWOT analysis to evaluate the current landscape of "Internet Plus Nursing Services" in China, aiming to provide insights

for its high-quality development.

1. Research Background and Development Status of "Internet + Nursing Services"

On February 12, 2019, the National Health Commission of the People's Republic of China issued the Notice on Carrying Out Pilot Projects of "Internet + Nursing Services" and the Pilot Work Plan for "Internet + Nursing Services". Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, and Guangdong were listed as pilot areas (General Office of the National Health Commission., 2019). In 2021, the results of the seventh national population census in China showed that the population aged 60 and above had reached 264 million, accounting for 18.7% of the total population (National Bureau of Statistics, 2021); there were about 150 million people with chronic diseases, accounting for 65% of the total elderly population. There were about 42 million disabled or semi-disabled elderly people, among whom about 10 million were completely disabled (Hu, J., Wang, T., & Zhang,

Y, 2020). It is predicted that from 2015 to 2050, the total number of the elderly population in China will continue to increase, and by 2050, China will become a super - aged country (Chen, Y., Liu, Z., Li, X., & Huang, Y, 2018). The aging society has a huge rigid demand for services such as medical care, nursing, rehabilitation, and daily living assistance. Highly efficient, all - around, and full - cycle nursing services are urgently needed. In 2019, the industry scale of China's "Internet + Nursing Services" market was approximately 2.96 billion yuan, accounting for 5.7% of the Internet medical market. The combination of "Internet +" and nursing services will better meet the health needs of the people and contribute to the development of hospital extended nursing services, community - based home - based elderly care undertakings, etc.

Currently, multiple regions in China have implemented "Internet Plus Nursing Services," with diverse platform formats including mobile apps, WeChat mini-programs, and official accounts. Examples include Guangdong's "U Care", Henan's "Nurse Home", Jiangsu's "Qinhuai Online Nursing", and the WeChat official account of Wuhan Central Hospital. These platforms offer services such as intravenous infusion, nebulization, wound care, stoma management, and PICC catheter maintenance (Liu, Q., Sun, H., Yu, S., Zou, L., & Ai, Z, 2022). Service models are categorized into private and public sectors. Most private providers lack formal hospital affiliations, leading to lax nurse qualification verification and raising safety concerns (Huang, Y., Yuan, C., Song, X., Li, W., Wang, Z., & Yang, N, 2020).

2. SWOT Analysis of "Internet + Nursing Services"

2.1 Strength

2.1.1 Patient side

The "Internet + Nursing Services" breaks

through the traditional industry barriers in nursing, extends the service radius of nursing, and provides the public with convenient and high - quality medical and nursing services. It can provide nursing care for discharged patients or special groups with limited mobility, meeting diverse and multi - level health needs. It also offers health education related to diseases to patients or their families and imparts professional nursing knowledge and skills in person.

Relevant studies have shown that 82.7% of patients are willing to participate in the experience of "Internet + Nursing Services". They believe that nurse home visits can relieve the burden on family members, reduce the medical burden on patients with chronic diseases, cut down the time spent queuing at hospitals, solve the travel problems of the elderly and children, alleviate the pressure on hospital outpatient services, and enhance patients' loyalty to hospitals and their sense of service acquisition, thereby improving the quality of life (Xie, F., Lin, F., & Gan, T, 2020; Chen, J., Yu, Q., & Qi, R, 2019).

2.1.2 Nurse side

Nurses utilize their spare time to give full play to their expertise, serving the society to a greater extent. This not only reflects their professional advantages but also demonstrates the autonomy and flexibility of their services. The "Internet + Nursing Services" has expanded the scope and geographical area of nursing practice. It promotes nurses to continuously improve themselves, offers promising career prospects, and paves a new way for the professional development of the nursing specialty (Li, X., Qin, Y., Hu, W., Liu, Z., & Shi, Z, 2019). Through the "Internet + Nursing Services" model, more practical work opportunities are provided for nursing staff, creating a platform to transform their professional skills into economic benefits.

While increasing their reasonable income, it helps them enhance their working ability, adaptability, and social communication skills. This model enables nursing staff to fully tap into their potential, promotes the improvement of their professional qualities, facilitates the rational allocation of high - quality nursing resources. Moreover, it not only increases the economic income of nursing staff but also enhances their professional well – being (Li, Y, 2018). Survey research indicates that nurses who have participated in "Internet + Nursing Services" exhibit higher intentions to continue their profession, greater self-efficacy, and enhanced sense of achievement. Meanwhile, they experience relatively lower levels of emotional exhaustion. This also provides a new pathway for the expansion of the scope and regional coverage of professional nursing work(Ren, A., Pan, S., Deng, H., Wang, Y., Luo, J., & Li, X,2020).A study (Zhong, Y., Lin, Q., Wang, L., Zheng, D., & Fu, G,2020) shows that 76.7% of nurses hold a positive attitude towards "Internet + Nursing Services" and believe that participating in such services is conducive to improving their abilities in independent decision - making, active learning and communication.

2.1.3 Others

The new nursing model of "Internet + nursing service" has little influence on others (such as managers and nursing staff), and has no obvious advantages.

2.2 Weakness

2.2.1 Shortage of nursing human resources.

As of 2018, the number of registered nurses in China was only 4.09 million, while the number of inpatients reached as high as 250 million (National Bureau of Statistics, 2019). Due to the shortage of nursing resources, heavy workloads for nurses, low professional identity, and family - related factors, the nurse turnover rate has been increasing, which has,

to some extent, exacerbated this phenomenon(Liu, X., Wang, Y., & Wang, F.,2011).Research by Yan Yongyang et al(Yan, Y., Deng, J., & Sun, H,2020)shows that most patients tend to choose nurses with longer working years to provide "Internet + Nursing Services" when placing orders. However, in China, only 52.6% of nurses have a nursing tenure of five years or more, resulting in an insufficient number of nursing staff to participate in "Internet + Nursing Services". A study by Huang et al(Huang, R. D., Xu, M., Li, X. T., Wang, Y. P., Wang, B., & Cui, N. X,2020). Reveals that 40% of nurses are reluctant to sacrifice their personal time for home visits. The reasons include a large number of outpatients in hospitals, heavy daily workloads, and limited energy.

2.2.2 The elderly lack proficiency in using the Internet.

The "Internet + Nursing Services" relies on the Internet. Users can apply for the required nursing services online, and the operation needs to be carried out via smart terminals such as mobile phones and tablets. The elderly have the highest demand for home - based nursing services. However, most of this group are not very familiar with the operation of smart devices, which brings certain inconveniences to some service recipients to a certain extent.

2.3 Opportunity

2.3.1 Policy Support

In March 2015, Premier Li Keqiang elevated the "Internet Plus" initiative to a national strategic level for the first time(Resolution of the Third Session of the 12th National People's Congress on the Government Work Report,2015)In April 2017, the Beijing Municipal Health Commission collaborated with multiple departments to include the service fees generated by nurses' home visits into the category of medical insurance reimbursements(Jing, T., Yang, S., &

Xie, T,2016). In July 2018, the National Health Commission (NHC) put forward in the Guidance on Promoting the Reform and Development of the Nursing Service Industry that information technology should be leveraged to advance the construction of nursing informatization and innovate the supply model of nursing services (National Health Commission,2018).In October of the same year, the Shandong Provincial Nursing Association changed the practice registration location of nursing staff to Shandong Province, providing policy support for the implementation of "multi - point practice" and "shared nursing"(Yu, S., Sun, H., Liu, L., Li, F., & Liu, Q,2018). To respond to the requirements of the Healthy China Strategy and relevant documents, in February 2019, the National Health Commission (NHC) issued the Pilot Work Plan for "Internet + Nursing Services". The plan aims to provide home-based nursing services for the elderly who are disabled, suffering from chronic diseases, of advanced age, physically handicapped, or facing practical difficulties in mobility (General Office of the National Health Commission, 2019). It makes detailed provisions regarding the content and forms of home-based services, with the goal of forming replicable and scalable pilot experiences to contribute to the development of the "Internet + Nursing Services" cause in China. In September 2021, the State Council proposed in the 14th Five-Year Plan for National Medical Security to extend medical insurance management and service to "Internet + Medical Health" and improve the medical insurance policy system (General Office of the State Council., 2021). In October of the same year, the Notice on Issuing the Action Plan for Promoting the High-Quality Development of Public Hospitals (2021 - 2025) was released. It proposed to build a "trinity" smart hospital and develop a

smart hospital information system featuring "electronic medical records, intelligent services, and intelligent management". In 2022, the National Health Commission issued the Notice on the National Nursing Development Plan (2021 - 2025) and the Notice on the 14th Five-Year Plan for the Development of the National Aging Undertaking and the Construction of the Elderly Service System. These documents pointed out the new situation faced by the development of the nursing profession during the 14th Five-Year Plan period. It is necessary to actively respond to the new tasks posed by population aging for the development of the nursing profession. It was once again proposed to develop "Internet + Nursing Services" into an intelligent integrated medical and elderly care service targeting home - based, community, and institutional settings (The State Council, 2022), so as to improve the comprehensive quality of elderly care services. The policy support and the attention from leaders will drive the "Internet + Nursing Services" industry in China to enter a new upsurge.

2.3.2 There is a huge user demand

The China Population and Development Research Center predicts that from 2020 to 2035, the elderly population in China will increase significantly. By 2035, the elderly population will reach 326 million, accounting for 22.8% (Dong, R., Tian, X., & Qiu, B., 2021). By 2050, the elderly population will exceed 400 million, and China will join the ranks of countries with the most severe aging population in the world (Zhu, T,2020).Under the huge demand of the nursing market, the "Internet + Nursing services" nursing model fully meets the needs of home-based nursing services for the elderly in China. It is undoubtedly the best choice for home-based patients. It satisfies the medical, rehabilitation, nursing and other health and wellness needs of

different types of patients and is bound to become a rigid demand in the aging era.

2.4 Threat

2.4.1 Deficient system

Since "Internet + Nursing Services" in China is still in the exploratory stage, there are currently no policies to standardly define the scope of nursing practice and service content. In addition, there is a lack of standardized industry standards, effective supervision mechanisms, and a sound quality control system to ensure the quality of home-based nursing services (Chen, Q., & Li, W, 2020). These are all challenges faced by the development of "Internet + Nursing Services". In China, home-based services have not formed regional linkages, resulting in a limited service coverage, with only a few regions carrying out "Internet + Nursing Services". Both nurses and patients are not proficient in using Internet technology and lack professional nursing technical support. Moreover, the handling of medical waste related to home visits is inconvenient and difficult to supervise. Additionally, the demand connection between third-party platforms and institutions is not smooth. All these issues will restrict the development of "Internet + Nursing Services" in China to a certain extent. In China, existing laws stipulate a "practice location" for medical acts, which is specifically defined as a "medical institution". Research findings indicate that the current Nurse Regulations in China have numerous issues. Moreover, registered nurses are restricted to fixed practice locations, and the procedures for changing their registration are cumbersome, thereby restricting the mobility of nursing talents (Zhao, J., Li, Z., Yin, M., & Li, Y, 2017). Providing home - based nursing services involves a change of the practice location. Although such a change is recognized by hospitals, Internet platforms (either the hospital's own platform or third -

party platforms authorized by the hospital), it is not permitted from a legal perspective and does not receive legal protection.

2.4.2 Safety Issues of Nurses and Patients

The "Internet + Nursing Services" pose varying degrees of safety risks to both patients and nurses to some extent. Unlike nursing services in medical institutions, which are supported by complete facilities, equipment, and teams, the locations, timings, and recipients of online - ordered nursing services are full of uncertainties.

Due to the variability in the home - visit service environment and service content, emergency plans lack universal applicability. Since nurses usually provide home - visit services at patients' homes, a series of factors can easily lead to patients' emotional agitation, medical disputes, and increased risks of physical harm to nursing staff. These factors include low - level nursing qualifications, insufficient home - visit experience, substandard hygiene and disinfection, lack of emergency rescue equipment during the service, failure to meet patients' service requirements, and poor nurse - patient communication (Chen, S., Ding, Y., Zhu, W., & Wang, F, 2021; Liu, W., Wu, C., & Sun, W, 2021). The development of "Internet + Nursing Services" relies on Internet technology. As a new - type information exchange platform, once the website is attacked, there is a risk of leakage of medical information and privacy of both nurses and patients. Therefore, the importance of network security should be enhanced, management efforts should be strengthened to ensure the information security of both parties.

3 Discussion

3.1 It is recommended to establish standards and improve laws

Strictly regulate the access to the "Internet + Nursing Services" industry and further

standardize the market of "Internet + Nursing Services". Nursing staff included in the platform should possess relevant qualifications, pass assessments before taking up their posts, and work in accordance with established professional conduct standards. Wei Xiaofan et al have developed a capability assessment scale suitable for home nurses in China, which includes practical home care ability, self-protection ability, communication and coordination ability, critical thinking ability, management ability and professional development ability, to strengthen pre-job training and assessment for home nurses (Wei X F ,Yang H X, Zhou J& Li Y, 2021) .Accelerate the advancement and revision of the Nurse Regulations, clarify the scope of nursing practice, and break through the restrictions on multi - point practice policies for nurses. Legal frameworks and hospitals need to provide legal support for nurses' home - based nursing services to ensure that "Internet + Nursing Services" are legally compliant. Draw on practical experience to formulate rigorous and feasible implementation plans for "Internet + Nursing Services", and continuously refine the relevant management systems and service specifications.

3.2 Ensure the safety measures for both parties involved

Establish and improve the information security system for "Internet + Nursing Services". Pilot medical institutions can independently develop Internet information technology platforms or cooperate with qualified third - party information technology platforms. Internet information technology platforms should be equipped with facilities, information technology, technical personnel, and information security systems, and be assessed by network supervision departments and health authorities. The platforms for "Internet +

Nursing Services" should be operated by the Internet hospitals of secondary and tertiary hospitals or third - party platforms recognized by health departments at or above the municipal level.

Establish a safety guarantee system for nurses. Utilize information technology and other means to safeguard the personal safety of nurses during their practice. Provide nurses with positioning and tracking systems, equip them with nursing work devices, and establish electronic safety fences for service monitoring. Implement identity recognition and authentication for both nurses and patients, and obtain the support and cooperation of public security departments to ensure personal safety.

The Internet platform and home - visiting nurses may jointly purchase insurance in certain proportions. The insurance types include comprehensive accidental injury insurance, third - party liability insurance, and medical malpractice insurance for home - visiting nursing services.

Establish and improve various supervision systems for "Internet + Nursing Services". Conduct strict qualification reviews and competency assessments of nurses providing home - visiting services. Enhance the professional skills of nursing staff in dealing with common diseases among residents, as well as their home - based nursing service capabilities. Cultivate their abilities in emergency treatment and crisis management during home - visiting nursing services, and improve nurses' overall quality and service levels. Internet platforms should establish a collaborative consultation and joint nursing model involving multiple disciplines and specialties. Given that elderly patients often suffer from multiple concurrent diseases and require specialized nursing care from different fields, such a model can leverage the

advantages of each discipline and specialty to provide comprehensive nursing care. At the same time, make use of the advantages of medical consortiums and community health centers in terms of layout, human resources, and material resources to build a multi - level interconnected "Internet + Nursing Services" system. Encourage social organizations and volunteers to participate in "Internet + Nursing Services" to promote the integration of medical care and elderly care. For medical waste generated in "Internet + Nursing Services", recycle and dispose of it in accordance with the requirements of the Regulations on the Management of Medical Waste, the Measures for the Administration of Medical Waste in Medical and Health Institutions, and relevant supporting documents. Develop a medical waste treatment process, appoint dedicated personnel to regularly inspect and guide the classification, collection, transportation, and other work related to medical waste, and make emergency response plans for the loss of medical waste and accidental incidents.

4 Conclusion

Under the impetus of China's national conditions and government policies, we should comprehensively promote the high-quality development of the nursing industry, focusing on the health of the entire population and covering the entire life cycle. "Internet + Nursing Services" is a new model of nursing services, full of innovation and requiring continuous exploration. It is a good opportunity to enhance the professional value of nurses. This nursing model has broken through the barriers of the traditional nursing industry, allowing patients at home to enjoy high-quality and convenient nursing services. It can promote the optimal integration of medical resources and enhance nurses' sense of professional belonging and identity. The application of "Internet + Nursing services" in the medical field is long-term and gradual. In the future, the supervision of "Internet + nursing services" will also shift to a "new normal". Nursing staff should take advantage of the situation to promote the vigorous development of the nursing industry while meeting the needs of patients.

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