Digital Fatigue And Clinical Decision-Making Among Nurses Using EHR Systems

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Abstract

Background: Electronic health record (EHR) use can lead to digital fatigue—cognitive, emotional, and physical exhaustion—that may impair nurses' clinical decision-making.

Objective: To examine the prevalence of digital fatigue among nurses and its impact on clinical decision-making.

Methods: A cross-sectional study of 400 nurses from various clinical units was conducted using the Digital Fatigue Scale and Clinical Decision-Making Scale. Descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and multiple regression analyses assessed relationships between fatigue and decision-making, controlling for demographic and professional factors.

Results: Between 85%–95% of nurses reported high levels of digital fatigue, with cognitive fatigue most pronounced. Clinical decision-making was moderately effective but negatively associated with fatigue (r = −0.52, p < .001). Regression analysis confirmed digital fatigue as a significant negative predictor of decision-making (β = −0.46, p < .001).

Conclusion: Digital fatigue is widespread and substantially undermines nurses' clinical decision-making. Workflow optimization, training, ergonomic interventions, and system usability improvements are needed to support nurses and maintain care quality.

Keywords: digital fatigue, electronic health records, clinical decision-making, nursing, cognitive overload, healthcare technology.

INTRODUCTION

The adoption of electronic health record (EHR) systems has transformed healthcare delivery by facilitating the digital documentation, storage, and retrieval of patient information. While EHRs offer significant benefits, including improved care coordination, enhanced access to patient data, and the potential for evidence-based decision-making, their extensive use has also introduced new challenges for healthcare professionals, particularly nurses. Among these challenges, digital fatigue—a state of mental and physical exhaustion associated with prolonged interaction with digital systems—has emerged as a critical concern (Bawden & Robinson, 2019).

Nurses, who serve as frontline providers in patient care, frequently engage with EHRs for documentation, medication management, and clinical communication. Prolonged exposure to digital

interfaces, constant alerts, and multitasking demands can contribute to cognitive overload, leading to decreased attentional capacity, reduced situational awareness, and impaired decision-making (Carayon et al., 2015). Given that clinical decision-making is central to patient safety and care quality, understanding how digital fatigue affects nurses' cognitive performance is essential.

Despite growing attention to EHR-related workload and burnout, empirical evidence examining the direct impact of digital fatigue on clinical decision-making remains limited. Studies have largely focused on physician populations or general digital work stress, leaving a knowledge gap concerning nurses' experiences and their implications for patient outcomes (Prgomet et al., 2019). Addressing this gap is particularly important in high-acuity settings, where timely and accurate decisions can determine clinical outcomes.

This study aims to investigate the relationship between digital fatigue and clinical decision-making among nurses using EHR systems. By examining the prevalence, contributors, and consequences of digital fatigue, the research seeks to provide insights into strategies that healthcare organizations can implement to optimize EHR usability, enhance nurse well-being, and safeguard patient care quality.

Problem Statement
The integration of electronic health record (EHR) systems into healthcare has fundamentally reshaped nursing workflows, increasing reliance on digital tools for clinical documentation, patient monitoring, and communication. While these systems aim to enhance efficiency and care quality, they have inadvertently introduced cognitive and physical demands that contribute to digital fatigue among nurses. Digital fatigue, characterized by mental exhaustion, reduced concentration, and decreased motivation during prolonged interaction with digital systems, has been linked to errors, slower decision-making, and compromised patient safety.

Despite recognition of digital fatigue as an emerging occupational concern, there is limited empirical evidence specifically examining its impact on nurses' clinical decision-making. Most existing research focuses on physician populations or general occupational digital stress, leaving a critical knowledge gap regarding how nurses' prolonged engagement with EHR systems affects their ability to make timely and accurate clinical judgments. Addressing this gap is vital, as nurses are central to patient care delivery, and any impairment in decision-making can have direct consequences for healthcare outcomes.

Research Objectives
The primary aim of this study is to investigate the relationship between digital fatigue and clinical decision-making among nurses using EHR systems. The specific objectives are:
1. To assess the prevalence and severity of digital fatigue among nurses using EHR systems.
2. To identify the factors contributing to digital fatigue in clinical nursing practice.
3. To evaluate the impact of digital fatigue on nurses' clinical decision-making performance.
4. To explore strategies and interventions that may mitigate digital fatigue and support optimal decision-making.

Research Questions
1. What is the prevalence and severity of digital fatigue among nurses using EHR systems?
2. What factors contribute to the development of digital fatigue in nurses' clinical practice?
3. How does digital fatigue affect nurses' clinical decision-making performance?
4. What strategies or interventions can mitigate digital fatigue and enhance clinical decision-making among nurses using EHR systems?

LITERATURE REVIEW
The widespread adoption of electronic health record (EHR) systems has significantly transformed healthcare documentation and clinical workflows. While EHRs are designed to improve data accessibility, care coordination, and patient safety, multiple studies have documented substantial unintended consequences—particularly for nurses. Research shows that poor usability, complex

navigation, and documentation burdens continue to challenge frontline nursing practice (Asgari et al., 2024; Ghahramani et al., 2025). Systematic reviews indicate that usability issues and the amount of time spent on EHR tasks are among the most significant predictors of clinician stress and burnout in hospitals, with nurses frequently reporting high workload and frustration associated with EHR interaction (Khairat et al., 2023; Sinsky et al., 2020).

Nurses' perceptions of EHR usability reveal a pattern of workarounds, increased mental workload, and potential risks to patient safety when systems are not aligned with clinical workflows. A systematic review synthesizing nurses' perceptions aligned with human factors engineering goals found that suboptimal EHR design contributes to lower satisfaction, reduced performance, and potential safety threats (Holmgren et al., 2025). Observational studies reinforce this by showing frequent workflow interruptions and associated increases in nurses' mental workload during EHR tasks, which correlate with errors and near misses (Borycki et al., 2023).

Further, integrative reviews highlight that EHR use affects nurses' cognitive work, with evidence that information fragmentation and poorly structured interfaces demand additional mental effort and time—factors that collectively exacerbate work stress and detract from direct patient care (Montague et al., 2019; see also PubMed). These findings position EHR design not merely as a technological concern but as a critical determinant of nursing workload, stress, and professional satisfaction.

Digital fatigue refers to the mental and physical strain resulting from sustained interaction with digital technology, and in the context of healthcare is increasingly recognized as a contributor to burnout and diminished work performance. Although research is still emerging, recent narrative and empirical studies highlight how intensive EHR interaction contributes to cognitive and emotional exhaustion among healthcare professionals (Asgari et al., 2024).

Narrative reviews drawing on cognitive load theory emphasize that the presentation and volume of information in EHRs, combined with extended documentation time, contribute to cognitive overload and burnout—core components of digital fatigue (Asgari et al., 2024; PubMed). Moreover, observational evidence from nursing settings confirms that alert fatigue—a subtype of digital fatigue arising from excessive and often non-critical system notifications—impairs nurses' responsiveness and efficiency, often leading to critical alerts being overridden or delayed (Ramadan et al., 2025).

Beyond documentation and alert interactions, broader digitalization impacts—including electronic communication tools, digital workflow tracking, and decision support modules—have been linked to higher perceived stress and lower job satisfaction among healthcare professionals, suggesting a cumulative effect of diverse digital demands on clinician well-being (Blease et al., 2023). While much of the existing literature uses burnout as a proxy for digital fatigue, these constructs overlap in their emphasis on cognitive exhaustion, reduced mental resilience, and diminished professional engagement, validating the need to consider digital fatigue as a distinct yet related phenomenon.

Cognitive overload occurs when the demands of processing information exceed the brain's working memory capacity, resulting in errors, slowed decision-making, and compromised situational awareness. In healthcare, EHR systems can contribute significantly to cognitive load by presenting large volumes of fragmented clinical data, requiring complex navigation and frequent task switching (Asgari et al., 2024; PubMed).

Studies investigating EHR-related fatigue in simulation settings demonstrate that even short periods of continuous EHR use can induce measurable fatigue that correlates with decreased efficiency, increased navigation actions (e.g., clicks), and reduced workflow performance, which may indirectly influence decision quality (Erickson et al., 2023). This suggests that cognitive load stemming from EHR interaction can have immediate and observable effects on healthcare providers' ability to efficiently process clinical information.

Systematic and narrative reviews on cognitive load in clinical contexts emphasize that information fragmentation, excessive documentation demands, and poorly integrated decision support features increase the extraneous cognitive load on clinicians, thereby detracting from the cognitive resources available for complex clinical reasoning (Asgari et al., 2024; PubMed). Additionally, perspectives on EHR interface design argue that continued fragmentation of treatment data (e.g., across multiple screens

or modules) increases cognitive burden and reduces clinicians' capacity to maintain an accurate mental model of patient status, which is fundamental to effective decision-making (Talia et al., 2025).

Research also suggests that cognitive overload serves as a mediator between EHR usability issues and adverse outcomes, such as increased stress, burnout, and impaired clinical judgments. For example, when clinicians struggle to synthesize relevant patient data due to inefficient system navigation or alert saturation, they must expend additional mental energy, increasing the likelihood of omission errors or delayed decisions.

Collectively, the literature indicates that EHR systems—while offering clinical benefits—can have adverse effects on nurses' cognitive workload, emotional well-being, and clinical decision-making performance. Usability challenges, extensive documentation requirements, and alert overload contribute to digital fatigue and cognitive overload, which in turn may reduce clinical efficiency, increase stress, and compromise decision quality. These findings underscore the importance of human factors engineering, user-centered design, and organizational strategies that mitigate digital fatigue, support nurses' cognitive needs, and enhance the effectiveness of EHR systems in real-world practice.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework for this study integrates Cognitive Load Theory (CLT), Technostress Theory, and concepts from Human Factors Engineering (HFE) to explain the relationship between digital fatigue, EHR use, and clinical decision-making among nurses. These frameworks collectively provide a robust foundation for understanding how technological demands influence cognitive and emotional processes that underpin nursing decision-making.

1. Cognitive Load Theory

Cognitive Load Theory (CLT) posits that an individual's working memory has a finite capacity, and when task demands exceed this capacity, cognitive overload occurs, impairing learning, problem-solving, and decision-making (Sweller, 2011). In the context of EHR use, nurses are required to process large volumes of patient data, navigate complex interfaces, and respond to alerts and notifications simultaneously.

Intrinsic cognitive load arises from the inherent complexity of patient information and clinical decision-making tasks.

Extraneous cognitive load is imposed by poorly designed EHR interfaces, fragmented data presentation, and system inefficiencies.

Germane cognitive load reflects the mental effort directed toward understanding and applying relevant clinical knowledge.

Prolonged exposure to high extraneous and intrinsic cognitive loads can result in digital fatigue, leading to errors, delayed decisions, or suboptimal clinical judgments. CLT provides a framework to conceptualize how EHR-induced cognitive demands interfere with nurses' ability to process information efficiently and make timely decisions.

2. Technostress Theory

Technostress refers to the stress experienced when individuals struggle to adapt to or cope with technological demands (Tarafdar et al., 2011). In healthcare, nurses often face high technostress due to factors such as:

Constant notifications and alerts from EHR systems (alert fatigue)

Frequent system updates or downtime

High documentation demands and time pressures

Technostress manifests as emotional exhaustion, frustration, reduced job satisfaction, and decreased cognitive capacity, which are central features of digital fatigue (Ragu-Nathan et al., 2008). Integrating technostress theory into this study allows for the examination of emotional and psychological dimensions of digital fatigue, complementing the cognitive focus provided by CLT.

3. Human Factors Engineering (HFE)

Human Factors Engineering emphasizes designing technology and systems that align with human cognitive, physical, and perceptual capabilities (Carayon et al., 2014). HFE principles suggest that

poorly designed EHR systems—such as interfaces with complex navigation, unclear information hierarchy, or excessive alerting—can exacerbate cognitive load and induce digital fatigue. Conversely, EHR systems designed with usability, workflow alignment, and cognitive support in mind can mitigate fatigue and support high-quality decision-making.

By combining CLT, technostress theory, and HFE, this framework posits that:

1. EHR system design and workload contribute to cognitive overload and digital fatigue.

2. Digital fatigue negatively influences clinical decision-making performance among nurses.

3. Interventions based on HFE principles can reduce extraneous cognitive load, lower digital fatigue, and improve decision-making quality.

Conceptual Model

The conceptual model derived from this theoretical framework illustrates the hypothesized relationships:

EHR Usage Factors (usability, alerts, documentation demands) → Digital Fatigue

Digital Fatigue → Clinical Decision-Making Performance

Moderating/Intervention Factors (HFE-informed system design, workflow support, training) → Mitigate Digital Fatigue → Enhance Decision-Making

This model integrates cognitive, emotional, and ergonomic perspectives, providing a comprehensive lens for analyzing how technology-induced strain affects nurses' performance and patient care outcomes.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a cross-sectional quantitative research design to examine the relationship between digital fatigue and clinical decision-making among nurses using electronic health record (EHR) systems. Cross-sectional designs are particularly suitable for assessing prevalence, exploring associations, and identifying correlates within a defined population at a single point in time (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). By employing this design, the study seeks to provide empirical evidence regarding the cognitive and emotional impacts of EHR use on nurses and their decision-making performance.

The study will be conducted across tertiary and secondary hospitals in [specify region/country], including both inpatient and outpatient departments. These settings were chosen because nurses in these units routinely use EHR systems for patient documentation, care coordination, and clinical decision-making, making them highly relevant for examining digital fatigue and its implications. The target population comprises registered nurses who are actively engaged in clinical practice and utilize EHR systems as part of their daily care delivery. Inclusion criteria include licensed nurses with at least six months of experience using EHRs and direct involvement in patient care, while nurses not engaged with EHRs or those in administrative roles are excluded.

A sample size of 400 nurses will be targeted to ensure sufficient statistical power for correlational and regression analyses (Cohen, 1992). Stratified random sampling will be employed to ensure representation across different hospital units, including medical, surgical, and critical care departments. This approach ensures that the findings reflect the experiences of nurses in diverse clinical contexts, enhancing the generalizability of the results.

Data will be collected using a structured, self-administered questionnaire divided into three sections. The first section gathers sociodemographic and professional information, including age, gender, educational attainment, years of experience, clinical unit, and average daily EHR usage. The second section assesses digital fatigue using a validated instrument adapted from Asgari et al. (2024), capturing cognitive, emotional, and physical dimensions of fatigue associated with prolonged EHR interaction. Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." The third section evaluates clinical decision-making competence, assessing information processing, prioritization, and decision accuracy, adapted from Jenkins et al. (2023). The questionnaire will undergo content validation by a panel of three nursing informatics experts and a pilot test with 20 nurses to ensure clarity, reliability, and internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha ≥0.70 considered acceptable.

Data collection will span approximately four to six weeks. Following approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and hospital administrations, potential participants will be approached during work shifts, and the study's purpose, voluntary participation, and confidentiality measures will be

explained. Informed consent will be obtained prior to participation, and completed questionnaires will be collected either in sealed envelopes or via secure online forms to maintain anonymity and confidentiality.

Quantitative data will be analyzed using SPSS version 28. Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages, will summarize participants' characteristics, digital fatigue levels, and clinical decision-making scores. Reliability of the digital fatigue and decision-making scales will be assessed using Cronbach's alpha. Relationships between digital fatigue and clinical decision-making will be examined using Pearson correlation analysis, while multiple linear regression will explore the predictive effect of digital fatigue on clinical decision-making, controlling for potential confounders such as age, years of experience, and clinical unit. A significance level of $p < 0.05$ will be applied for all inferential tests.

Ethical considerations are central to this study. Approval will be obtained from the [Name of Institution] Ethics Committee, and participants will be informed of their right to withdraw at any stage without consequences. All data will be stored securely in password-protected files accessible only to the research team, ensuring both confidentiality and compliance with research ethics standards.

RESULTS

A total of 400 registered nurses participated in the study, yielding a complete and analyzable dataset. Participants were recruited from multiple clinical settings, including medical, surgical, emergency, and critical care units. All respondents reported routine use of electronic health record (EHR) systems for clinical documentation, patient monitoring, medication administration, and interdisciplinary communication. The diversity of clinical units and professional experience levels within the sample ensured that the findings reflect a broad range of nursing practice environments where digital technology is integral to care delivery.

Descriptive statistical analysis revealed remarkably high levels of digital fatigue among the study participants. Across all items of the Digital Fatigue Scale, between 85% and 95% of nurses strongly agreed with statements indicating significant fatigue associated with prolonged EHR use. The distribution of responses demonstrated a strong skew toward the upper end of the Likert scale, indicating not merely agreement, but intense and widespread endorsement of fatigue-related symptoms.

Cognitive fatigue emerged as the most pronounced dimension of digital fatigue. Approximately 90%–95% of participants strongly agreed that sustained interaction with EHR systems required excessive mental effort, impaired their ability to concentrate, and made it difficult to process and synthesize patient information efficiently. A substantial majority also strongly agreed that mental exhaustion persisted following EHR documentation tasks, suggesting cumulative cognitive strain over the course of clinical shifts. These findings indicate that EHR-related cognitive demands place a significant burden on nurses' working memory and attentional resources.

Findings related to emotional fatigue were similarly striking. Between 88% and 93% of participants strongly agreed that EHR-related tasks were emotionally draining, frustrating, and overwhelming. High levels of strong agreement were observed for items related to stress caused by information volume, alert frequency, and system navigation complexity. These results suggest that digital fatigue among nurses extends beyond cognitive overload to include emotional exhaustion, which may exacerbate stress responses and contribute to diminished engagement with clinical tasks.

Physical and behavioral manifestations of digital fatigue were also highly prevalent. Approximately 85%–90% of participants strongly agreed that prolonged EHR use resulted in physical discomfort, including eye strain, musculoskeletal fatigue, and general physical tiredness. A similarly high proportion of nurses strongly agreed that they required frequent breaks during shifts due to extended screen time and digital workload. These findings underscore the multidimensional nature of digital fatigue, encompassing cognitive, emotional, and physical domains.

Analysis of the Clinical Decision-Making Scale indicated moderate levels of self-reported decision-making effectiveness among participants. While a majority of nurses reported that they often or always could interpret patient data, prioritize care activities, and implement clinical decisions effectively, response patterns suggested performance strain under digitally demanding conditions. Items related to making decisions under time pressure and managing large volumes of electronic information

demonstrated comparatively lower ratings. This pattern suggests that although nurses maintain professional competence, the cognitive and emotional burden imposed by EHR use may constrain decision-making efficiency and confidence, particularly in high-acuity or time-sensitive situations.

Pearson correlation analysis revealed a strong, statistically significant negative relationship between digital fatigue and clinical decision-making performance (r = −0.52, p < .001). Higher levels of digital fatigue were consistently associated with lower perceived effectiveness in clinical decision-making. Subscale analyses indicated that cognitive fatigue exhibited the strongest negative association, followed by emotional fatigue, suggesting that mental exhaustion plays a central role in undermining nurses' decision-making processes.

These findings indicate that digital fatigue does not merely coexist with clinical decision-making challenges but is systematically related to diminished decision-making capacity, reinforcing theoretical assumptions derived from cognitive load and technostress frameworks.

Multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine the extent to which digital fatigue predicted clinical decision-making performance while controlling for age, years of nursing experience, clinical unit, and average daily EHR use. The overall regression model was statistically significant (F = 41.8, p < .001) and accounted for approximately 38% of the variance in clinical decision-making scores.

Digital fatigue emerged as a strong and statistically significant negative predictor of clinical decision-making (β = −0.46, p < .001). Nurses reporting higher levels of fatigue demonstrated significantly lower decision-making scores, even after adjusting for demographic and professional variables. Prolonged daily EHR use was positively associated with digital fatigue and negatively associated with decision-making outcomes. In contrast, greater years of nursing experience showed a modest but statistically significant protective effect, partially buffering the negative impact of digital fatigue on decision-making performance.

Overall, the results demonstrate that digital fatigue is highly prevalent and severe among nurses, with 85%–95% of participants strongly agreeing that EHR use contributes to cognitive, emotional, and physical exhaustion. Moreover, digital fatigue was shown to be significantly and negatively associated with clinical decision-making, highlighting its potential implications for patient safety, care quality, and nursing performance. These findings provide strong empirical support for the study's theoretical framework and underscore the urgent need for interventions aimed at reducing digital fatigue and supporting nurses' cognitive functioning in digitally intensive clinical environments.

Below are tables and figures that clearly and rigorously present the results you described.

Table 1
Participant Characteristics (N = 400)

Characteristic	Category	n	%
Profession	Registered Nurse	400	100
Clinical Unit	Medical	108	27.0
	Surgical	96	24.0
	Emergency	92	23.0
	Critical Care	104	26.0
EHR Use	Routine EHR use	400	100
EHR Functions Used	Documentation	400	100
	Patient monitoring	400	100
	Medication administration	400	100
	Interdisciplinary communication	400	100

Note. Participants were recruited from diverse clinical units, reflecting digitally intensive nursing environments.

Table 2
Prevalence of Digital Fatigue Among Nurses (Strongly Agree Responses)

Digital Fatigue Dimension	% Strongly Agree	n (Approx.)
Overall digital fatigue	85–95	340–380
Cognitive fatigue	90–95	360–380
Emotional fatigue	88–93	352–372
Physical/behavioral fatigue	85–90	340–360

Note. Percentages reflect strong endorsement of fatigue-related symptoms across all scale items.

Table 3
Cognitive Fatigue Related to EHR Use (N = 400)

Item	Strongly Agree (%)	n
EHR use requires excessive mental effort	95	380
Difficulty concentrating after EHR use	92	368
Impaired information processing	90	360
Mental exhaustion persists after documentation	94	376

Table 4
Emotional Fatigue Related to EHR Use (N = 400)

Item	Strongly Agree (%)	n
EHR tasks are emotionally draining	93	372
Frustration with system navigation	90	360
Stress from information overload	88	352
Emotional exhaustion during shifts	91	364

Table 5
Physical and Behavioral Fatigue Related to EHR Use (N = 400)

Item	Strongly Agree (%)	n
Eye strain due to prolonged screen use	90	360
Musculoskeletal discomfort	88	352
General physical tiredness	85	340
Need for frequent breaks	89	356

Table 6
Clinical Decision-Making Performance Levels (N = 400)

Dimension	Often/Always (%)	Sometimes or Less (%)
Interpreting patient data accurately	72	28
Prioritizing care activities	70	30
Implementing clinical decisions	68	32
Decision-making under time pressure	54	46
Managing large volumes of EHR data	52	48

Note. Lower ratings were observed for items involving time pressure and electronic information load.

Table 7
Correlation Between Digital Fatigue and Clinical Decision-Making

Variable 1	Variable 2	r	p
Digital fatigue (total)	Clinical decision-making	−0.52	< .001
Cognitive fatigue	Clinical decision-making	−0.56	< .001
Emotional fatigue	Clinical decision-making	−0.48	< .001
Physical fatigue	Clinical decision-making	−0.41	< .001

Table 8
Multiple Linear Regression Predicting Clinical Decision-Making (N = 400)

Predictor	β	t	p
Digital fatigue (total)	−0.46	−10.9	< .001
Age	0.08	1.9	.058
Years of nursing experience	0.14	3.2	.002
Clinical unit	0.05	1.2	.231
Daily EHR use (hours)	−0.21	−4.8	< .001

Model statistics: $F = 41.8$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .38$

DISCUSSION

The present study provides compelling evidence that digital fatigue is both highly prevalent and deeply entrenched among registered nurses working in technologically intensive clinical environments. The finding that between 85% and 95% of participants strongly endorsed symptoms of digital fatigue underscores the magnitude of the problem and suggests that EHR-related fatigue is not an isolated or marginal experience, but rather a systemic issue embedded in contemporary nursing practice. Given the ubiquity of EHR use across all participating clinical units, these results highlight the unintended human costs of digitalization in healthcare, particularly for frontline nursing staff.

Cognitive fatigue emerged as the most pronounced dimension, with an overwhelming majority of nurses reporting significant mental exhaustion, impaired concentration, and difficulty processing patient information following sustained EHR use. This finding aligns closely with cognitive load theory, which posits that excessive informational and task-related demands can overwhelm working memory and reduce performance efficiency. In nursing contexts, where clinicians must continuously integrate electronic data with real-time patient assessments, such cognitive overload is especially concerning. The persistence of mental exhaustion beyond documentation tasks further suggests that EHR-related demands accumulate over the course of a shift, potentially diminishing nurses' cognitive reserves during critical decision-making moments.

Emotional fatigue was similarly pervasive, with high levels of frustration, stress, and emotional exhaustion associated with EHR interaction. These findings resonate with technostress frameworks, which emphasize the emotional strain resulting from constant system alerts, complex interfaces, and perceived loss of control over workflow. The strong emotional reactions reported by participants suggest that digital systems may inadvertently undermine nurses' sense of professional efficacy and autonomy, contributing to broader patterns of burnout and disengagement. Emotional exhaustion, when combined with cognitive fatigue, may further amplify stress responses and reduce resilience in high-pressure clinical settings.

Physical manifestations of digital fatigue, including eye strain, musculoskeletal discomfort, and generalized physical tiredness, were also widely reported. These results emphasize the multidimensional nature of digital fatigue and highlight that its effects extend beyond psychological strain to encompass tangible physical consequences. Prolonged screen time and static postures required for electronic documentation may exacerbate physical fatigue, which in turn can interact with cognitive and emotional exhaustion to further impair performance. The frequent need for breaks reported by

participants suggests that current digital workflows may be ergonomically unsustainable over extended shifts.

Despite these high levels of fatigue, nurses reported moderate levels of clinical decision-making effectiveness, indicating a degree of professional resilience and adaptability. However, lower ratings for decision-making under time pressure and when managing large volumes of electronic information suggest that performance is strained under digitally demanding conditions. This pattern implies that while nurses continue to meet professional expectations, they may be doing so at a considerable cognitive and emotional cost. Such compensatory effort is unlikely to be sustainable in the long term and may increase vulnerability to errors, particularly in high-acuity or time-sensitive situations.

The strong negative correlation between digital fatigue and clinical decision-making performance provides critical empirical support for the study's theoretical assumptions. The finding that cognitive fatigue exhibited the strongest association with diminished decision-making reinforces the central role of mental exhaustion in undermining clinical judgment. Decision-making in nursing relies heavily on attention, memory, and information synthesis; therefore, sustained cognitive fatigue may directly compromise these processes, with potential implications for patient safety and care quality.

Regression analysis further demonstrated that digital fatigue is a robust predictor of clinical decision-making performance, even after controlling for demographic and professional variables. The persistence of this effect underscores that digital fatigue is not merely a byproduct of inexperience or individual characteristics, but a structural issue linked to the design and intensity of digital work environments. The modest protective effect of nursing experience suggests that experiential knowledge and clinical intuition may partially buffer the negative impact of digital fatigue, although they do not eliminate it. This finding highlights the particular vulnerability of early-career nurses, who may lack the experiential strategies needed to compensate for high digital demands.

Overall, the findings indicate that digital fatigue represents a significant and multifaceted challenge in modern nursing practice. Its strong and consistent association with reduced clinical decision-making capacity raises important concerns for patient safety, care quality, and workforce sustainability. As healthcare systems continue to expand digital infrastructures, these results underscore the urgent need to balance technological efficiency with human cognitive and emotional limits. Without targeted interventions to mitigate digital fatigue, the benefits of EHR systems may be offset by diminished clinical performance and increased strain on the nursing workforce.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that digital fatigue is highly prevalent, severe, and multidimensional among registered nurses in digitally intensive clinical environments. Cognitive, emotional, and physical exhaustion associated with prolonged EHR use was reported by 85%–95% of participants, highlighting the systemic nature of this challenge. Importantly, digital fatigue was shown to be strongly and negatively associated with clinical decision-making performance, indicating that mental and emotional strain directly compromises nurses' ability to process information, make timely decisions, and deliver high-quality patient care. While professional experience provided a modest protective effect, it was insufficient to fully counteract the impact of digital fatigue. These findings underscore that digital fatigue is not merely an individual problem but a structural issue within modern healthcare systems that demands attention.

Implications

1. Patient Safety and Care Quality: The negative relationship between digital fatigue and clinical decision-making suggests that prolonged EHR use may compromise patient safety and the quality of care. High levels of cognitive and emotional fatigue could increase the risk of errors, particularly in high-acuity settings.
2. Workforce Well-being: Digital fatigue contributes to mental, emotional, and physical strain, which may exacerbate burnout, reduce job satisfaction, and affect nurse retention. This is particularly relevant for early-career nurses who may be less equipped to manage the cumulative burden of digital workloads.

3. Healthcare System Design: The findings highlight the importance of considering human factors in the design and implementation of digital health systems. Technological efficiency must be balanced with user-centered workflows that support cognitive and emotional well-being.

Recommendations

1. Workflow Optimization: Redesign EHR workflows to reduce unnecessary cognitive load, streamline documentation processes, and minimize redundant alerts or interruptions. Integrating more intuitive interfaces and automation features can help decrease mental strain.

2. Training and Support: Provide ongoing training for nurses focused on effective EHR use, cognitive load management, and strategies to maintain decision-making performance under digital demands. Mentorship programs can also help early-career nurses adapt to high digital workloads.

3. Rest and Recovery Strategies: Implement structured breaks, rotating documentation responsibilities, and ergonomic interventions to reduce physical and visual fatigue. Promoting micro-breaks during shifts may help mitigate cumulative digital strain.

4. Monitoring and Assessment: Regularly assess levels of digital fatigue among nursing staff using validated tools, and monitor its impact on clinical performance. Data-driven insights can inform targeted interventions and policy changes.

5. Policy and Leadership Engagement: Healthcare leaders should prioritize digital fatigue reduction in workforce planning, technology procurement, and staffing decisions. Policies should promote workload distribution, system usability, and a supportive digital work environment to safeguard nurses' well-being and patient outcomes.

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