

Original Research Article

Knowledge on Legal and Ethical Aspects in Patient Care among Critical Care Nurses

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Nurses face many legal and ethical issues while providing patient care and it is essential to understand the law and the way it affects the nursing practice. A study was conducted with the objectives to assess the knowledge on legal and ethical aspects in patient care among staff nurses, find out the association between level of knowledge and selected demographic variables and provide an awareness program on legal and ethical aspects inpatient care.

Materials & Methods: A cross-sectional descriptive survey was carried out among 230 staff nurses working in critical care units. Data was collected by using demographic proforma and structured knowledge questionnaire on legal and ethical aspects in patient care.

Result and conclusion: Only 10% of nurses had good knowledge and 77% had average knowledge. There was no significant association between level of knowledge and selected demographic variables. There is a need to improve the knowledge of staff nurses on legal and ethical aspects in patient care which will help to improve their critical thinking ability and decision making during legal and ethical issues.

Keywords: Legal & ethical aspects, Staff nurses, nursing care, patient care, awareness program.

INTRODUCTION

Within a health care team, nurses have the major responsibilities of including provision of care, making decision and maintaining confidentiality of the patient. With advanced technology, nurses can be confronted with the legal and ethical issues during their work. ^[1]

A study assessed the knowledge regarding legal responsibilities in nursing among 150 Staff Nurses in selected hospitals of Punjab, identified that 42% had good knowledge, 56% had average knowledge. It showed that there was no significant relationship between the nurses' knowledge with their age, gender, duration of clinical experience and in-service

education ($p < 0.05$). For implementation of safe and high quality nursing practice, good knowledge of legal aspects of health care is necessary. ^[2] In addition to that the laws, rules, and regulations that govern the Nursing practice influence the relationship which exists between the Nurse and the patient. Many legal issues are related to health care. In this era the patients are more educated and have higher expectations of the care which they receive and are aware of their rights. The patients have a right to expect their Nurses to provide the care that is consistent with the legal standards and principles. ^[3]

In developing country like India, all the hospital may not have continuing

nursing education cell or the ethical and legal aspects are not highlighted. But the public awareness is increasing as a result of advancement in science and technology. Therefore, nurses working in the hospital also need to be updated with present knowledge on ethical and legal aspects in patient care. So, a study was carried with the objectives to assess the knowledge on legal and ethical aspects in patient care among staff nurses, find out the association between level of knowledge and selected demographic variables and provide an awareness program on legal and ethical aspects in patient care.

MATERIALS & METHODS

A cross-sectional descriptive survey was conducted in a Tertiary Care Hospital, Udipi district, Karnataka, India. There is more than 1,100 registered staff nurses employed and have a regular, mandatory Continuing Nursing Education (CNE) Program. The study was done among 230 subjects. Registered Staff Nurses with GNM/BSc qualification and working in critical care units and emergency departments with minimum experience of two months and above as a registered Nurse were recruited. Nurses with Auxillary Nurse & Midwife & Hospital Auxillary qualification were excluded.

The data collection instruments consisted of demographic proforma and structured knowledge questionnaire on legal and ethical aspects in patient care. The structured knowledge questionnaire consisted of 36 multiple choice items with one correct answer for each. The tool was validated by seven experts and reliability was established by split half method and found to be reliable ($r=0.8$). Pretesting was done among 5 nurses and there was no difficulty to understand the test items.

Ethical considerations: Permission was obtained from Medical Superintendent & Chief Operating Officer of the Selected Tertiary Care Hospital, Ethical clearance from the Institutional Ethical Committee of

the Selected Hospital; Informed consent was taken from the study participants.

Statistical package of social science software (SPSS 16.0) was used for statistical analysis of data. Frequency, mean, percentage, chi-square tests were applied.

RESULTS

Sample Characteristics

The demographic data such as age, gender, religion, educational qualification, previous awareness, source of awareness area of work and years of clinical experience was collected by using demographic proforma and the details are given in Table 1.

Level of knowledge of registered Staff Nurses on legal and ethical aspects in patient care

The level of knowledge on legal and ethical aspects in patient care was assessed by administering structured knowledge questionnaire. Table 2 shows the level of knowledge among nurses working in critical care units and emergency departments.

The score of knowledge on legal and ethical aspects was arbitrarily categorized as good (75-100%), average (50-74%) and Poor (<50%). Figure 1 depicts the category of level of knowledge. Majority (77%) had average knowledge.

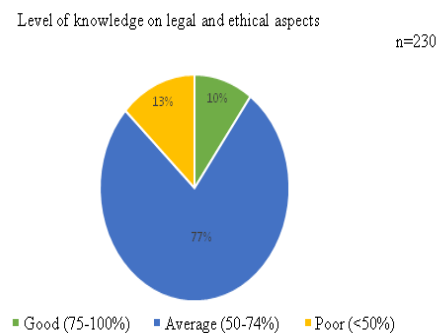


Figure 1: Pie diagram representing the percentage of knowledge scores on legal and ethical aspects in patient care

Association between level of knowledge and selected demographic variables

Table 3 shows the association between level of knowledge on legal and

ethical aspects in patient care and selected demographic variables.

Only 10% of nurses were having good knowledge on ethical and legal aspects in patient care. Therefore, an awareness

program was conducted by subject expert on legal aspects patient care. Ethical aspects in patient care were explained by the researcher.

Table 1: Frequency, percentage distribution of subjects based on demographic variables n=230

Variable	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)	
Age in years	21-25	126	55
	26-30	77	33.4
	31-35	08	3.4
	>35	19	8.2
Gender	Male	36	16
	Female	194	84
Religion	Christian	80	35
	Hindu	148	64
	Muslim & Others	2	01
Had previous awareness on legal & ethical aspects in patient care	Yes	205	89
	No	25	11
Source of awareness on legal & ethical aspects in patient care	Books	45	20
	Lectures	122	53
	Conferences	5	02
	Books & Lectures	27	11
	Books, lectures & Conferences	6	03
Educational qualification	Diploma in nursing	160	70
	Graduation in nursing	70	30
	Post-graduation in nursing	0	0
Area of work	Medical ICU	108	47
	Cardiac ICU	39	17
	Neuro ICU	22	10
	Emergency & Trauma Triage	20	09
	Burns ICU	13	05
	Surgical ICU	28	12
Years of Clinical Experience	2months-1 year	46	20
	1-5 y	132	57.39
	6-10y	28	12.17
	>10 y	24	10.43

Table 2: Description of knowledge score on legal and ethical aspects in patient care n=230

Mean	Standard deviation	Range	Minimum score obtained	Maximum score obtained
21.4	3.4	17	13	30

Possible minimum score- 0 and possible maximum score- 36

Table 3: Chi-Square values Computed between knowledge on legal and ethical aspects inpatient care and selected demographic variables n=230

Sample characteristics	Knowledge			χ^2 /Fischer	p Value
	Good	Average	Poor		
Age in years					
21-25	10	101	15	8.8 (fisher exact)	0.137
26-30	8	59	10		
31-35	02	03	03		
>35	03	14	02		
Gender					
Male	05	28	3	1.37 (fisher exact)	0.507
Female	18	149	27		
Previous awareness on legal and ethical aspects in patient care					
Yes	22	156	27	0.85 (fisher exact)	0.65
No	01	21	03		
Educational qualification					
Diploma	10	128	22	8.2 (chi square)	0.016
Graduation	13	49	08		
Years of clinical experience					
2months-1 year	04	34	08	4.3 (fisher exact)	0.63
1-5 y	12	104	16		
6-10 y	02	23	03		
>10 y	05	16	03		

DISCUSSION

In the present study, 55% of participants belong to the age group of 21-25 years with 1-5 years of professional experience (57.39%), 84% were females, and 64% were Hindus. The majority (89%) of the participants had previous awareness on legal and ethical aspects in patient care, 70% of subjects had a professional qualification of Diploma in Nursing and rest of them (30%) were graduate nurses. However, the majority, 177 (77%) were found to have average knowledge on ethical and legal aspects in patient care. But, a smaller group (10%) had good knowledge and 30(13%) had poor knowledge on legal and ethical aspects in patient care. Nevertheless, there was no significant association between the level of knowledge on legal and ethical aspects in patient care and selected demographic variables such as age, gender, previous awareness on legal and ethical aspects in patient care, educational qualification, and years of clinical experience.

Our report is similar to the study on effectiveness of informational booklet on Nurses' knowledge and practice in legal responsibilities which showed 40% of the participants were in the age group of 21-30 years. Majority (92%) of the participants' professional education was GNM, 74% had working experience of more than 10 years and 90% had not attended in-service program related to legal aspects. [4]

This is also supported by a study done at Punjab found that 96.67% of the participants were female, 73.33% of the staff belong to the age group of 21-30 years, 68% were Diploma holders and 64.67% of them were with 0-5years experience. Nearly one third (30.67%) of Staff Nurses had not attended any in-service education and there was no significant relationship with the knowledge of Nurses with their age, gender, duration of clinical experience and in service education. 56% had average knowledge on legal responsibilities in nursing, 42% of Staff Nurses had good knowledge and 2% of Staff Nurses had

below average knowledge regarding legal responsibilities in Nursing. However, in both studies, the majority had an average level of knowledge. [2]

There was a study conducted (2009) in the same setting of the present study, on effectiveness of instructional programme on knowledge and attitude regarding legal aspects in health care among registered Staff Nurses. This study also had the similar report of having no significant association with knowledge and selected demographic variables such as professional education ($\chi^2=0.094, p=0.525$), exposure to in-service education ($\chi^2=0.856, p=0.359$), and years of experience ($\chi^2=1.59, p=0.210$). [5]

Similar result is noted in a study to determine the Nursing Graduates' knowledge on legal responsibilities in patient care using a descriptive approach which found out that there was no significant association with knowledge and selected demographic variables such as age, academic education, experience and in-service education which is similar to the present study. [6]

CONCLUSION

Nurses are expected to provide a care which is ethically and legally safer. But, our curriculum has very little focus on this aspect. Yet, most of the staff nurses had an average level of knowledge on legal and ethical aspects in patient care in our study. Every health care professional should have adequate knowledge in the legal and ethical aspects to provide compressive care to the patients. Thus, they can safeguard themselves and patients from the legal and ethical consequences. Therefore, we recommend the nurse educators/nursing schools and colleges to give additional teaching on ethical and legal aspects in patient care to the student nurses. It is also important to periodically update the knowledge of staff nurses of the same. Attending seminars, workshops, and conference would enhance their knowledge. The knowledge can be improved by providing awareness on legal and ethical

issues by the subject experts so as to enrich legally and ethically bound quality Nursing Care.

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