

Sasakawa Nursing Fellow Progress Report 2025

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This is a report of my progress as a first-year student in the philosophy of doctoral program (PhD) at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), School of Nursing. My research interest is palliative care navigation among older adults with non-malignant chronic illnesses living in rural areas. My passion for this phenomenon stems from my 12 years of experience as a nurse caring for patients with life-limiting illnesses such as various chronic diseases, including acquired immunodeficiency syndrome, cancers, and senility in urban and rural healthcare settings. I have witnessed healthcare providers, including myself, failing to navigate timely palliative care due to a lack of awareness of its needs. This problem was particularly prevalent among patients with non-malignant chronic illnesses, resulting in unnecessary suffering and decreased quality of life for patients and their caregivers. In 2026, older adults who die from health-related suffering are estimated to increase by nearly 22 million compared with 2016 globally (Sleeman et al., 2019). My ultimate aim is to bring equitable person-centered palliative care navigation and improve the quality of life for all.

Academic Journey

Coursework Descriptions

The PhD curriculum sequence consists of 18 courses designed to cover the core content needed to become an independent scholar. Only three students were in my cohort, and we have been supporting each other's success throughout the courses. After two quarters, I have completed seven core courses focusing on literature review strategies, ethics of research, the introduction of statistics, qualitative methodology, and nursing philosophy.

Literature Review

Literature review courses were divided into two segments to prepare students to critically analyze and synthesize existing literature, identify gaps, and shape research quotations by following methodological protocol. Based on the literature review conducted in

the fall quarter, we revised our research questions and formed PICO in the first week of the winter quarter. We started a literature search with the guidance of a librarian, which enhanced our skills to conduct a robust literature search independently. Moreover, comparing and constructing articles utilizing tables of evidence and other strategies, introduced by an instructor and the director of the graduate writing center, significantly enhanced my understanding of the literature in depth, allowing themes to emerge and synthesize. This course taught me that collaboration with diverse disciplines is crucial for creating a rigorous literature review, just as in nursing. I will continue to communicate with professionals in diverse disciplines, follow the methodological protocol to foster advanced knowledge creation, and ensure the trustworthiness of nursing science.

Statistics

We learned introductory statistics in the winter quarter, consisting of fundamental nursing statistics concepts using SPSS software. The main takeaway from this course was the ability to determine significant relationships between variables and examine whether independent variables are appropriate for the outcomes using various methods. Moreover, I have learned the significance of effect size and hypothesis to assess whether the results are clinically significant. For the final group project, we used an existing dataset to examine how polypharmacy impacts the financial burden among people with diabetes. We finalized and submitted an abstract to the UCLA Nursing Science and Innovation Conference.

Qualitative Methodology

The introduction of a qualitative methodology course primarily focused on a field project: building qualitative research questions, semi-structured interview guides, interviewing one person related to a research question, and coding the transcript. Throughout this course, we have learned about different qualitative methodologies and strategies for maintaining rigor in qualitative study throughout the course while we work on field projects.

I became interested in qualitative research, particularly constructivist grounded theory, which best explores my interest in the phenomenon. Constructivist grounded theory recognizes reality as subjective and shaped by social and cultural influences, emphasizing there is no singular truth (Charmaz, 2016). This course reminded me that conducting the study is not a snapshot of a phenomenon. Rather, it is a lifetime process that a researcher flourishes throughout the academic journey.

Nursing Philosophy

In this course, we have learned fundamental philosophical concepts and their application to nursing to expand our understanding of nursing knowledge. We were assigned to write a reflection paper weekly based on the provided reading materials and discussed readings and our reflections in class. The discussion was rich in context, mainly about the complexities of racism and feminism in nursing in the United States through the lenses of various philosophical frameworks. For the final term paper, we were challenged to compare and contrast how different philosophical lenses create knowledge of the phenomenon of our interests. I appreciate this course, highlighting that every phenomenon is nuanced and sensitive and that philosophy helps us understand the complexity of phenomena.

Fostering Scholarly Growth

Conference Participations

In the fall quarter, the professor for the ethics of research course allowed us to review her study on environmental health among the rural indigenous population and instructed us to create abstracts and posters as a group project for the National Nursing Ethics of Conference (NNEC) that is held at UCLA annually. The group poster discussed environmental justice, health outcomes caused by environmental contaminants, community responses, and the significance of the dishonesty of governments and industries toward the affected communities in both urban and rural settings. We listed communities affected by various

types of contamination and explored the implications for addressing environmental injustices. Other participants from all over the United States shared their scope and passion related to nursing ethics, enhancing my understanding of how ethics involves every aspect of nursing. Every content of the conference was enriched by enormous experts in the ethics of caring, and the stories they shared with the audience were inspirational and flourished the atmosphere.

Additionally, I worked on the initial steps of the literature review regarding continuous palliative and end-of-life care education among rural healthcare providers during the fall quarter as part of an independent study with my advisor. Under the guidance of my advisor, we submitted an abstract of methodological protocol for the literature review to the 2025 National Symposium for Academic Palliative Care Education and Research, and it was accepted. I will continue to work on the next steps of the literature review and present the poster at the symposium at the beginning of June.

Community Engagement

I have become involved with the “Hearing Their Voice” program, which aims to deliver advanced care planning and related healthcare resources to people unhoused (Cortez & Meyer, 2022). We visit a food bank at church in Santa Monica once a month and engage in conversations with people visiting the food bank. This involvement has been fruitful, allowing me to gain a holistic understanding of the complexities of human beings living in uncertainty through diverse perspectives. Moreover, the people I have met through this program are phenomenal. Their empathetic and compassionate care for individuals is truly inspiring, reflecting the virtue of nursing ethics and our responsibilities to raise awareness of unheard voices. I feel very fortunate to be able to be involved in this program and will continue to engage with their enthusiasm to address disparities in palliative care navigations.

Conclusion

Through the two-quarters of the PhD program at UCLA, I have become more curious about how nursing science can contribute to making the world a better place. While I focus on my research topic in palliative care navigation among older adults living in rural areas, I will continue to explore diverse perspectives to gain a holistic understanding of the complexities of human beings and palliative care navigation. As a scholar, my ultimate goal is to bring equity to healthcare, particularly in palliative care navigation, and improve the quality of life for all.

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