

A Study to Assess the Knowledge Regarding Legal Aspects in Psychiatric Nursing among Nurses in a Selected Tertiary Care Centre

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Abstract: *Background of the study:* Ethical and legal responsibility lies with any professional license. Doctors take the oath pledging to do no harms to patients, lawyers are held responsible for their clients in court, and architects are responsible for the safety of the structures they build. Nurses are no different. Whether it's administering a medication or obtaining an informed consent from a pre-op patient, nurses may be held responsible if they fail to meet certain standards. *Objectives:* The objectives of the study are to assess the knowledge regarding legal aspects in psychiatric nursing among staff nurses in a selected tertiary care hospital and to determine the relationship between knowledge and selected demographic variables. *Methods and Materials:* The study is a descriptive study in which Simple Random Sampling is adopted. Knowledge of 60 Nurses was assessed regarding legal aspects of Psychiatric Nursing by using Self-administered semi-structured questionnaire comprising of 30 items which was modified after pilot study. *Results:* Association between various sample characteristics and knowledge regarding legal aspects in Psychiatric Nursing was assessed by applying Mann Whitney and Anova test. Test results showed association between knowledge score of nurses and years of Clinical Experience (18.74 ± 4.368), whereas the various sample characteristics, i.e. age of Nurses, professional qualification and present clinical area, showed no association with existing Knowledge score. *Conclusion:* The study findings revealed that maximum (53.33%) subjects had average knowledge on legal aspects of psychiatric nursing with a mean knowledge score of 17.93 ± 4.52 . This study revealed that none of the nurses had undergone any In-service education regarding legal aspects of psychiatric nursing, which highlights the lack of regular continuing nurse's education regarding legal aspects of psychiatric nursing, an essential aspect in today's world.

Keywords: legal aspects, psychiatric nursing, nurses, knowledge

1. Introduction

Nursing is a profession, which is practiced in the society involving people. It is an integral part of the health care system in which nurses direct their energies towards the promotion, maintenance and restoration of health in the society. But in every society there are some common as well as statutory laws for protection of the right of the people. As nurses have social obligations for safe nursing practice, one has to understand the legal responsibilities to enable her to protect the right of her legal responsibility, to protect the right of the client as well as to protect herself from liability.

The role of nurses and professional nursing has expanded rapidly within the past few decades to include expertise specialization, autonomy and accountability, both from a legal and ethical perspective. This expansion has forced new concerns among nurses and a heightened awareness of the interaction of legal and ethical principles. Areas of concerns include professional nursing practice, legal issues and ethical principles. The context of mental healthcare is constantly changing and the proactive response of mental health nurses to such changes is reflected in the evolution of our profession.

2. Background of the Study

Mental health today is recognized as an important aspect of one's total status. It is a basic factor that contributes to the maintenance of physical health as well as social effectiveness. The WHO in its world health report 2012 has

drawn attention to fact that, nearly 15% of the total population are estimated to be suffering from mental illness globally.¹

Today, legal rights of those with mental disorders and ethical health care practices of mental health providers are ongoing concerns for psychiatric nurses. People with psychiatric problems are vulnerable to mistreatment and abuse; consequently, laws have been passed that guarantee them legal protection.²

3. Need for the Study

Though the legal aspects of nursing are included early in the syllabus, yet very little emphasis is given on its use, as the staff nurses rarely get to apply their knowledge in general ward settings. But with the prevalence of mental illness and increased awareness of consumers, nurses must know the law that governs her profession to avoid lawsuits against her. Legal issues confronting nurses today are many, but the nurse should view the law not with apprehension, but as a helpful adjunct to define nursing practice. Nurses who are aware of legal rights and obligations will be better prepared to care for clients.

4. Methods

A descriptive research study design was adopted to assess the knowledge regarding legal aspects of psychiatric nursing among staff nurses working in a tertiary care hospital. Simple random sampling method was used and 60 staff

nurses were selected who fulfilled the inclusion criteria. The investigator prepared a list of all staff nurses working in the selected hospitals from the nominal roll. This formed the sampling frame. Each member of the sampling frame was given a number from 1-130 and out of this 60 staff nurses were selected by the computer generated random numbers (RAND = 60). This method of randomization was undertaken to avoid contamination and sampling bias. Sample size determination for this study was obtained using the formula given below

$$n = \{Z^2_{1-\alpha/2} P(1-P)\} / E^2$$

(Sample size determination in Health Studies – A Practical Manual by S.K.Lwanga and S.Lemeshow WHO Geneva 1991)

Where,

n is the minimum sample required to test the hypothesis

Z is the table value from the standard normal distribution corresponding to $1-\alpha/2$

P=10% is the mean deviation of the variable under study from the previous study

E is the absolute precision = 8%.

Using the above formula the sample size is n=54

So I have taken sample size 60 in my study.

Inclusion criteria

The study is limited to the staff nurses who have been working in the hospital for the past 1 year

Exclusion criteria

The study exclude the staff nurses who have undergone specialized training in the field of psychiatric nursing.

Investigator personally witnessed many health professionals and staff nurses who are unaware of legal aspects of psychiatric care among the patients. It provides insecurity to the patients, community and health care professionals. Staff nurses have vital role in health care setting. They can provide knowledge and favourable attitude to other professionals, family members and community. For this reason the investigator felt the need to conduct this study among staff nurses and implement more knowledge.

The study was conducted in various ward (as shown in table 1) but not psychiatric ward, because the staff nurses working in psychiatric ward are those who have undergone specialized course in psychiatry, which does not fulfill the inclusion criteria. The question of on job training augmenting the knowledge based of the psychiatric nurses, doesn't arise.

Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted to check the feasibility of the tool and to foresee the problem which may arise during the study. After accordance of the ethical committee clearance by the concerned educational institution, the pilot study was conducted in one of the selected hospitals of the city. Study was conducted on 12 participants selected as per the inclusion criteria and who were willing to participate in the study. The sample size of 12 was taken as it contributes 20% of sample size. The participants belonged to a similar setting, other than the research setting to avoid contamination of the sample. Pilot study was conducted for a

period one week in August 2013. The tool used was a self-administered semi structured questionnaire consisting of 30 items (Appendix 1). Each item in the questionnaire was given a score of 1. Data collected were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics and the level of significance used for testing the hypothesis was 0.05. The study was conducted in the month of Oct 2013.

5. Results

Out of the 60 subjects taken (table 1), majority (53.33%) were of the age group 20-30 years. 53.33%(32) were diploma nurses and 46.67%(28) had done BSc Nursing. None of them had done MSc Nursing or PB BSc Nsg

Out of the 60 Nurses under study, 58.33% (35) were with 0-10yrs of experience. Most of them (28.33%) were from Medical wards and none have attended In-service education on legal aspects of psychiatric nursing. The mean knowledge score of Staff Nurses was 17.93 ± 4.52 . Majority (58.33%) of the subjects had average knowledge (table 2)

The findings also showed that nurses had good knowledge score in areas like informed consent and confidentiality (table 3), with a mean knowledge score of 3.17 and 3.53 respectively.

Association between various sample characteristics and knowledge regarding legal aspects of psychiatric nursing was assessed by applying Mann Whitney and ANNOVA test. Test results showed that there is no association between knowledge regarding legal aspects of psychiatric nursing and some sample characteristics, i.e, Age, Present clinical area and Professional qualification. But significant association was found between clinical experience and knowledge score of nurses, with those nurses with clinical experience of 11-20 years found to have more knowledge than those <10 years and >20 years of experience.

Table 1: Socio demographic data

S/No	Parameters	Freq	%	
1	Age (Yrs)	• 20 – 30	32	53.33
		• 31 – 40	10	16.67
		• 41 – 50	14	23.33
		• >50	4	6.67
2	Sex	• Male	0	0
		• Female	60	100
3	Qualification	• Dip in Nsg	32	53.33
		• B Sc	28	46.67
		• PB BSc	0	0
		• Others	0	0
4	Clinical experience	• 0 – 10	35	58.33
		• 11 – 20	10	16.67
		• 21 – 30	15	25
5	Present Clinical area	• Med ward	17	28.33
		• Paed ward	5	8.33
		• ICU	11	18.33
		• Surg ward	11	18.3
		• Burn	1	1.67
		• Onco ward	5	8.33
		• Ortho	2	3.33
		• OBGY	8	13.33
6	Inservice education	Yes	0	0
		No	60	100

Table 2: Distribution of knowledge score among study group

Knowledge score	Freq	%
0 – 10 (Poor)	5	8.33
11 – 20 (Average)	35	58.33
21 – 30 (Good)	20	33.33
Total	60	100

Table 3: Knowledge score of nurses in various legal aspects of psychiatric nursing

S.no	Area	Knowledge score	
		Mean	SD
1	Admission and discharge	2.8	1.34
2	Rights of mentally ill	2.2	0.94
3	Civil responsibilities of mentally ill	1.7	0.96
4	Leave of absence & Parole	2.3	0.96
5	Informed consent	3.17	1.24
6	Confidentiality	3.53	1.21
7	Record keeping	2.23	0.74
	Total	17.93	4.52

Table 4: Comparison of Knowledge score according to clinical experience in study group

Clinical Exp	No	Knowledge score		F Value	P Value
		Mean	SD		
0 – 10	35	18.74	4.368	3.62	<0.05
11 – 20	10	19.00	2.539		
21 – 30	15	15.33	5.080		

6. Discussion

The demographic findings in the present study showed that, more than half (53.33%) of the subjects were diploma nurses, and the rest of them (46.67%) were graduate nurses. This finding is consistent with a study conducted by Nagarajaiah, et al (2009)³, who revealed that majority of the subjects were Diploma nurses (57%)³.

In the present study maximum (58.33%) of the subjects were those with less than 10 years experience, which is consistent with the findings of Nagarajaiah, et al (2009)³ and Rajesh Kumar, et al (2010)⁴, where they found that majority of the subjects were below 10 years of experience.

This study also revealed that none of the subjects had attended any In-service education on legal aspects of psychiatric nursing, which was supported by a study done by Binu Mathew in 2009⁵, reporting that none of the subjects (n=60) had any exposure to In-service education on legal aspects of psychiatric nursing, despite working in a litigious climate. This highlights the lack of In-service programme for the staff nurses on legal aspects of psychiatric nursing which is an emerging need in today's world.

The total mean knowledge score secured by nurses were 17.93 ± 4.52, against a total score of 30. This study was supported by a study conducted by Rajesh Kumar, et al (2010)⁴, which revealed that majority (90%) of the nurses possess moderate level of knowledge and 10% of nurses possessed high level of knowledge

The present study revealed that there is no significant relationship between age, present clinical area and qualification (except for Clinical experience) with the existing knowledge of nurses, regarding legal aspects of psychiatric nursing. Gender

and In-service education cannot be compared since all subjects were female and none of the subjects had undergone any In-service education in legal aspects of psychiatric nursing.

Even though the present study revealed that the BSc nurses are having higher knowledge (19 ± 3.95) than Diploma nurses (17 ± 4.82), but to envisage the statistical significance using Man Whitney test, it was found that there was no significant relationship between existing knowledge and educational qualification (p >0.05).

Demographic variable do not show any major significant relationship with existing knowledge (except clinical experience), but it had also described the possibilities of higher education having better knowledge than lower education. Furthermore, it was also observed that those nurses below 40 years and those nurses working in medical wards and ICU were more knowledgeable than those working in surgical and obstetrics wards.

7. Conclusion

Thus the findings suggest that the total mean knowledge score of most nurses is average, and nurses do not have 100% knowledge regarding the legal responsibilities of psychiatric nursing. This can be because of lack of reinforcement, lack of continuing In-service education, or lack of motivation and interest when not working in that Specialty area. Now a days as the consumer has become more aware of his rights related to health and illness, the nurse who is directly involved with the patient needs to be aware

of the legal responsibilities concerning patient care. This is a very important aspect because without adequate knowledge on legal issues, nurses cannot assume accountability, and without accountability there can be no professionalism.

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