

FORENSIC NURSING A SENSITIZATION

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INTRODUCTION

Specialities in medical, nursing and paramedical courses are emerging day by day because of the advancement in science and technology. Forensic Nursing is one such new speciality where nurses expand their knowledge beyond their nursing abilities and make a move as legal nurse consultants, assist in criminal prosecution cases, provide care to sexual assault victims and excel their skills in other areas of the speciality.

In India, crime rates have been increasing day by day. However, due to the scarcity of the forensic experts, significant proportion of legal cases is pending for judgement. Also there is deficiency of supportive manpower to forensic physicians in handling medico-legal cases. It has been observed that due to lack of trained assistants, forensic pathologists feel handicapped while performing post-mortem examination at most of the places and many a times much time is wasted due to lack of such assistants. Similar problems arise while dealing with poisoning cases, injury cases and sexual assault cases. Problems have been noted in preservation of viscera, clothes and other biological evidences in medico legal cases.

When nurses work in casualties, their main role in a medico legal case will be to save the patients' life. During the process, they act quickly, thereby unknowingly erase or wash the evidences, without knowing the legal

importance. Faye Battiste-Otto, RN, from the American Forensic Nurses Association, once said "Nurses are taught to cleanse a wound, but if it's a suspect in a criminal case, we are washing away valuable evidence," This article attempts to sensitize the nursing fraternity about forensic nursing speciality.

WHAT IS FORENSIC NURSING?

According to the International Association of Forensic Nurses 2010 (IAFN), Forensic Nursing is the application of nursing science to public or legal proceedings; It is concerned with the education of the nurse in the scientific investigation and management of trauma and violence.

In simple terms, Forensic Nurse is a nurse with specialized training in forensic evidence collection, criminal procedures, legal testimony expertise and more.

EVOLUTION OF FORENSIC NURSING

Nursing profession actually started as forensic nursing, when Florence Nightingale provided nursing care to war victims without any consideration as friend or foe. Bhai Kanhaiya, a Sikh sanyas from Sialkot district of ancient India had also represented one of the most fundamental aspects of forensic nursing – i.e., caring of traumatized war victims. These two personalities have provided ethics in the field of forensic nursing.

Between 12th & 16th Century, in Italy and France, Forensic nursing was used in a crude form to decide cases of nullity of marriage on the basis of impotence. Couples have to perform sexual intercourse in front of doctors and nurses for opinion about their capabilities. Nurse-Midwives had provided forensic examination reports like evidence of sexual assault or confirmation of pregnancy, in the court of the Kings.

The nurse's role in medico legal cases has been recognized since mid 1970s, when Dr. John Butt, Chief Medical Examiner in Alberta, Canada first established the role of a forensic nurse examiner in a death investigation case, to represent as a forensic pathologist at the scene of crime. In 1989, the American Association of Legal Nurse Consultants was formed in San Diego, California. In 1990, Forensic Nursing was established in USA by Ms. Virginia Lynch, a clinical nurse specialist. The driving force behind her was her concern over the failure by the prosecution to authenticate the accused in crimes like rape. Later, she became a moving force to initiate forensic nursing science principles in South Africa, Japan, Hong Kong, Sweden, Zimbabwe, Turkey, Italy, Australia, Central America, UK and now in India. She is recognised as the founder of forensic nursing science.

In 1992, the International Association of Forensic Nurses was formed. Forensic Nursing was officially recognized by the American Association of Nurses in 1995. In 1997, the standards and scope of Forensic Nursing Practice were published.

FORENSIC NURSE EDUCATION IN WESTERN COUNTRIES

Forensic Nursing schools abroad prepare students to confront extreme human behaviour. They offer 2-year post graduate-level courses (Master of Science). The syllabus includes in-depth knowledge and skill that interfaces nursing with law enforcement, forensic science, mental health, health care and judicial systems. The course includes sub specialities like SANE (Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner), Medical Legal Consultant, Emergency Room Nursing, Evidence Collection Trainer, Law Enforcement Team, Expert Medical Witness, Nurse Death Investigation or Medico-Legal Death Investigation.

THE WORK ENVIRONMENT OF A FORENSIC NURSE

Forensic nurses work with victims of rape, sexual assault, domestic violence, other violent or traumatic events. They often work with hospitals, prisons and law enforcements to collect, document evidence and act as aids in crime scene investigations. They can also provide expert testimony in court. They can also work independently as private consultants for law enforcement agencies or insurance companies.

A few roles of a forensic nurse include: Forensic Nurse Associate, Forensic Nurse Examiner, Forensic Nurse in Toxicology, Forensic Nurse in Sexual Assault Cases, Forensic Nurse as Members of the Legal Team / Assistants to Attorneys, As a Member of the Investigative Team for Insurance

Companies, As a Member of the Investigating Team at Scene of Crime, As a Social Forensic Nurse, In Human Rights Violations, Forensic Psychiatric Nursing; etc...

FORENSIC NURSING IN INDIA

In India, the first lecture on Forensic Nursing was delivered at Sri Guru Sahai Nursing School, Rajkot, jointly by Mrs. Virginia A Lynch and Dr.R.K.Gorea, Professor in Forensic Medicine to doctors, nurses, judges, advocates and police officials. They were introduced to the concept of forensic nursing, its utility to the investigating officers and the judiciary.

In 2003, an attempt was made at National Level at Patna and Delhi, in the International Congress of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology (ICFMT) and XXIV Annual Conference of Forensic Medicine to popularize Forensic Nursing by sensitising the delegates, the aspects of forensic nursing.

At the 4th annual conference of Punjab Academy of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology, an intensive effort was made to get forensic nursing introduced in the syllabus of the B.Sc. Nursing. The Baba Farid University of Health Sciences agreed in principle to get it introduced in the syllabus of undergraduate nursing students. Now in Punjab, various educational programs are designed for nursing students and staff in forensic nursing. Similar programs have been started in All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), New Delhi and Govt. Medical College, Patiala.

CONCLUSION

In present curriculum, nurses are exposed to very little forensic science issues. To meet the

legal health care needs of an increasingly diverse population of patients, establishment of formal and informal education programmes for nurses in forensic nursing is a necessity. Nurses can play a vital role by using their nursing background combined with Medico Legal Education. It can be considered as a need of the hour.

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