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# Therapeutic education in the nursing degree: key competencies



**T**herapeutic education (TE) has become established as one of the central pillars of nursing care in contemporary health care systems, particularly in the management of chronic diseases and in health promotion across the life cycle.

The transformation of health care systems, driven by population aging, the increasing prevalence of chronic diseases, and the growing availability of diagnostic and therapeutic technologies, has shifted the focus from a disease-centered model to a person-centered model that emphasizes self-care capacity. Within this framework, TE is consolidated as a key nursing competency aimed at strengthening the abilities of individuals and those involved in their care, enabling them to understand their health condition, manage treatment, and make informed decisions. It is not limited to the transmission of information but involves active support in developing skills, attitudes, and resources that promote coping with the health-disease process with the highest possible level of autonomy and quality of life (1, 2). Therefore, nurses act as reference professionals who accompany patients and their families in understanding the disease and its treatment. From an evidence-based practice perspective, they are responsible for planning, implementing, and evaluating both programs and educational interventions aimed at promoting self-care, improving therapeutic adherence, and preventing complications. During undergraduate education, **nursing students must develop, alongside clinical care**

**skills, competencies to establish a therapeutic relationship, select and implement educational interventions, and assess their impact on health outcomes.** Although competency frameworks in nursing degrees in Spain include outcomes related to health education, communication, the helping relationship, and comprehensive care planning, these are often described in broad and non-specific terms regarding TE. This lack of specificity makes it difficult to identify which competencies are truly critical for high-quality TE and how they should be progressively and coherently integrated throughout the training pathway.

## THERAPEUTIC EDUCATION AS A NURSING COMPETENCY

TE can be defined as a structured, planned, and continuous process, delivered by trained health care professionals, that helps patients and families acquire and maintain the skills necessary to manage disease, adapt to treatment, prevent complications, and make decisions that enhance autonomy and quality of life<sup>1</sup>. Unlike simple information delivery, it involves the co-construction of knowledge, attitudes, and skills based on each individual's needs, experiences, and resources, aiming to produce an additional therapeutic effect beyond other interventions such as pharmacological or physical treatments. It is particularly directed at individuals with chronic or long-term conditions, without excluding those in acute or severe situations (2, 3).

From a nursing perspective, TE is a core professional competency grounded in the caregiving role, the biopsychosocial model, and the recognition of the individual as an active agent in their own care. Providing nursing care involves not only applying techniques but also establishing a therapeutic relationship, selecting interventions aimed at preventing problems, and facilitating informed decision-making. In this sense, health education and TE are integrated as essential components of the nursing process and care plans across all levels of care (3, 4).

In nursing degree programs in Spain, the role of nurses as health educators and as professionals capable of using appropriate methodologies in health education activities and programs—and evaluating patient

learning—is explicitly recognized (5). This competency is frequently included across various course curricula; however, its effective development requires intentional curricular design that coherently connects theoretical content with practical experiences in which students can plan and carry out real educational interventions under supervision.

## ESSENTIAL COMPETENCIES FOR TRAINING IN THERAPEUTIC EDUCATION IN NURSING DEGREES

Below is a classification of competencies whose acquisition significantly contributes to TE training (5, 6):

### 1.1 Clinical and reasoning competencies

These are linked to **clinical reasoning** and the ability to integrate scientific knowledge into practice. Their development requires case analysis, simulation, and reflection on clinical practice, understanding TE as an integral part of comprehensive care at any level. Key competencies include:

- Ability to comprehensively assess the patient's health situation, considering biological, psychological, social, and cultural dimensions, and identifying health education needs.
- Skill in establishing nursing diagnoses related to treatment management, coping with illness, therapeutic adherence, or knowledge deficits.
- Ability to select evidence-based TE interventions adapted to the care context (primary care, hospital, or socio-health settings) and disease stage.
- Competence in evaluating outcomes in terms of knowledge acquired, practical skills, behavioral changes, and, when possible, clinical indicators (e.g., glycemic control or blood pressure).

### 1.2 Communication and relational competencies

TE is based on a relationship of trust between professional and patient, where **effective communication** is essential. This relationship goes beyond information exchange and involves active listening, identifying needs, »

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## PROVIDING NURSING CARE INVOLVES NOT ONLY APPLYING TECHNIQUES, BUT ALSO ESTABLISHING A THERAPEUTIC RELATIONSHIP, SELECTING INTERVENTIONS AIMED AT PREVENTING PROBLEMS, AND FACILITATING INFORMED DECISION-MAKING

» validating emotions, negotiating goals, and reinforcing self-care behaviors. Key competencies include:

- Ability to establish empathetic and respectful communication using clear language adapted to health literacy levels and cultural characteristics.
- Capacity to explore patient expectations, beliefs, and prior experiences regarding illness and treatment, promoting participation in decision-making.
- Mastery of motivational interviewing and basic counseling techniques to support lifestyle changes (e.g., smoking cessation, dietary adherence, physical activity).
- Ability to manage conflict, resistance, or distrust, seeking realistic and negotiated agreements on educational goals.

These competencies can be developed through role-playing, video analysis, simulation with standardized patients, and structured feedback. Clinical practice placements provide key opportunities for observing and practicing educational communication in real scenarios.

### 1.3 Pedagogical and methodological competencies

TE requires **mastery of teaching-learning** principles and strategies. Key competencies include:

- Ability to define clear, measurable, and patient-centered learning objectives.
- Skill in selecting and using appropriate educational resources, including ICT tools, and evaluating their usefulness and patient understanding.
- Ability to sequence content according to prior knowledge, clinical condition, and available time.
- Competence in evaluating learning through simple techniques (e.g., teach-back, demonstration, self-assessment) and adjusting interventions as needed.

These competencies are fostered through health education projects, development of educational materials, oral presentations, and community group education experiences. Active learning methodologies such as project-based learning and service learning are particularly useful.

### 1.4 Critical thinking and management competencies

These require fostering **critical thinking** and **decision-making** through case analysis, simulation, and reflection. Key competencies include:

- Ability to search, select, and apply evidence-based information.
- Capacity to prioritize actions and

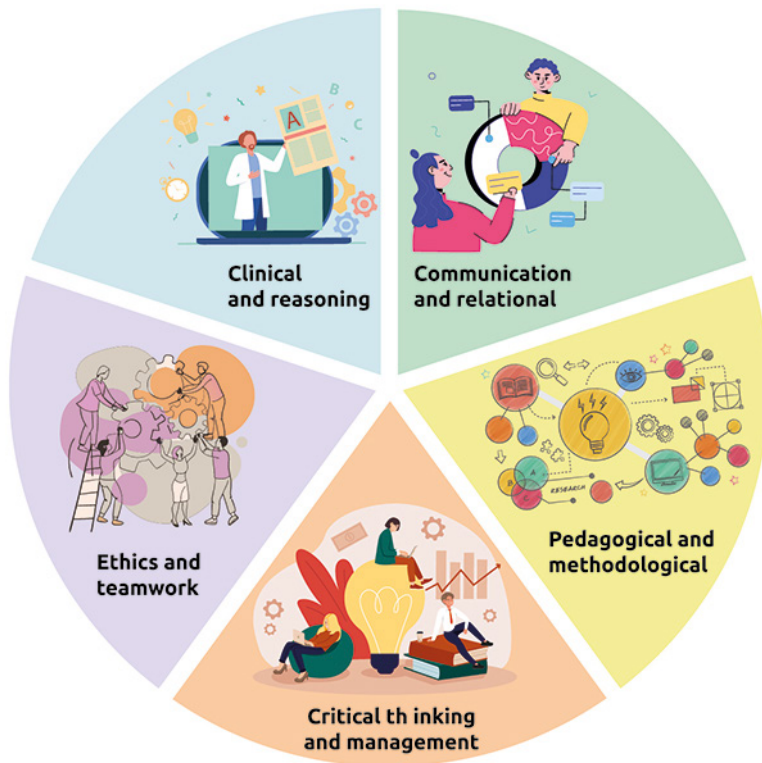
select the most appropriate TE approach for each patient.

- Ability to manage available resources efficiently and effectively.

### 1.5 Ethical and teamwork competencies

TE is developed within an ethical framework in which autonomy, confidentiality, justice, and beneficence must guide actions. It involves sharing sensitive information, balancing health promotion with patient autonomy, as well as respecting values, beliefs, and personal decisions even when they do not coincide with professional recommendations. The incorporation of ethical reflections in TH clinical cases, as well as interdisciplinary experiences during clinical placements, fosters the development of these competencies, among which are:

- Ability to obtain genuine informed consent in educational interventions.
- Skill in protecting confidentiality, especially in group settings.
- Competence in managing value conflicts between professional and patient.
- Ability to work collaboratively in interdisciplinary teams, promoting a holistic approach and avoiding duplication or contradictions.



**FIGURE.** Types of competencies for training in therapeutic education in the nursing degree.

» It is essential that nursing curricula explicitly incorporate TE competencies, both through specific courses and transversally throughout training. Integrating this preparation from the undergraduate level ensures that future professionals enter clinical practice with the necessary skills to design, implement, and evaluate effective educational interventions—particularly important in the context of increasing chronicity and the need to promote self-care and health. **D**

## CONCLUSIONS

- The nursing degree must ensure the acquisition of comprehensive competencies that enable the design, implementation, and evaluation of TE interventions adapted to individuals, families, and communities.
- TE should be conceived as a transversal axis of the curriculum, with progressive, coherent, and longitudinal development throughout the entire nursing program.
- Active learning methodologies, digital literacy, simulation, and clinical practice are essential elements for developing these competencies in diverse real-world contexts.
- Solid and up-to-date training in TE positions nursing as a key agent in promoting self-care, therapeutic adherence, and improved quality of life.

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