

## Knowledge of Medico- Legal Aspects of Patient Care among Nurses Working in Cardiothoracic Setting

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### Reprint Request

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### Abstract

Nursing practice is surrounded by many legal aspects because nurses are accountable for their professional judgments and action. For the implementation of high quality of nursing practice in the world of latest medical technological advances a good knowledge of legal aspects of health care is necessary. The enactment of various legal provisions like Consumer Protection Act, India, 1986 (CPA), Right to Information Act, 2005 (RTI), and standardization of procedures and practices has brought nursing care under the legal ambit and focus, more than ever before. The purpose of the present study was to determine the level of knowledge regarding medico legal aspects of patient care among nurses working in a selected hospital of Kerala. The study utilized a non-experimental approach, and descriptive design. The target population was staff nurses working in the selected hospital, Thrissur, Kerala. A total of 48 staff nurses who were working in cardiology and cardiothoracic wings of the selected hospital was recruited using purposive sampling. Findings revealed that, majority of 91.7% of study participants had inadequate knowledge while 4.2% each had moderately adequate and adequate knowledge. None of the participants reported to be aware of medico-legal cases against nurses in India and in the working institution. Knowledge regarding medicolegal aspects of patient care was only found to be associated with total years of experience ( $p=0.000$ ), but not with other variables. The study highlights on the need to strengthen nurse's knowledge on medico legal aspects of patient care.

**Keywords:** Knowledge; Medico- Legal; Nurses.

### Introduction

Nursing profession is in the forefront of healthcare. It is governed by legislation, code of Ethics, and Etiquette. Government has made laws related to medical and nursing practice. Also accountability is an essential concept of professional practice. Nurses deal with the most fundamental human events like birth, death and suffering, they encounter many legal issues surrounding these sensitive areas. With a

paradigm shift in the role of nurses, there is an expansion and extension of their clinical roles in a number of specialized areas.

Nursing practice is surrounded by many legal aspects because nurses are accountable for their professional judgments and action. For the implementation of high quality of nursing practice in the world of latest medical technological advances a good knowledge of legal aspects of health care is necessary. Legal responsibility in nursing practice is getting more important as each year passes.

Consumers are becoming increasingly aware of their legal rights in the health care. The enactment of various legal provisions like Consumer Protection Act, India, 1986 (CPA), Right to Information Act, 2005 (RTI), and standardization of procedures and practices has brought nursing care under the legal ambit and focus, more than ever before. Needless to say, the level of legal awareness amidst nursing staff in India is abysmally low. Medical malpractice statistics for the USA in 2003, shows that 16,339 (7.9%) nurses and nursing-related practitioners had a malpractice report made against them in the US (1990-2003, US DHHS). Even in developed countries like USA, the number of adverse actions reported to NPDB, related to nurses in 2011, was nearly double of that which was seen in 2002 (21,586 vs. 11,029 respectively) [1].

Safe Nursing practice includes an understanding of the legal boundaries in which nurses must function. An understanding of the implication of the Law support critical thinking on the Nurses part. Laws are changing constantly to reflect changes in the society, changes in the delivery of health care and advancement in medical technology.

Recently nurses in India have been in the limelight for negligence and cases of criminal medical negligence against nurses are also being registered in courts [2]. In recent era of educated and intellectual society it is necessary for the nurses to become aware about the legal medicine. During the clinical postings the investigators has come across various negligence and medication errors that arise due to the lack of knowledge of staff nurses which has put the hospital and themselves into various issues. So the researcher proposed this study to determine the level of knowledge regarding medico legal aspects of patient care among nurses working in a selected hospital of Kerala.

#### *Objectives*

1. To assess the knowledge regarding medico-legal aspects of patient care among nurses.
2. To examine the association of knowledge regarding medico-legal aspects of patient care among nurses with the selected variables.

#### **Materials and Methods**

The present utilized a non-experimental approach, and descriptive design. The target population was staff nurses working in the selected hospital, Thrissur, Kerala. A Total of 100 staff nurses who were working in cardiology and cardiothoracic

wings of the selected hospital and who were willing to participate in the study were included in the study. Those who were not available during the study were excluded. Purposive sampling technique was used for the selection of sample. Study was conducted in a tertiary care hospital, Thrissur, Kerala.

A self-administered questionnaire developed in English was used for the study. The initial part of the questionnaire consisted of demographicssuch as age, gender, education, marital status, area of practice, designation, years of experience in the current hospital, total years of experience in profession, the ever involvement of medico-legal cases and the frequency encountered in practice. The second part of the questionnaire consisted of 52 questions pertaining to medico legalterminologies (10), related acts and laws (18), consumer protection act (6), consent (12), and documentation (6). It also had two open ended questions to list medico legal cases against nurses in India in the present working hospital. Reliability and validity of the questionnaire was ensured before administration. The permission to conduct the study was obtained from the hospital authorities. Written consent was obtained after providing the information sheet to the participants. A pilot study was conducted among 10% of the study population for testing the feasibility of the study. Individuals included in the pilot study were not considered for the mainstudy to prevent possible bias. The study was conducted during the month of May 2017.

On selection of the study subject, a brief introduction about the self was given to the subjects followed by detailed explanations regarding the purpose of the study and expectations from the nurses during the data collection were informed. Among the 60 distributed questionnaires, 49 were returned, out of which one questionnaire was incompletely filled and was not included for analysis.

One point was assigned for each correct answer and 0 for wrong answer. The knowledge score for the individual was calculated by summing the correct answers. A score of more than 80% was considered as adequate, 60-80% as moderately adequate, and less than that as inadequate. Statistics used in the study were descriptivestatistics, Pearson Chi-square test. Statistical significance was fixed at the level of  $p < 0.05$ . Statistical analysis was done using SPSS Version 20 software program.

#### **Results and Discussion**

##### *Characteristics of Study Participants*

The mean age of study participants was

27.46±3.031 (Range 22-35 years). All of them were females and 75% were married. The mean total professional experience was 4.54±3.351(Range 0-13 years). Regarding area of work, 55% were working in wards 45% were working in ICU. None of them reported prior involvement of medico-legal cases while 4.2% reported facing legal problems by their colleagues. Out of all 33.3% had attended in-service education on medico-legal aspects of nursing. Of them 70.8% each was oriented to the bill of rights of

patients, read articles on legal aspects of patient care and legal aspects of nursing. Hemant Kumar et al conducted similar study to know the legal awareness among nursing staff in administration of patient care the among nurses working in a trust hospital. The analysis of results based on age of nursing staff, revealed that the knowledge of nursing staff on various established basicnursing procedures was highest among those who were more than 40 years of age [3].

*Knowledge Regarding Medico-Legal Aspects of Patient Care*

**Table 1:** Distribution of category wise knowledge regarding medico legal aspects of patient care

Domain	Minimum score	Maximum score	Mean	SD
Terminology	1	7	4.13	1.852
Acts and Laws	14	3	17	8.50
Consumer protection act	5	0	5	2.04
Consent	5	1	6	3.25
Documentation	5	1	6	3.25
Total score	12	47	23.38	7.280

**Table 2:** Distribution of category wise knowledge regarding medico legal aspects of patient care

Domains	Adequate F (%)	Moderately Adequate F (%)	Inadequate F (%)
Terminology	0(0)	12(25)	36(75)
Acts and Laws	2(4.2)	12(25)	34(70.8)
Consumer protection act	12(25)	14(29.2)	22(45.8)
Consent	2(4.2)	10(20.8)	36(75)
Documentation	4(8.3)	32(66.7)	12(25)
Total score	2(4.2)	2(4.2)	44(91.7)

From Table 1 & 2 it is clear that the present study participants had inadequate knowledge regarding medicolegal aspects of patient care. Majority of 91.7% of study participants had inadequate knowledge while 4.2% each had moderately adequate and adequate knowledge. The results of the present study were also consistent with the findings of similar studies done in India and abroad, which also indicated huge deficits in their knowledge regarding medico legal aspects of patient care. Kumar et al in their study in Jaipur, Rajasthan, reported that a majority (90%) of the nurses possessed only a moderate level of knowledge on legal awareness [4]. Hemant Kumar et al reported that the knowledge on various legal provisions, as was applicable to nursing, across all categories of nurses was found to be poor. The nursing staff had poor knowledge on patients’ rights and also on their legal obligations towards patients. In another study done by Sharmil in Malaysia on ‘Awareness of community health nurses on legal aspects of health care’, it was

observed that only 11.7% nurses had the expected adequate level of knowledge on legal aspects of health care, while the remaining 88.3% nurses had only a moderate level of knowledge [5]. Aliyu D et al have found contrasting results while studying knowledge, attitude and practice of nursing ethics and law among nurses at Federal Medical Centre, Bida. They found that nurses had considerably good knowledge, attitude and practice of nursing ethics and law [6].

*Awareness of Medico Legal Cases Against Nurses*

In the present study, none of the participants reported to be aware of medico-legal cases against nurses in India and in the working institution. Though there are not too many cases of legal suits filed against nurses in India, the numbers are slowly increasing. A total of 47% nurses admitted to having some knowledge on such cases of negligence caused by nurses, which were mainly related to wrong administration of injections and drugs to patients. 3

### *Association between Knowledge and Selected Variables*

Knowledge regarding medicolegal aspects of patient care was only found to be associated with total years of experience ( $p=0.000$ ), but not with other variables.

As the age increases the level of knowledge on legal aspects has also been increased. The better knowledge on legal aspects of healthcare was found to be associated with increasing age, Christian religion, Bsc Nursing degree, increasing total experience in the profession [7].

### **Conclusion**

It is high time in India for nurses to have acquire enough knowledge on medicolegal aspects related to clinical practice with the growing awareness on consumers, increasing complexity of health care and with the prying eyes of the media. The overall results of the study suggested that there is an urgent need for nurses to understand the medico legal aspects of patient care.

Nursing associations and hospitals should arrange and enhance participation in seminars, and continuing nursing education to increase awareness of medico legal issues of patient care.

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