

# Artificial intelligence and the erosion of human touch in nursing: An Islamic ethical reflection

Mohamad Firdaus Mohamad Ismail<sup>1\*</sup> , Siti Zuhaidah Shahadan<sup>1</sup> 

<sup>1</sup> Kulliyyah of Nursing, International Islamic University Malaysia, Kuantan, Malaysia

\*Correspondence: Mohamad Firdaus Mohamad Ismail. Address: Kulliyyah of Nursing, International Islamic University Malaysia, Kuantan, Malaysia. Email: [firdausismail@iium.edu.my](mailto:firdausismail@iium.edu.my)

The use of artificial intelligence (AI) in healthcare is rapidly transforming modern nursing practice. Technologies such as electronic documentation systems, virtual monitoring, robotic assistance, and clinical decision-support tools are increasingly used to improve efficiency, reduce workload, and enhance patient safety (Buchanan et al., 2020). While these developments provide many benefits, they also raise an important concern: is nursing gradually losing its human touch?

Nursing is more than a technical profession. Besides administering medications and monitoring patients' conditions, nurses provide emotional support, therapeutic communication, compassionate presence, and spiritual reassurance. Watson's Theory of Human Caring highlights that caring relationships are central to nursing and healing (Watson, 2008). Spiritual care is also recognised as an important component of holistic healthcare (Khalili Khouzani et al., 2025). However, increasing dependence on digital systems and automated technologies may gradually shift nursing care toward a more task-oriented and less human-centred approach. Nurses may spend more time interacting with electronic systems than engaging directly with patients. As a result, patients may feel medically treated, yet emotionally and spiritually uncared for.

This issue is particularly important because nursing has consistently been recognised as one of the most trusted professions worldwide. According to the Gallup Honesty and Ethics survey, nurses have remained the most trusted profession for many consecutive years because of their honesty, compassion, and close relationships with patients (Gallup, 2024). Patients trust nurses not only because of their clinical competence, but also because nurses provide empathy, comfort, and human connection during moments of illness and suffering.

However, an important question arises in the era of AI-driven healthcare: what will happen to this trust if nursing becomes excessively dependent on technology? Although AI can analyse data quickly and improve clinical efficiency, it cannot genuinely understand human

suffering, provide emotional comfort, or offer spiritual reassurance. Eye contact, attentive listening, empathy, and compassionate interaction are deeply human aspects of healing that cannot be fully replaced by machines. AI may imitate intelligence, but it cannot imitate sincere compassion rooted in human emotion, faith, and moral responsibility.

The loss of human touch in nursing may produce serious consequences for patients. Patients may feel emotionally neglected, spiritually empty, demotivated, and devalued during illness experiences. They may perceive themselves as objects or robotic cases rather than respected human beings with emotional and spiritual needs. Overreliance on technology may unintentionally create healthcare environments that are efficient yet cold and impersonal. In the long term, this may weaken therapeutic relationships, reduce patient satisfaction, and diminish trust in healthcare professionals. Compassionate nurse-patient relationships remain important for emotional well-being and quality care (Nursalam et al., 2017).

From an Islamic ethical perspective, caregiving is deeply connected to the values of *rahmah* (compassion), *ihsan* (excellence), and *amanah* (responsibility). Islam teaches that caring for sick individuals is not only a professional duty, but also a moral and spiritual responsibility. The preservation of human dignity and life are among the key objectives of *Maqasid al-Shariah* (Al-Bar & Chamsi-Pasha, 2015). The Qur'an and Sunnah consistently emphasise kindness, mercy, and compassion toward those who are suffering.

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ demonstrated compassion, gentleness, and empathy toward sick and vulnerable people. These values remain highly relevant in modern healthcare settings. Although AI can support documentation, monitoring, and clinical management, it cannot replace sincere empathy, spiritual presence, and moral sensitivity. A machine may detect abnormal vital signs, but it cannot comfort a frightened patient or reassure family members during moments of grief and uncertainty.

Therefore, the increasing use of AI in healthcare requires ethical reflection rather than unconditional acceptance. Technology should support nursing care, not replace the human and moral dimensions of caregiving. Several efforts may help preserve human touch in nursing. Healthcare institutions should ensure that technology reduces workload without reducing human presence at the bedside. Nursing education should continue emphasising communication skills, spiritual care, ethical reasoning, and compassionate practice alongside digital competencies. In Muslim contexts, continuous exposure to Islamic teachings related to compassion and caregiving ethics may help future nurses preserve humanity in clinical care.

In conclusion, the future of nursing should not only be AI-powered, but also compassion-guided. Technology and humanity must coexist in healthcare. The purpose of AI should be to create more time for compassion, not less. By preserving human touch in nursing care, nurses uphold not only professional values, but also the moral and spiritual principles of compassionate healing emphasised in Islamic teachings.

## References

- Al-Bar, M. A., & Chamsi-Pasha, H. (2015). *Contemporary bioethics: Islamic perspective*. Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-18428-9>
- Buchanan, C. et al. (2020). Predicted influences of artificial intelligence on the domains of nursing: Scoping review. *JMIR Nursing*, 3(1), e23939. <https://doi.org/10.2196/23939>
- Gallup. (2024). *Nurses continue to rate highest in honesty and ethics*. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/274673/nurses-continue-rate-highest-honesty-ethics.aspx>
- Khalili Khouzani, P. et al. (2025). Identifying the key components of providing spiritual care in the hospital: A scoping review study. *BMC Palliative Care*, 24, 142. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12904-025-01762-x>
- Nursalam, N., Pratiwi, P., & Hidayati, L. (2017). Model of An Increasing Quality of Nursing Service (Satisfaction) for Poor Patient in Public Health Center Indonesia. *Jurnal Ners*, 8(2), 301–308. <https://doi.org/10.20473/jn.v8i2.3834>
- Watson, J. (2008). *Nursing: The philosophy and science of caring* (Rev. ed.). University Press of Colorado.