

Phantom Puppeteer: Weaving Wonders and Worries in the Web of Learning

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Abstract

This study explored the lived experiences of student nurses on the use of artificial intelligence (AI) chatbots in their nursing education at Lorma Colleges, City of San Fernando, La Union. The researchers employed a qualitative phenomenological design and conducted face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with 13 purposively selected student nurses. Thematic analysis was used to interpret and analyze the data. Three major themes emerged: "Filaments of Wonders," highlighting the positive contributions of AI in enhancing learning efficiency, conceptual clarity, and self-directed learning; "Phantom's Frayed Strings," which exposed issues of overreliance, cramming behaviors, and misinformation risks; and "Mending the Broken Threads," reflecting the coping strategies and adaptive measures students developed to address the challenges brought by AI use. The study concluded that while AI chatbots offer substantial academic benefits, responsible usage, and critical evaluation are necessary to maximize their potential and preserve essential nursing competencies. Programs promoting digital literacy and balanced learning strategies are recommended.

Keywords: *student nurses, artificial intelligence, chatbots, nursing education, lived experiences, learning strategies*

1. Introduction

"AI in nursing, a powerful friend, but too much reliance can make learning bend."

In today's fast-paced world of innovation, artificial intelligence (AI) has emerged as a silent yet powerful force—a "phantom puppeteer" subtly shaping how we think, learn, and make decisions. Gone are the days when student nurses relied solely on textbooks, lectures, and their determination to master complex subjects like anatomy, physiology, and patient care. Now, AI tools such as chatbots and algorithms provide real-time support, enhancing efficiency and accessibility in learning. However, this transformation raises an important question: Is AI a game-changer for nursing education, empowering students to learn and grow efficiently? Or does its presence create a dependency that might dilute the critical thinking and hands-on skills essential for future nurses?

The emergence of artificial intelligence (AI) in education has introduced a profound and complex dynamic, shaping how students learn, think, and engage with knowledge. This study captures the dual use of AI within this context. The term "phantom" emphasizes AI's unseen yet

influential presence, while "puppeteer" symbolizes its role in subtly guiding the learning process. AI brings with it remarkable "wonders," transforming various aspects of learning and problem-solving. However, it also raises significant "worries," raising concerns about its integration. These contrasting dimensions are intricately "woven" into the "web of learning," representing AI's seamless yet far-reaching integration into modern education.

In today's digital era, artificial intelligence (AI) has become a significant force in the academic landscape, particularly in nursing education, where the integration of AI technologies continues to shape the way students learn, process, and apply knowledge. Tools such as AI chatbots—ChatGPT, Bard, Socratic, Gemini, and Microsoft Bing—are transforming educational spaces by providing immediate access to personalized responses and real-time academic support (Labadze et al., 2023; Tegmark, 2023). Student nurses who once relied on lectures, textbooks, and face-to-face interactions now navigate an environment where AI serves as an invisible yet powerful presence, acting as both guide and tutor in their educational journey. While this technological evolution enhances learning opportunities, it also presents considerable concerns regarding dependency, misinformation, and ethical integrity (Zhai et al., 2024; Lagadec et al., 2024).

In nursing education, AI has emerged as a double-edged tool. On one side, it offers personalized and efficient assistance that enables students to explore medical terms, interpret diagnoses, and manage academic tasks with speed and clarity. Through AI-powered simulations, learners engage with dynamic scenarios that improve clinical reasoning and decision-making without risking patient safety (Rodriguez Arrastia et al., 2022). These simulations provide tailored feedback that reinforces autonomous learning and builds competence in managing stress-inducing clinical situations (Glauberger et al., 2023). AI tools like ChatGPT allow students to revisit complex topics, clarify misunderstood concepts, and receive help at any time of day, fostering an environment of self-paced and student-centered education.

Countries such as Singapore, South Korea, and India have successfully implemented AI into their nursing curricula, enhancing communication skills and improving the way students engage with patient-centered scenarios. These nations have also invested in faculty training and AI infrastructure to bridge educational gaps (Lukkahatai and Han, 2023). However, barriers such as institutional resistance and lack of faculty readiness remain, affecting the widespread adoption of these tools. In the Philippine context, AI has made significant inroads, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic when distance learning necessitated creative instructional methods. Filipino students reported using AI for a variety of academic tasks, such as research, paraphrasing, and summarization, thereby improving academic productivity (Han et al., 2022).

Despite these advancements, many challenges persist. According to Villarino (2024), students in rural regions of the Philippines struggle with access to devices and stable internet connectivity, limiting their capacity to fully utilize AI technologies. Similarly, Savellon, Baybayan, and Asiri (2024) found that while students were satisfied with AI tools, they also expressed concerns about privacy, accuracy, and social influences. These disparities underline how the benefits of AI are not equally distributed, potentially deepening educational inequalities, particularly in resource-constrained communities.

Local narratives reflect the complexity of students' experiences with AI. Student nurses at Lorma Colleges reported how AI tools helped simplify difficult topics, such as electrocardiogram readings and pharmacological terms. One student, for example, used ChatGPT to clarify medical concepts that were not adequately explained in lectures, which increased her confidence and comprehension. Another student mentioned that AI chatbots were preferable to asking instructors directly due to the absence of perceived judgment, highlighting the emotional

safety these platforms offer. These testimonies underscore how AI fosters academic independence and reduces anxiety related to seeking help in traditional settings.

However, alongside these benefits, there is growing concern over the ethical and cognitive implications of AI reliance. Some students confessed to using AI to complete assignments without fully engaging in the learning process, raising issues of academic integrity and critical thinking development (Chavez, 2023). In some cases, students reported relying on AI-generated answers that later proved to be inaccurate, necessitating verification with clinical instructors. These situations underscore the importance of maintaining human oversight in the educational process. The accuracy of AI responses can vary, and the lack of nuance in some answers makes it essential for students to double-check information, particularly in fields as sensitive as nursing (E.L.B., personal account, 2025).

Moreover, AI integration has had a notable impact on interpersonal communication and student-teacher engagement. Students noted that AI tools, while useful, also reduced their need to consult instructors or collaborate with classmates, potentially weakening their communication skills and peer relationships (Arriola, 2023). One student admitted that AI reduced her desire to ask professors for help, leading to a gap in her understanding of complex subjects. Others found that excessive screen time and digital distractions affected their focus and productivity, prompting some to limit their AI usage and adopt wellness strategies such as physical activity to balance their mental health.

Students also expressed concerns about the limitations of AI in nuanced clinical scenarios. A student described how a chatbot gave conflicting guidance on a mupirocin treatment plan, which had to be corrected by a clinical instructor. This reflects the risks associated with unsupervised AI use, especially in healthcare education, where precision and patient safety are paramount. The simplification of complex scenarios by AI tools may result in misleading conclusions and compromise patient outcomes if not thoroughly validated.

To address these concerns, students have adopted adaptive strategies to responsibly manage their use of AI in academic work. These include verifying answers with textbooks, consulting peers or mentors, limiting AI usage during formative assessments, and reserving its use for idea generation rather than final outputs. Such efforts represent a conscious attempt to balance convenience with integrity and to preserve essential academic and professional competencies. In essence, students are not only learning from AI but are also learning how to engage with AI critically and ethically.

Educational institutions have a responsibility to guide this transition. Faculty development programs must prepare educators to integrate AI effectively while maintaining academic rigor and promoting humanistic values. AI should be positioned as a supplemental tool rather than a replacement for instructor guidance. Policies must also be developed to address data privacy, content verification, and appropriate AI usage in both academic and clinical settings (Lee et al., 2024). Without such measures, the line between assisted learning and automated dependency risks becoming blurred.

Ultimately, the integration of artificial intelligence into nursing education is reshaping how knowledge is accessed, processed, and applied. It presents significant benefits in efficiency, personalization, and conceptual clarity but also brings challenges that must be met with careful consideration, ethical reflection, and institutional support.

The study revealed that while AI chatbots offer notable advantages in enhancing learning efficiency, improving understanding of complex topics, and supporting self-paced education, their use also gives rise to serious concerns such as overreliance, last-minute cramming, and risks of misinformation. Nevertheless, student nurses exhibit adaptability by developing strategies to verify information, moderate their dependence on AI, and seek

guidance from peers and clinical instructors, thereby fostering responsible and reflective use of these emerging tools in their academic journey.

2. Objectives

The study explored student nurses' experiences on the use of artificial intelligence (AI) chatbots in their learning.

3. Materials and Methods

The researchers utilized a qualitative research design, specifically adopting a phenomenological approach. Qualitative research was employed to explore and understand the complexity of human experiences, behaviors, and social phenomena. It focused on collecting rich, detailed data, often through methods such as interviews or focus groups, and aimed to interpret meanings and patterns within a particular context (Braun & Clarke, 2021). This approach sought to understand the meaning of lived experiences from the perspectives of participants, often emphasizing subjective interpretations and how individuals made sense of their experiences (Beck, 2020). Phenomenology was particularly valuable for qualitative researchers because it allowed a privileged view of the meaning of experiences from the participants' perspectives.

This study was conducted at Lorma Colleges, located in Carlatan, City of San Fernando, La Union. Student nurses from Lorma Colleges were selected as participants for the study. Specifically, in this study, the participants consisted of thirteen (13) student nurses, including one (1) from Level 1, four (4) from Level 2, three (3) from Level 3, and five (5) from Level 4. The researchers determined the final number of participants through the process of reaching the saturation point, at which the collection of additional data no longer yielded new insights or information. They were selected based on specific criteria: (1) enrolled in the College of Nursing for the academic year 2024–2025, (2) at any level from first to fourth year, (3) both male and female students, (4) both Filipino and international students, (5) with prior experience using AI chatbots, such as ChatGPT, Bard, or similar platforms, for academic or clinical purposes, and (6) willing to participate. Conversely, participants who did not meet the inclusion criteria set by the researchers were excluded from the study.

The researchers employed semi-structured interviews to collect data from student nurses at Lorma Colleges in San Fernando, La Union. This approach enabled an in-depth exploration of the students' experiences with AI chatbots in education by allowing the use of open-ended questions that encouraged rich qualitative insights. The combination of a predetermined set of open-ended questions and follow-up queries helped the researchers delve into specific themes and develop a comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences. To streamline data collection, the interviews were conducted face-to-face. Additionally, recording materials such as cameras and audio recorders were utilized for documentation purposes. Lastly, the researchers had the interview guide validated by three clinical instructors to ensure its accuracy and relevance for the study.

Next, the researchers submitted the paper to the Research Ethical Committee for review and approval. This step was essential for ensuring that the study complied with ethical guidelines designed to protect the rights and welfare of participants. Additionally, after the approval of the REC, the researchers submitted a communication letter to the Dean to seek permission to conduct the study. This letter outlined the purpose of the study, criteria for participant selection, and the importance of obtaining institutional support for the research process.

The researchers predetermined participants through an interview prior to the actual data gathering, ensuring that they met the criteria set by the researchers. Once selected,

participants were invited for a face-to-face interview on a scheduled date and time, enabling a streamlined and efficient data collection process. Prior to collecting data, participants were presented with an informed consent form. The form was explained clearly, allowing participants to review its contents, ask questions, and provide their consent before proceeding. They were informed that they could refuse to answer any question or withdraw from the study at any time without feeling obligated to continue. These measures were put in place to foster trust and transparency between the researchers and participants. With the participants' permission, their responses were recorded.

4. Results

The results of the analysis of the selected participants provided an understanding of student nurses' perceptions, feelings, and insights while using AI chatbots throughout their academic and clinical journey. The researchers found similarities in their experiences, generating the three major themes that were drawn from the participants' responses. The following titles of the themes were based on symbolic representations of threadwork and puppetry, echoing the intricate relationship between human agency and technological influence; (1) Filaments of Wonders, (2) Phantom's Frayed Strings, and (3) Mending the Broken Threads. The following themes will provide insight into the positive and negative experiences, as well as the adaptive strategies, of student nurses navigating the digital domain of learning through AI chatbots.

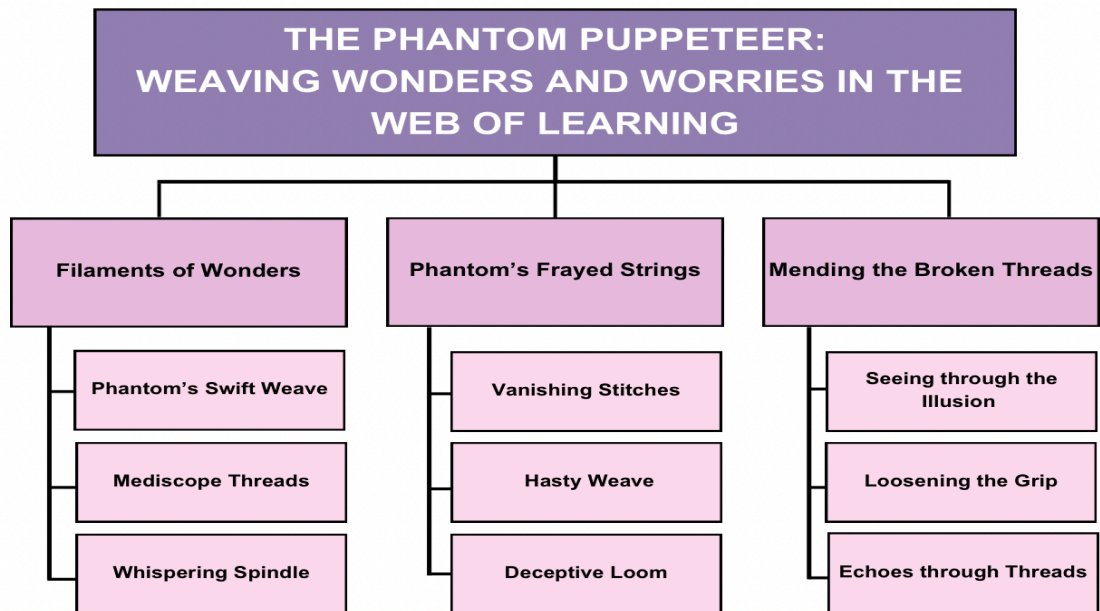


Figure 1. Lived experiences of student nurses using AI chatbots were analyzed, revealing three (3) major themes and nine (9) subthemes. “Filaments of Wonders” describes the positive experiences, while “Phantom’s Frayed Strings” and “Mending the Broken Threads” explore the negative experiences and coping strategies, respectively.

5. Discussion

Under the major theme **Filaments of Wonders**, the positive experiences of student nurses in using AI chatbots throughout their nursing education were explored. The researchers found that participants widely acknowledged the convenience, speed, and academic support

provided by AI. These chatbots were not only tools for completing tasks but also served as accessible companions that reduced anxiety and helped simplify complex topics. Through this theme, students shared how AI chatbots enhanced their confidence, increased efficiency, and provided a personalized learning experience.

The subtheme **Phantom's Swift Weave** describes how AI chatbots helped student nurses weave through academic tasks with greater ease and speed. Participants reported that with just a few clicks, they were able to access answers, saving time and effort. The ease of access and simplified interface allowed for faster academic completion and encouraged continuous engagement even under pressure.

The subtheme **Mediscope Threads** emphasizes the role of AI in deepening conceptual understanding. Rather than relying solely on textbooks or instructors, students used AI to explore unfamiliar terms, medical jargon, and clinical cases. It helped them break down complex content, especially in technical subjects such as Medical-Surgical Nursing, and reinforced their ability to construct accurate nursing diagnoses. These threads reflect how AI served as a lens for students to magnify and clarify academic content.

The subtheme **Whispering Spindle** reveals how AI became a quiet yet reliable presence in students' academic lives. The participants described the chatbot as nonjudgmental and calming, something they could approach without fear of criticism or shame. In situations where students felt embarrassed or hesitant to ask instructors, AI offered a safe, supportive alternative that encouraged learning through trial and error, building confidence over time.

The major theme **Phantom's Frayed Strings** captured the negative experiences of student nurses. As AI usage increased, the participants reported developing patterns of overdependence, reduced memory retention, and occasional misinformation. These "frayed strings" represent the areas where AI subtly weakened the educational fabric, leading to cramming habits, shallow learning, and emotional detachment from authentic study practices.

The subtheme **Vanishing Stitches** refers to the fading of deep learning and information retention. Participants admitted that they relied so much on AI that they no longer practiced recall or critical processing. Some forgot what they had studied or felt less confident in their own understanding, illustrating how the threads of knowledge began to slip through their grasp.

The subtheme **Hasty Weave** highlights the use of AI chatbots during last-minute reviews and high-pressure periods. While efficient, this practice led to superficial engagement with content. Students acknowledged that they preferred quick answers from chatbots over meaningful, independent exploration of the material. This behavioral pattern raised concerns about diminished study habits and the formation of cramming tendencies.

The subtheme **Deceptive Loom** centers on the errors and inconsistencies occasionally found in AI-generated content. Participants described confusion and frustration when AI provided inaccurate answers, forcing them to double-check and verify elsewhere. This deception, though unintended, jeopardized their trust in the tool and emphasized the importance of maintaining vigilance in evaluating chatbot responses.

The major theme **Mending the Broken Threads** explores the coping strategies employed by student nurses as they sought to address the challenges posed by AI chatbots. These mending actions represent deliberate efforts to realign their learning paths, preserve academic integrity, and re-establish balance between technology and human guidance.

The subtheme **Seeing through the Illusion** highlights students' awareness of the need to verify chatbot outputs. They cross-checked answers with textbooks, instructors, and clinical materials to ensure the information was accurate and aligned with nursing standards. This behavior demonstrated their growing sense of responsibility and discernment.

The subtheme **Loosening the Grip** reveals students' intentional efforts to limit their reliance on AI. Some made conscious decisions to solve problems on their own or consult traditional academic resources before turning to chatbots. This act of restraint helped protect their ability to think critically and remain engaged in the learning process.

The subtheme **Echoes through Threads** underscores the enduring value of peer and mentor support. Despite AI's digital assistance, participants still found guidance and emotional reassurance through instructors, classmates, and clinical supervisors. These human "threads" helped ground their learning, reinforced their clinical reasoning, and contributed to the development of compassionate, well-rounded nursing identities.

6. Conclusion

The lived experiences of student nurses using artificial intelligence (AI) chatbots in nursing education are complex, encompassing both enriching and challenging dimensions. This study offered an in-depth exploration of their positive encounters with AI, the limitations and concerns they faced, and the thoughtful strategies they developed to navigate this evolving digital learning environment.

Student nurses recognized AI chatbots as valuable learning tools that enhanced their academic performance, reduced stress, and supported their comprehension of complex topics. They described how AI streamlined their academic workload and offered immediate, non-judgmental responses that were especially helpful during mentally taxing periods. In addition to improving efficiency, AI was also appreciated for its emotional reliability and ability to simplify difficult concepts, qualities that positioned it as a dependable academic companion.

Despite these positive aspects, students also became aware of the drawbacks of excessive reliance on AI tools. Several participants reported weakened memory retention, surface-level learning, and confusion caused by inaccurate or inconsistent chatbot responses. These challenges raised concerns about the long-term impact of AI on critical thinking, academic integrity, and clinical preparedness. As students reflected on these issues, they recognized the importance of staying grounded in traditional learning practices and human guidance.

In response, the participants demonstrated resilience by adopting coping strategies to balance their learning. They practiced verification by cross-checking AI-generated content with reliable academic sources. They intentionally limited their use of chatbots to avoid overdependence and preserve their critical thinking abilities. Most importantly, they reaffirmed the value of mentorship, peer collaboration, and classroom instruction in shaping their development as future nurses. These coping mechanisms reflect the participants' efforts to maintain cognitive engagement, ethical awareness, and personal integrity while embracing the benefits of technological advancement.

Based on the findings of the research study, the researchers recommend that student nurses verify AI-generated content using textbooks and instructor-approved materials. Independent studying and critical reflection must be encouraged to prevent overdependence on AI tools. Nurse educators should highlight the importance of clinical reasoning and reinforce that AI serves only as an academic aid, not as a substitute for professional judgment.

Nursing institutions are encouraged to offer focused workshops or integrate digital literacy training into existing coursework to equip students with the knowledge and skills to use AI responsibly and ethically. Instructors should also facilitate open discussions on the benefits and limitations of AI, allowing students to develop balanced perspectives and make informed choices.

Furthermore, researchers are encouraged to examine how AI chatbot use influences student learning, clinical judgment, and professional identity formation. Surveys and focus groups may offer valuable insights. Future studies should include diverse participants across year levels, institutions, and locations to understand the broader implications of AI use in nursing education. Comparative studies between AI users and traditional learners can help evaluate AI's long-term impact on academic outcomes and practice readiness.

Finally, all the stakeholders are encouraged to access and review the full output of this study. The findings offer practical insights into how AI influences nursing education and provide a foundation for informed decision-making, policy formulation, and future innovations in teaching and clinical training.

7. Acknowledgements

The researchers would like to express their profound gratitude and genuine appreciation to all those who have extended their support, contributions, and encouragement to make this study a success and a possibility.

To Mrs. Guerly M. Acosta, MAN, their research adviser, for her assistance, direction, insightful remarks, and recommendations that greatly facilitated the completion of this research study.

To Allen Joshua R. Dominguez, MAN, PhD, and Mrs. Conception G. Bautista, MAN, their research instructors, for their unwavering support and dedication to this study.

To Mrs. Teresita A. Ferrer, MAN, the Dean of the College of Nursing, for her thoughtful analysis, assistance, and guidance.

To Junel Bryan A. Bajet, RM, MAN, PhD; Ryan Jay L. Yalung, MAN, PhD, N.M.D.; and Mrs. Araceli F. Surat, MAN, the panelists, for their insightful counsel that contributed to improved research outcomes.

To Mrs. Maria Corazon O. Cabanela and Mrs. Luz V. Walis, for validating the grammar and English translation of this research study, ensuring clarity, accuracy, and coherence in the final manuscript.

Heartfelt gratitude is expressed to all participants for sharing their experiences and thoughts, without whom this research would not have been feasible.

The researchers also extend their appreciation to their parents for their steadfast IV emotional, physical, and financial support, as well as academic guidance.

Moreover, the researchers would like to express their sincere gratitude to all individuals who contributed to the completion of this research paper, including friends and colleagues.

This study would not have been possible without the assistance and support of these people.

Above all, the researchers would like to thank the Almighty God for bestowing them with wisdom, bravery, guidance, and connections throughout this endeavor.

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9. Appendices

APPENDIX A

Approval Sheet from the Research Ethics Committee



LC-REC Form #004
APPROVAL LETTER
REC Reference #: 2025-004

January 21, 2025

To: Kaypee Margarette Adame, Jennifer Ancheta, Jayson Cordero, Edrian Estioco, Jasbabe AJ Sandara Garabiles,
Nicole Lazarte, Daryl Kaye Miraflores and Ben Dominic Walls
LORMA Colleges, College of Nursing

Subject: Approval of the Research Study "PHANTOM PUPPETEER: WEAVING WONDERS AND WORRIES IN THE WEB LEARNING" by the Research Ethics Committee (REC).

Dear Researchers,

The Research Ethics Committee (REC) has reviewed your application to conduct the above-mentioned research study in the LOCALE OF STUDY with you as the Principal Investigators within the duration of January 21, 2025 to January 21, 2025.

The following documents have been reviewed and approved:

1. Letter of Intent to Conduct the Study
2. Endorsement of the Research Technical Panel
3. Title and Statement of the Problem/ Objective
4. Literature Review
5. Methods and Procedures
6. Population and Locale
7. Exclusion/Inclusion Criteria
8. Data Analysis
9. Ethical Considerations

We approve the study to be conducted in the presented form provided the following are integrated in the final research protocol:

1. Use the probing questions as stated in the interview guide, to verify if participants' answer is aligned with the topic mentioned in the question.
2. Clearly state the purpose of conducting the study and how the data will be used.
3. Indicate in the manuscript the length of time for interview as well as the frequency.

None of the Investigators participating in this study took part in the decision making and voting procedure for this study.

The Institutional REC expects to be informed about the progress of the study, any revision in the protocol before implementation and participants' /respondents' information/informed consent. Likewise, you are required to provide the Board a copy of the final report.

Yours Sincerely,


CHRISTY E. JAVARRO, MASE, PTRP
Chairman, Lorma Colleges-Research Ethics Committee

10. Author(s) Biodata

Mr. Edrian E. Estioco, a third-year student nurse at Lorma Colleges in City of San Fernando, La Union, served as group leader for a qualitative study on student nurses' experiences with AI chatbots in education. Guided by their research adviser, Mrs. Guerly M. Acosta, MAN, the team explored the role of technology in nursing, highlighting their shared commitment to innovation, ethics, and human-centered care in academic and clinical settings.