

REVIEW ARTICLE

Forensic Nursing

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ABSTRACT

Forensic Nursing is the application of nursing process to public or legal proceedings in the healthcare with scientific investigation of trauma or death related to abuse, violence, criminal activity, liability and accidents. Nurse practices in all areas with specialized roles by taking care of the documentation which plays a major role for clarification. Forensic Nursing was recently recognized by American Nurses Association but it has its origin as early as 12th century from Italy Florence Nightingale (1820 – 1910), Angel of Crimea / Lady With A Lamp provided nursing care to war victims without any consideration whether of friend or enemy. In 1992 International Association of Forensic Nurses was found in the USA and other countries where the forensic nursing took its practice are Canada, South Africa, Japan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Sweden, Switzerland, and the Great Britain. In India, the journey of Forensic Nursing started in 2002 with the visit of Ms. Virginia A. Lynch to Punjab. In October 2015, Department of Health and family welfare, Government of India and Indian Nursing Council approved and started a one-year post-Basic diploma in Forensic Nursing at the Institute of Forensic Science, Gujarat Forensic Sciences University with fifteen students. Forensic nurses contribute to disaster planning and response. They are also consulted on legal cases, assisting attorneys to understand the medical terminology and how care is provided to the individual.

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INTRODUCTION

NURSING IS A VERY IMPORTANT component of healthcare system to provide comprehensive medical services to the public. And forensic nursing is one of the specialties in Forensic discipline which, in addition to creating more satisfaction in nurses, is considered essential in holistic, quality, and safe care. It is one of the recent forms of discipline in forensic science, and it is the application of forensic science, combined with clinical nursing practice in the scientific investigation of death and injury resulting from criminal activity and accidents. The role

of a nurse in medico-legal cases has been recognized since the mid-1970s when Dr. John Butt, the Chief Medical Examiner, Alberta, Canada, first established the role of a forensic nurse examiner in death investigations, representing the forensic pathologist at the scene of crime. Later, forensic nursing started as a specialty in the United States and then to various parts of the world like Sweden, South Africa, Japan, Singapore, and Malaysia. In this regard, Virginia A. Lynch, a forensic clinical nurse specialist, is recognized as the founder of forensic nursing as a formal discipline in the United States and



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all across the world. A forensic nurse is a nurse who provides specialized care for patients who are victims and/or perpetrators in medico-legal cases. Forensic nurses can play an important role in bridging the gap between the law and medicine. Nurses trained in this field can document injuries, collect biological fluids, and preserve clothing with evidence of assault. In medico-legal practice, it is not uncommon for some significant evidence in poisoning cases, namely, gastric aspirate, vomitus, urine sample, soiled cloth, etc., to be discarded in emergency departments. Trained forensic nurses are aware of the importance of these evidences, and they may help in collection, preservation, and maintenance of the chain of custody of these samples.²

A study aimed to describe the consequences of the presence of forensic nurses in the health system. This qualitative study was conducted between 2017 and 2018 in Iran. Semi-structured interviews were performed with 18 participant experts in the field of health and law. The interviews were analyzed using the inductive content analysis approach proposed by Graneheim and Lundman. The consequences of the presence of nurses in the health system were summarized into two categories: positive and negative consequences. The positive consequences consisted of improved performance, better legality of nurses, the calmness of nurses, prevention of patients' rights violations, advancement comparable with developed countries, reduced costs, increased accuracy and speed in dealing with forensic cases, improved performance of Iranian Legal Medicine Organization and increased employment. On the other hand, the negative consequences were role conflict with other involved professionals and nursing shortage. Participants included nurses (with different specialties), nurse lawyers, forensic medicines, forensic midwives, a judge, and a medical lawyer. If planners and policymakers have a positive attitude toward the presence of forensic nurses, we can anticipate better forensic services for clients through the development of systematic educational programs, the formation of forensic teams, and the expertise of this profession can provide many benefits.¹

Sexual violence is a significant cause of physical and psychological harm and suffering for

women and children. Although sexual violence mostly affects women and girls, boys are also subject to child sexual abuse. Nurse is the person who attends the victim first. In order to meet the rigid and ever-changing demands of providing care to the victim and complying with our confusing system of laws, the nursing should have been forced to expand into a Forensic nursing, specialty of its own. Nursing roles in the criminal justice service known by many names worldwide- Custody nursing, Prison/Correctional nursing, Immigration center nursing, Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) or Sexual Assault Forensic Examiner (SAFE), SARTs (Sexual assault response team), SARCs (Sexual assault referral center) and FNDIs (Forensic nurse death investigator). The WHO and IAFN have urged inclusion of forensic content in both undergraduate and postgraduate nursing programs. Forensic Nurse Specialist can provide direct services to individual clients, consultation services to nursing, medical and law-related agencies, as well as providing expert court testimony in areas dealing with trauma and/or questioned death investigative processes, adequacy of services delivered, and specialized diagnoses of specific medical conditions. Research Findings on the Effectiveness of Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) Programs suggests various improvements in each and every step in care of victim of sexual assault.³

ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Cases of sexual violence are on the rise, and a tremendous amount of physical and psychological trauma are suffered by the victims of such heinous crimes. A female forensic nurse can readily establish a rapport with these victims of sexual violence. At the same time, these nurses are qualified in providing sexual assault evaluations and victim management. They provide services to attending doctor, to individual clients, give counseling to victims and relatives, as well as provide expert court testimony.³

In the field of death investigation both at the crime scene and during postmortem examination, forensic nurses can also play an important role. In the mortuary, they may help in receiving dead bodies, police papers as well as in maintenance

of records and management of legal formalities, recording of the condition of the body, etc. A forensic nurse may also serve as a forensic pathology associate during dissection as well as in the collection of biological samples and trace evidences.⁴ In present times, “death” has become a respectable field of inquiry, demanding answers to satisfy the public need, and demand to determine the cause and manner of death. Nurses can bring empathy and compassion as well as excellent observation, clinical, and communications skills to death investigation.⁵

On the other hand, forensic nurses may play a significant role in dealing with cases involving mental illness, especially when such people become involved in criminal cases or when criminals are feigning mental illness. They can provide a thorough forensic evaluation while observing for specific symptoms related to such a case. Moreover, crime victims face a higher risk of posttraumatic stress disorder, depression, suicide, and medical complications than other patients; forensic nurses improve both legal outcomes and quality of life for these patients.⁶

Interestingly, according to the American Forensic Association, the most important subspecialty of forensic nursing is sexual assault followed by other subspecialties such as death investigation, medicolegal consulting, and forensic psychiatric nursing.⁷ Research findings on the effectiveness of Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner programs suggest various improvements in each and every step in care of victim of sexual assault. [3] Further, battered women, abused children, and the neglected elders will be more comfortable in explaining the circumstances of injury to female forensic nurses as compared to police personnel.⁶

CONCLUSION

In the present world, several new specialties are developing in various scientific fields. In nursing sciences, new areas of practice such as pediatric nursing, psychiatric nursing, and geriatric nursing have come up. The specialty of forensic nursing is a comparatively new entity in India. It was first introduced to a few select institutes and agencies in our country in the year 2003, and good response was emanated from this prolog in New Delhi,

Punjab, and some other places in India.

To conclude, forensic nursing is an evolving specialty that has undergone substantive development in recent years. Unfortunately, in this part of India, most of the health-care professionals are not even aware of the existence of such a specialty. Even though efforts are still on, forensic nursing is yet to find a proper place in the nursing curriculum manuals in India.² **IJFMP**

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