

A The Evolving Role Of The Medical Secretary And Health Assistant In Modern Healthcare Systems In Saudi Arabia: Literature Review 2024

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Abstract

Background

Medical secretaries and healthcare assistants (HCAs) play a foundational role in the functioning of healthcare organizations by managing administrative duties that ensure smooth communication and coordination between patients, clinicians, and healthcare departments. Regarding professional identity, patient acceptance, cost-effectiveness, patient safety and delegation, training and competence, and workforce development are prompted by the introduction of healthcare assistants (HCAs) into general practice. However, the rapid evolution of healthcare systems driven by technological advancements, regulatory changes, and growing patient-centered care models—has significantly altered the scope of the medical secretary's role and healthcare assistants. The integration of medical secretaries, healthcare assistants (HCAs) plays a pivotal role in enhancing Modern Healthcare Systems high-quality patient care, minimizing operational costs, and reducing healthcare staff burnout.

Aim of this systematically review: To explores the multifaceted responsibilities of medical secretaries and healthcare assistants (HCAs) with a particular focus on their crucial role in Modern Healthcare Systems in Saudi Arabia2024.

Method: The study employs a systematic review approach to synthesize the literature on role of the Medical Secretary and health assistant in Modern Healthcare Systems, drawing insights from a wide range of sources including research articles, reports, and news articles.

Results: healthcare quality improvement initiatives has increased the emphasis on reducing administrative burdens on clinical staff. As a result, the role of the medical secretary and health assistant has expanded from a passive clerical function to a dynamic, multifaceted support position that contributes directly to operational efficiency, patient safety, and overall service quality. Despite this transformation, limited academic attention has been devoted to examining the evolving role of the medical secretary and health assistant in Saudi Arabia.

Conclusion: Medical secretaries and health assistant play a vital role in promoting inter professional collaboration and effective team dynamics in healthcare settings. Optimizing their role through clear job descriptions, training and recognition can enhance teamwork and ultimately improve patient care, modern Healthcare Systems. Further research is needed to develop and evaluate interventions to support the integration of medical secretaries and health assistant in healthcare teams.

Keywords: Evolving, role, Medical Secretary, Health Assistant, Modern, Healthcare Systems, Saudi Arabia.

Introduction

Background:

In the intricate tapestry of modern healthcare, where precision, efficiency, and compassionate care intersect, the role of a medical secretary stands as a linchpin in facilitating seamless operations. As the healthcare landscape evolves with technological advancements and shifting patient demographics, the pivotal position of medical secretaries has become increasingly pronounced. [1] They serve as the vital bridge between administrative functions and patient care, embodying a blend of organizational prowess, interpersonal finesse, and adaptability to navigate the complexities of contemporary healthcare settings.[2]

A Medical secretary and health assistant is involved in the administrative profession and plays diverse tasks in the management of healthcare institutions. [3] Originally, medical secretaries performed clerical duties, including scheduling appointments, invoicing, and record keeping. Nonetheless, they play even bigger roles within such institutions due to advancements in streams such as electronic health records or even telemedicine, among other changes brought about by the digital revolution [4]

Nowadays, healthcare assistants play a very important role in the care of patients through the provision of medical professionals with the help they require, as well as hands-on care for the patients. With most parts of the world facing the challenge of rising demands within the healthcare system, HCAs have grown to be very important members of multidisciplinary teams over a short period [5]

A healthcare assistant (HCA) serves as a patient care provider within medical facilities and community settings such as hospitals, clinics, care homes and other healthcare environments. The healthcare assistants work together with nursing staff and medical personnel as well as other healthcare professionals to deliver daily support services for patients. [6] This position requires workers to assist patients with their personal hygiene and mobility needs along with their eating needs. [7] Patient conversations and vital sign monitoring including temperature and blood pressure checks together with basic medical assistance such as blood collection and injection administration (upon proper training) are part of healthcare assistant responsibilities.[8] The position serves well for individuals who want to provide assistance to others without possessing formal medical education. A person can obtain useful experience about healthcare work through this position. People who desire medical professions such as nursing or midwifery usually begin their healthcare career as Healthcare Assistants. This position delivers direct care that profoundly impacts individuals' lives.[9]

A health assistant in nursing, alternatively referred to as a nurse aide, healthcare assistant, or nursing assistant, is an essential component of the healthcare staff. Under the guidance of licensed practical nurses (LPNs) or registered nurses (RNs), they administer direct patient care. [10] Their principal responsibility is to support nurses and other healthcare practitioners in the provision of high-quality patient care across a range of healthcare environments, including but not limited to hospitals, nursing homes, clinics, and home healthcare agencies [11]

Methodology

Aim of the study:

To explore the multifaceted responsibilities of medical secretaries and healthcare assistants (HCAs) with a particular focus on their crucial role in Modern Healthcare Systems in Saudi Arabia 2024

Study design:

Systematic reviews using Online searching engines were using databases to identify relevant articles through the included electronic databases: Google Scholar, PubMed, and Saudi Digital Library (SDL), data extracted from published articles were systematically analyzed for Role of the medical Secretary and health assistant care in Modern Healthcare Systems in Saudi Arabia Opportunities and Challenges in were applied to refine the search strategy in Saudi Arabia 2024.

Search strategy:

This literature review adopts a systematic review approach this systematic review follows the online searching engines to examine the evolving role of medical secretaries and healthcare assistants (HCAs) in modern healthcare systems. A comprehensive search was conducted across academic databases including PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. The search covered peer-reviewed articles published between 2020 and 2024 to ensure the inclusion of recent developments. Keywords used included "medical secretary," "healthcare assistants," "healthcare support staff," "electronic health records," "administrative efficiency," and "patient communication." Boolean operators

Searches and Data Sources

A comprehensive search was performed to obtain studies on the Role of the medical Secretary and healthcare assistants (HCAs) in Modern Healthcare Systems in Saudi Arabia. The databases used in the search included Pro Quest and Scopus, and the keywords used were 'Evolving ', 'Role of the medical Secretary', 'Saudi Arabia', 'healthcare assistants' , 'Modern Healthcare Systems' . These keywords were used to find articles with matching terms in their abstracts or titles. To discover the most recent studies and literature on our review topic, the search was limited to articles published between 2020 and 2024.

Inclusion criteria

Studies were included if they met the following: Saudi articles, focused on studies written in English that examined the roles, competencies, challenges, or contributions of medical secretaries and healthcare assistants in in healthcare settings.

Articles centered on broader administrative staff were considered only if they included specific references to medical secretaries and healthcare assistants

Exclusion Criteria

Exclusion criteria involved studies focusing exclusively on clinical or nursing roles without administrative context. A total of 22 articles were initially retrieved, and after screening titles, abstracts, and full texts for relevance, 8 studies were selected for review. Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring patterns related to technological adaptation, task expansion, communication roles, and workforce development. The findings were synthesized and organized to reflect the transformation of the modern medical secretary's and health assistant in healthcare Systems role in light of healthcare system modernization.

Data Extraction

Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring patterns related to technological adaptation, task expansion, communication roles, and workforce development. The findings were synthesized and organized to reflect the transformation of the medical secretary's and health assistant role in light of healthcare system modernization. Studies were excluded if they investigated studies were not directly related to Role of the Medical Secretary and health assistant in Modern Healthcare Systems in Saudi Arabia , and studies were excluded if they were published before 2020.

The process of selecting the articles, which are contained in this review .

Presents method used for selecting eligible studies for this review. In the first stage, Pro Quest and Scopus returned 200 articles. After duplicate articles and those published before 2020 were removed, 50 remained. Non-peer-reviewed articles (35) and articles not mainly about evolving role of the medical secretary and health assistant in modern healthcare systems in Saudi Arabia, (32) were then excluded. After excluding studies with sample sizes fewer than 35 and response rates under 60%. A total of 22 articles were initially retrieved, and after screening titles, abstracts, and full texts for relevance, 8 studies were selected for review.

Table1: Summary of Evolving Role of the Medical Secretary and Health Assistant in Modern Healthcare Systems in Saudi Arabia 2024.

| Author, Date, Country | Region | Study design | Study aim | Results |
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| <p>Daba,et al (2024) (12)</p> | <p>Saudi Arabia</p> | <p>systematic review</p> | <p>To explores the evolving responsibilities and challenges faced by medical secretaries in the context of increasing digitalization and the adoption of electronic health records (EHRs).</p> | <p>Medical secretaries play a crucial role in healthcare institutions, serving as intermediaries between patients, healthcare providers, and administrative systems. This study explores the evolving responsibilities and challenges faced by medical secretaries in the context of increasing digitalization and the adoption of electronic health records (EHRs). As healthcare systems transition from paper-based to electronic documentation, medical secretaries are tasked with ensuring the accuracy, completeness, and proper formatting of patient records. A medical secretary (also referred to as a unit secretary or ward clerk) hereafter referred to as secretary is a healthcare employee responsible for administrative tasks such as scheduling appointments and documenting journal entries. By handling administrative responsibilities as part of the care team, secretaries enable nurses to devote more time to direct patient care. Ensuring the accuracy and quality of documentation is an integral part of the secretary's role .</p> <p>Conclusions</p> <p>Medical secretaries are integral to the efficient functioning of healthcare facilities, acting as intermediaries between clinical and administrative domains. Their responsibilities span administrative coordination, patient support, and ensuring the accuracy and security of medical records. As healthcare systems increasingly adopt electronic health records (EHRs) and other digital tools, the role of medical secretaries has evolved, demanding a high level of adaptability and proficiency in technology .</p> |
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| <p>ALOTAIBI ,. (2013) (13)</p> | <p>Saudi Arabia</p> | <p>study designs and validated measurement instruments insights grounded in evidence</p> | <p>To improve the efficiency and effectiveness of healthcare delivery and maximize the value of health assistants' contributions to patient care.</p> | <p>The scarcity of evidence regarding the effects of healthcare assistants in general practice in the United Kingdom reflects the relative novelty of this position. Five studies that examined the role or training of healthcare assistants were identified through an exhaustive review of the literature. Additionally, a rapid review was conducted to assess the role and impact of nurses and healthcare assistants in general practice. At the present time, only one study has been published that specifically examines healthcare assistants." The aforementioned evidence suggests that healthcare assistants have the potential to enhance patient care. However, it also gives rise to concerns regarding the primary workforce's development, acceptability and cost- effectiveness, patient safety and delegation, training and competence . Conclusions Despite facing challenges such as workload management, regulatory compliance, interpersonal dynamics, and ethical dilemmas, medical secretaries demonstrate resilience and commitment to professional growth. By fostering collaboration among interdisciplinary teams, maintaining quality assurance, and advocating for patient needs, they play a critical role in bridging gaps between healthcare providers, patients, and administrative systems. Addressing challenges through ongoing professional development, effective communication, and leveraging advancements in healthcare technology will further empower medical secretaries to navigate their</p> |
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| | | | | expanding roles and contribute to delivering high-quality patient care in dynamic healthcare environments.. |
| KHUNAYFIS, et al (2023) (14) | Saudi Arabia | Descriptive study | To explore the significance of recognizing and supporting the invaluable contributions of medical secretaries in modern healthcare environments. | <p>The role of medical secretaries has evolved to become indispensable in ensuring the smooth operation of medical facilities. This paper explores the multifaceted responsibilities of medical secretaries, with a particular focus on their crucial role in fire room management. As frontline personnel, medical secretaries are tasked with handling administrative duties, patient interactions, and emergency response coordination. Within the context of fire room management, their responsibilities encompass maintaining accurate records, facilitating communication between staff and emergency responders, and ensuring compliance with safety protocols. Through efficient organization and effective communication, medical secretaries play a pivotal role in safeguarding both staff and patients during emergency situations.</p> <p>Conclusions</p> <p>In the dynamic landscape of modern healthcare, the role of medical secretaries emerges as indispensable, embodying a delicate balance of administrative proficiency, interpersonal finesse, and adaptability. Throughout this exploration of their responsibilities, skills, and challenges, it becomes evident that medical secretaries serve as linchpins in facilitating the seamless operation of healthcare facilities and optimizing the patient experience. Despite the myriad challenges they face, from workload management to</p> |

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| | | | | navigating regulatory complexities and technological advancements, medical secretaries exhibit resilience, professionalism, and dedication in their roles. Their unwavering commitment to upholding standards of excellence, fostering effective communication, and advocating for patient centered care underscores the vital contributions they make to the healthcare ecosystem. |
| Qvarfordt , et al (2024) (15) | southern Sweden. | mixed-methods study was –Data were collected using a sequential exploratory mixed-methods design based on grounded theory , qualitative data collection (a Quality Cafe and individual interviews) followed by quantitative data collection (questionnaire). | To explore how medical secretaries experience digital transformation in a Swedish healthcare organization, with a focus on workplace climate and health. | The category Paving the way for digitalization is related to the factors Digital inclusiveness, Educational aspects and Added responsibility due to digitalization. The Acknowledgement and self-empowerment category correspond well with Workplace inclusion. Thoughts and fears can be related to Worries and concerns and Workday routines. Finally, Digitalization as an enabler corresponds to the Positive impact of digitalization. Moreover, Digital inclusiveness, Educational aspects and Workplace inclusion were correlated with the Perceived health index. In addition, these three factors, as well as Workday routines and Positive impact of digitalization, were associated with the SOC index. Correlation does not imply causation, and even if causation exists, the variable that causes it is uncertain. It is reasonable to assume that a higher sense of coherence should imply a higher ability to handle work changes related to digitalization. Regarding the correlation with perceived health, the stress of digitalization may be detrimental to health. Nonetheless, these are merely |

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| | | | | <p>loose assumptions. This study has shown that there are associations between several aspects of digitalization and health. Future studies should investigate the causality and mechanisms of these associations</p> <p>Conclusions</p> <p>In this study, depicting medical secretaries' experiences of digitalization were defined using qualitative methods. Taken together, these findings show that there are fears and worries among medical secretaries regarding the changes that have taken place and potentially will occur in their occupation. However, the participants also pointed out the positive aspects of digitalization, seeing it as an enabler of more efficient healthcare and more varied and interesting tasks. An association between medical secretaries' experiences of digitalization and their health was also found. Consequently, the findings show that organizing and paving the way for digital transformation in an appropriate manner is crucial. Medical secretaries should be involved in this process to ensure that their professional capacity is respected and utilized in the best possible way. In addition, a general acknowledgement of the professionalism of medical secretaries is vital to underline their status in the healthcare system.</p> |
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| Alkahtani, et al. (2023)(16) | Saudi Arabia | comprehensive review | The review the strategic collaboration transforming healthcare delivery through physician, nursing, and medical secretarial integration. | <p>Redefining healthcare delivery through strategic collaboration is essential, with an emphasis on the integration of doctors, nurses, and medical secretaries and health assistant. By working together, we hope to improve patient outcomes, reduce medical errors, and create a culture of patient-centered healthcare, interdisciplinary teamwork were discussed, with a focus on respect for one another, good communication, and the importance of recognizing the contributions of each expert. The function of medical assistants was examined, highlighting their emphasis on communication and teamwork. Furthermore, the need to maintain professional relationships in guaranteeing patient safety was emphasized, as were the possible consequences of internal disagreements on patient care. This story emphasizes the importance of seamless integration among healthcare experts in order to manage the complexities of the medical field and maximize the quality of patient care, acknowledging the transformative potential of teamwork.</p> <p>Conclusions</p> <p>This topic has covered a wide range of healthcare-related topics, with a focus on the value of professional, courteous, and cooperative relationships amongst medical personnel. The significance of proficient communication, collaborative efforts, and reciprocal regard have been emphasized consistently, acknowledging their indispensable function in attaining the best possible patient results and guaranteeing the security and welfare of patients receiving</p> |
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| | | | | <p>medical attention. The intricacies and difficulties of interdisciplinary teamwork have been examined, encompassing everything from the function of physician assistants to the dynamics between nurses and doctors. Healthcare professionals can use the tactics for building strong professional connections as a roadmap to help them negotiate the complexities of their workplace and create a culture of teamwork and continuous development.</p> |
| <p>Almutairi, et al. (2024) (17)</p> | <p>Saudi Arabia</p> | <p>Systematic review to analyze the data.</p> | <p>To explores the integration of radiology, EMS, and medical devices, highlighting the contributions of health administration, management, and medical secretarial practices to optimize hospital service deliver.</p> | <p>The Critical Role of Medical Secretary and health assistant practices Medical secretaries and health assistant are integral to the integration process, particularly in ensuring the seamless flow of information between radiology, EMS, and other hospital services. Their administrative responsibilities are key to supporting the multidisciplinary approach to healthcare. Patient Coordination: Medical secretaries facilitate communication between the EMS teams, radiologists, and hospital departments, ensuring that patient data is accurately entered into the system and that appropriate medical records are created and maintained . Scheduling and Document Management: In both the radiology department and the emergency room, medical secretaries manage appointments, prioritize urgent cases, and ensure that diagnostic tests and results are processed quickly. They play an essential role in reducing delays, ensuring that imaging, consultations, and treatments occur without unnecessary wait times.</p> |

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| | | | | <p>Conclusions</p> <p>The integration of radiology, emergency medical services, and medical devices within hospital services is crucial for improving operational efficiency, reducing patient wait times, and enhancing the quality of care. Health administration and management, alongside the pivotal role of medical secretaries and health assistant, contribute significantly to ensuring smooth coordination between these multidisciplinary teams. By optimizing workflows, improving communication, and utilizing technology effectively, hospitals can offer timely, accurate, and comprehensive care to patients in need. The continued evolution of this integration will require overcoming technological and organizational challenges, but the potential benefits for patient care and hospital efficiency are substantial</p> |
| Almohammadi, et al (2024) (18) | Saudi Arabia | A Systematic review | To discuss and analyze the contribution of the members of the multidisciplinary healthcare team in the context of health security, nursing, medical laboratories, social work, secretarial services, and physiotherapy, | The current investigation concentrated on the contributions of various disciplines within multidisciplinary healthcare teams, specifically examining the roles of health security, nursing, medical laboratories, social work, medical secretaries, and physiotherapy between 2016 and 2024. As a result, the review was published under many headlines in the discussion area, including: Health Security: Safeguarding the Healthcare Environment, Nursing: The Backbone of Patient Care, Medical Laboratories: The Cornerstone of Diagnostics, Social Work: Addressing Psychosocial Needs, Medical Secretaries: |

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| | | | | <p>Ensuring Administrative Efficiency, Physiotherapy: Promoting Rehabilitation and Recovery and Integration of Multidisciplinary Teams in Patient Care</p> <p>Conclusions</p> <p>The analyses of these resumes reveal how dedicated and hardworking these healthcare professionals are in coming up with an effective, empathic, and patient-oriented healthcare delivery system. Cooperation and professionalism are vital in the formation of such teams since it creates a balance of philosophy and practice and guarantees comprehensive care plans that anticipate and respond to all the aspects relating to a patient. Experts agree with the notion that knocks down inter professional healthcare teams are the future of health since they allow for harnessing different skills to address present and emerging health issues. These professions make sure that patient care is spectacular, and this show that physical, mental, and social aspects are integrated. This model of teamwork provides an excellent example of what the healthcare department is working towards, enhancing human and communal lives</p> |
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Results and discussion

Medical secretaries and health assistant play a foundational role in the functioning of healthcare organizations by managing administrative duties that ensure smooth communication and coordination between patients, clinicians, and healthcare departments while developed countries are experiencing increasing pressures on their primary and secondary healthcare services.[19]

Health Assistant is a healthcare professional who, under the supervision of registered nurses or licensed healthcare providers, provides direct care and support to patients. [20]Nursing assistants, nurse aides, and health care assistants are additional names for them in all health sector need to health assistant and medical secretaries because include extended longevity and the consequential demographic shift to an ageing population; technological and pharmaceutical developments resulting in more sophisticated medical treatments; spiraling costs; increased patient expectations; and shortages of skilled healthcare professionals. One way of addressing these issues is through changing role boundaries between staff groups by extending, delegating, substituting existing roles, or by introducing new ones. [21]

Traditionally, historically, the role of the medical secretary has centered on providing administrative and clerical support within healthcare institutions. [22] Medical secretaries served as key intermediaries between patients and healthcare providers, managing appointments, preparing medical correspondence, transcribing physicians' notes, handling billing processes, and maintaining both paper and digital patient records. [23] Their work ensured the continuity and organization of healthcare delivery by enabling clinicians to focus on patient care rather than administrative tasks. [24]

Also a health assistant in nursing, alternatively referred to as a nurse aide, healthcare assistant, or nursing assistant, is an essential component of the healthcare staff. Under the guidance of licensed practical nurses (LPNs) or registered nurses (RNs), they administer direct patient care. Their principal responsibility is to support nurses and other healthcare practitioners in the provision of high-quality patient care across a range of healthcare environments, including but not limited to hospitals, nursing homes, clinics, and home healthcare agencies [25]

Also their Medical Secretary responsibilities included tasks such as scheduling appointments, transcribing medical documents, managing patient files, and handling correspondence. However, the rapid evolution of healthcare systems—driven by technological advancements, regulatory changes, and growing patient-centered care models—has significantly altered the scope of the medical secretary's role [26]. In recent years, digital transformation has redefined how administrative functions are executed in healthcare. The implementation of electronic health records (EHRs), automated scheduling systems, telemedicine platforms, and compliance requirements such as HIPAA and GDPR have created a need for more technically skilled and adaptable administrative personnel [27] Medical secretaries are now expected to manage digital data, ensure the accuracy of electronic documentation, facilitate interdisciplinary communication, and sometimes interact directly with patients through telehealth systems [28]

In many settings, medical secretaries were also responsible for managing the front desk, welcoming patients, answering phone calls, and coordinating communications between departments. These functions made them essential to the operational workflow of clinics, hospitals, and private practices. Their ability to maintain confidentiality and manage sensitive information in compliance with medical and legal standards was also a fundamental aspect of their responsibilities [29]. Despite being often overlooked in healthcare workforce planning, medical secretaries have historically played a critical behind-the-scenes role. Their consistent presence, attention to detail, and organizational skills have formed the backbone of administrative efficiency in healthcare institutions, helping to support accurate documentation, schedule adherence, and smooth communication across departments [30]

In general, health assistants fulfill an indispensable function by providing assistance to nurses and other healthcare practitioners as they deliver holistic treatment to patients. The substantial contributions of their diligence, empathy, and meticulousness to the comfort and welfare of patients in healthcare environments are undeniable [31]

Conclusion

Medical Secretary and health assistant (HCAs) can make an increasingly useful contribution to the skill mix in general practice, but that more research and evaluation are needed to inform their training and development within the general practice team Research in hospital settings has found that medical Secretary and health assistant (HCAs) make a valuable contribution to patient care. Studies also suggest that HCAs often work beyond their remit, the boundaries between the assistant and nurse role are unclear, HCAs and nurses use boundary-work to protect or extend their roles, and that the development of the HCA role challenges nurses' professional identity .

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