

## Forensic Nursing in India: Need, Rationale and Future Road Map for Indian Medicolegal System

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### Abstract

Forensic Nursing is a much required specialty in India which is non-existent till date in the hospitals and Medicolegal setup. The nursing professional are already involved in assisting the doctors in management of Medico legal cases. The introduction of Forensic nursing will help in dealing the medicolegal cases in an efficient manner leading to an effective contribution in justice delivery system. Its implementation in health care system and Forensic medicine practice will impart professionalism. The article highlights rationale, neediness, and justification of introducing forensic nursing in our country. Further issues related to framing and implementing of curriculum will be discussed which could be helpful for providing skillful forensic nursing staff in the future and could be a future road map for the Indian Medicolegal system.

**Keywords:** Forensic Nursing; Indian Medicolegal system; Medicolegal cases; Forensic Medicine: Sexual Assault Forensic examination.

## INTRODUCTION

Forensic nursing extends traditional nursing to medicolegal practice.<sup>1</sup> It is already an emerging specialty of nursing in many countries but still is non-existent in our country despite of the fact that nursing professional are already involved in management of Medicolegal cases under

the supervisions of doctors. Recently a Faculty Development Program: Short Term Course in Forensic Nursing was organized by Dte. GHS, Nursing Division, MoHFW, Government of India in collaboration with College of Nursing and Department of Forensic Medicine, AIIMS, New Delhi. The programme was an online orientation training for the nursing professionals in different aspects of Forensic practice related to nursing professionals particularly evidence collection. (Image 1). More than 1000 participants across the country participated in the programme. These aspects are not included in the nursing curriculum, resulting in a lack of awareness about medicolegal aspects.<sup>2</sup> This article highlights rationale, neediness, and justification of introducing forensic nursing in our country. Further issues related to framing and implementing of curriculum will be discussed which could be helpful for providing skillful forensic nursing staff in the future and could be a future road map for the Indian Medicolegal system.

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**Dte.GHS, Nursing Division**  
in collaboration with  
**College of Nursing and  
Department of Forensic Medicine, AIIMS, New Delhi**  
ECHO India is organizing

**Faculty Development Program: Short Term Course in Forensic Nursing**  
**Target Group of Beneficiaries: Nursing Faculty**

**Date: 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> April, 2022 | Time: 9:00 am to 1:00 pm**

**Esteemed Guests**

**Dr. Randeep Guleria**  
Director  
AIIMS, NEW DELHI

**Dr. Rathi Balachandran**  
Dte.GHS- ADG Nursing  
MOHFW

**Organizing Chair Person**

**Dr. Latha Venkatesan**  
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**Image 1:** Faculty Development Program: Short Term Course in Forensic Nursing organized by Dte.GHS, Nursing Division, MoHFW, Government of India in collaboration with College of Nursing and Department of Forensic Medicine, AIIMS, New Delhi and ECHO India.

## History/Origin of Forensic Nursing

Forensic nursing is presently considered the new specialty of nursing, but the truth behind it is nurses have been practicing this for many years without official recognition as a separate specialization.

In history, nursing emerged with the practice of forensics. Florence Nightingale, originated the profession by caring for emergencies of war without bearing in mind the victims or offenders.<sup>3</sup> The term forensic nursing was coined by Virginia A in 1986.<sup>4</sup> Lynch framed a master's degree in nursing

with a clinical specialty in Forensic Medicine, and it was accepted by the University of Texas at Arlington. In 1991, the American Association of Forensic Science was recognized and accepted as a scientific discipline of Forensic nursing. The first national conference for sexual assault nurses was held in 1992 in Minneapolis, Minnesota, and it was acknowledged as forensic nurses can be more inclusive and focused on cases like sexual offense patients, domestic violence, child abuse, and other aspects of criminal or liability connected to trauma.<sup>5</sup> Finally, in 2002, the International Association of Forensic Nurse in the United States of America was established to ensure that the practice of nursing that specializes in the application of forensic sciences to patient care and it was continued to spread to various developing and developed countries like Italy, India, and South Africa.<sup>6</sup> but still is non-existent in our country.

## **NEED AND RATIONALE AND JUSTIFICATION /IMPORTANCE OF INTRODUCTION OF FORENSIC NURSING IN INDIAN MEDICOLEGAL SYSTEM**

In the current scenario, the Medicolegal cases (MLC) are being mostly handled in hospital emergency departments where the top priority of the doctors is to manage the patients having life threatening conditions. So, the stable MLC patients and particularly sexual assault survivors, victims of domestic violence have to wait for comparatively longer periods for health care professionals. Sometimes that can lead to the loss of valuable time for collecting evidence. Educating the nursing professional about the recognition of injuries caused by violence, and documentation of injuries will lead to effective and timely management of MLC cases which may not be having life threatening conditions but are still undergoing emotional and mental trauma.<sup>7</sup> This will not only lead to a more thorough examination and documentation of injuries and will also save the time of the doctors to handle the critical cases in emergency departments.

Cases of child physical and sexual abuse are still underreported in our country due to social stigma etc, particularly when the offender is known to the victims. Sensitization and training of Health care providers, particularly nursing professionals will lead to more detection of such cases in routine clinical examination also as the children will be more comfortable in revealing their trauma to the nursing professionals. Inclusion of all these aspects in the curriculum of Forensic Nursing can provide

well-trained and specialized nursing staff for such cases, which can lead to imparting justice to the victim.<sup>8</sup>

## **CHALLENGES IN ESTABLISHING THE ROLE OF A FORENSIC NURSE IN HOSPITAL SETTINGS AND FORENSIC MEDICINE DEPARTMENT**

First of all there is no PG course in nursing curriculum regarding Forensic Nursing. There are no specific cadre/ posts for the same. There is no forensic nursing specialty in any of the hospital/ healthcare setup in our country till date. Recognizing and establishing the role of a nursing professional in Forensic practice is an uphill task, and substantial administrative efforts will be required by Dte.GHS, Nursing Division, MoHFW, Government of India and other associated regulatory authorities. There is no legal provision of any other health professional other than the doctors to record, document and signing the Medicolegal reports. The nursing professionals will have to prove their findings in the courts of law.

## **Future Road Map for Establishing Forensic Nursing as a Part of Medicolegal Examiner's**

### *Nurses' sensitization to forensic background*

Forensic nursing is a challenging specialty. To rectify this proper internship training program related to the medicolegal case management and injury identification could be conducted in Department of Forensic Medicine for qualified Forensic nursing professional (FNP).<sup>9</sup> FNP should be capable of handling stressful situations like a medicolegal emergency with critical thinking, logical sequencing, social maturity, neutrality, observation, and communication skills. Forensic nursing is broadly classified into four categories based on practice areas, i.e., clinical forensic nursing, Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE), forensic psychiatry nursing, and institutional forensic nursing. The international forensic nurses association (IAFN) has recognized many subspecialties of forensic nursing like Forensic clinical specialists, death investigators, forensic nurse educators, legal nurse consultants, and forensic gerontology.<sup>10</sup> To sensitize forensic nursing specialties, many continuing medical education programs, workshops on forensic nursing-related things, faculty development programs, and short-term courses can be encouraged for the FNPs.

### ***Evidence based study for designing the course curriculum:***

An education should assess the recognition of the knowledge gap that can be well versed by the developing of an evidence based study for designing the curriculum for undergraduate and master's in forensic nursing. It will guarantee to resolve a part of a new and developing field and deliver a standard of practice. The lecturers should target the curriculum like nurses at various levels of approaches involved in evaluating the victimization, proper documentation, collection, and preservation of evidence. The course targets persons who choose to specialize in this emerging forensic nursing specialty and develop syllabi and teach the subject.<sup>4</sup>

### ***Problem identification and need Assessment of targeted learners***

Identification and study of a health care requirement or additional problem, that is to be addressed by the syllabus. It helps to focus on the goals and objectives of the curriculum's educational and assessment policies. The next stage is whether the curriculum is directed to resolving health care issues and what information is most needed can be assessed by curriculum developers from the target learners. The information may include preplanned training, existing skills, recent performance, observed deficiencies, and clinical understandings. The curriculum developer has clarified the neediness of learners; the curriculum is focused on the need by structuring the goals and objectives. The goals and objectives are identified, next stage is to develop the educational policies. The general content of the syllabus should be based on specific, measurable objectives.<sup>11,12</sup>

### ***Implementing the curriculum in a phased manner***

Before implementing the curriculum, identify the resources needed like faculty, administrative provision, supporting staff, learners, patients, services like space, equipment, clinical areas, financial assistance by government, professional societies, etc. If all resources are made ready, the curriculum will be introduced in a phased manner, like the initial stage of the experimental trial followed by a phase-in trial. In the final step can fully implement the curriculum. The reviewer can collect evaluation and feedback from the learners and use it to improve and guide individuals and the curriculum in the implementation phase. The assessment result may help seek funding for the curriculum, assess the individual level achievement,

gratifying external necessities, and aid as the origin for presentations and publications.<sup>11,14</sup>

### ***Academic regulation of program***

Admission for the master's in a forensic nursing specialty; the candidate must possess a bachelor of science in nursing from any recognized university/ autonomous college /Institute of National Importance and be registered in the Nursing Council of India like another specialty of the nursing branch. The course duration of two years, which includes a thesis dissertation. The internal assessment exam can be conducted at the end of each semester, and the final exam can be performed at the end of the course, which includes both theory and practical.<sup>14</sup>

### ***Recognition of Academic courses***

The candidate who obtains a postgraduate Master's degree in forensic nursing will be paid a salary/stipend as admissible under rules, and an increment can give for subsequent promoting years. In addition, Based upon the neediness for recruitment in teaching areas, clinical aspects, including casualty, one-stop crisis Centre for sexual assault survivors, and forensic medicine department, can be recruited. This will increase job opportunities and provide academic growth for the forensic nursing specialty.<sup>14</sup>

### ***Indented expected education outcome***

The learner should know the historical development of forensic nursing as a discipline of health care, Assess the effect of governmental, economic, and social factors on forensic care within the medicolegal system, application of cognitive, interpersonal, and applied skills in the practice of forensic nursing. Capability to develop comprehensive plans of forensic care by incorporating the principle of forensic nursing toward the nursing standard.<sup>11</sup>

### ***Administrative recommendations***

The role and responsibility of FNPs in Medicolegal practice under supervision of doctors will have to be endorsed by necessary authorities so that their reports could be accepted by courts of law. Designated posts for FNPs needs to be created in hospital/healthcare setups.

## **CONCLUSION**

This article mainly recommends and proposes to create forensic nursing as a subspecialty of

nursing by Dte.GHS, Nursing Division, MoHFW, Government of India and other associated regulatory authorities for professional recognition. The effective implementation of Forensic Nursing will ultimately lead to significant contribution to victims in justice delivery system.

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