



KNOWLEDGE REGARDING LEGAL ASPECTS IN PATIENT CARE AMONG STAFF NURSES'

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ABSTRACT

Legal responsibility in nursing practice is becoming of greater importance as each year passes. Consumers are becoming increasingly aware of their legal rights in the health care, therefore a nurse should know his/her legal rights. The aim of the study was to examine the knowledge level of staff nurses on the legal aspects of patient care. The objectives of the study were to assess the knowledge of staff nurses regarding legal aspects in patient care and to find the association between the knowledge score and selected demographic variables. A quantitative research approach was used with descriptive research design. The sample consist of 80 staff nurses and samples were selected by convenient sampling technique. The data collected by using a structured knowledge questionnaire prepared by the researcher. The data collected were tabulated and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The results showed that among the respondents 49% had poor knowledge, 44% of the nurses had average knowledge and 6% of staff nurses had good knowledge regarding legal aspects in providing patient care. Chi-square test showed that there is no significant association between knowledge score of the staff nurses and selected demographic variables. The results revealed that nurses had inadequate knowledge on legal aspects of health care and they need to enhance the knowledge through in-service education.

KEYWORDS : Knowledge, Legal aspects, Nurses, Patient care

Introduction

Nursing is an integral part of the health care system and nurses direct their dutiful endeavor for the promotion, maintenance and restoration of health. The rising demands and knowledge of health care consumers warrants a corresponding increase in the legal responsibilities of nurses. This implies that, the very nature of nursing practice requires nurses to be vigilant about understanding of the law. 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 technologies, a good knowledge of legal aspects of health care is inevitable. Knowledge of legal aspects in nursing is absolutely essential for each nurse to safeguard self and patients from legal bindings.

Objectives of the study

- To assess the knowledge of staff nurses regarding legal aspects of patient care.
- To find the association between the knowledge score and selected demographic variables.

Methodology : A quantitative research approach was used with descriptive research design. The sample consist of 80 staff nurses and samples were selected by convenient sampling technique.

Data collection procedure

The study was conducted after obtaining formal permission from the concerned authorities during the month of January 2017. After obtaining the permission, investigator met the subjects and established a rapport with them. A written informed consent was taken separately from each respondents. The researcher selected 80 respondents conveniently from general wards, emergency department, Intensive Care Unit and Operation Theater. After a brief self-introduction, details of the study were explained. Subjects were allowed to read the tool and made provision to clarify their doubts were also made. Each participant took 30 minutes to complete the questionnaire. The data collection was terminated after thanking each participant for their participation and cooperation. Confidentiality of the subjects was ensured during and after the study.

Data analysis

The data collected was organized, tabulated, analyzed and interpreted by using descriptive and inferential statistics and is described with the help of tables and graphs. The analyzed data organized and presented under the following sections:

Section A : Analysis and interpretation of socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

Section B : Knowledge of staff nurses regarding legal aspects in providing patient care.

Section C : Association between the knowledge score and selected demographic variables.

Section A: Description of sample characteristics

The demographic profile of samples was described in terms of age, gender, educational status, total years of working experience, area of work, and previous exposure on information regarding legal aspects of patient care and legal problems faced by self as a nurse.

Table 1: Frequency and percentage distribution of subjects according to age, sex and educational status

(n = 80)

Socio Demographic variables		Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Age	21 – 30	60	75
	31 – 40	16	20
	41 – 50	2	2.5
	Above 50	2	2.5
Sex	Male	11	13.8
	Female	69	86.3
Educational status	GNM	50	62.5
	B.SC	30	37.5

Table 1 shows that among 80 respondents, 75% participants were in the age group of 21 – 30 years, 20% belonged to 31 - 40 years of age, 2 (2.5) were in the age group of 41 - 50 and 2 (2.5) were in the age group of above 50 years. The data revealed that 86.25% staff nurses were females and remaining 13.75% were males. The data showed that majority of them 50(62.5%) had acquired GNM and remaining 30(37.5%) had completed BSc Nursing.

Table 2: Frequency and percentage distribution of subjects according to year of working experience and area of work (n=80)

Socio Demographic variables		Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Year of working experience	0-1 year	11	13.8
	1-2 year	12	15
	2-5 year	30	37.5
	>5 year	27	33.8
Area of work	ICU	21	26.3
	OT	24	30
	General Ward	30	37.5
	Emergency	5	6.3

Table 2 shows that 37.5% had 2-5 years of experience, 33.75% had above 5 years of experience, 15% had 1-2 years' experience and 13.75% had only less than one year experience. The majority of the respondents 37.5% had experienced in general ward, 30% from operation theater, 26.5% had ICU experience and the least 6.25% had emergency experience.

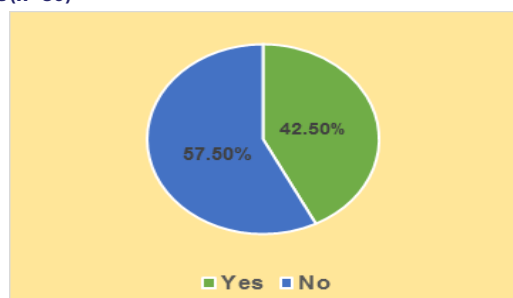
Figure 2: Distribution of respondents according to previous exposure on information regarding legal aspects of patient care (n=80)

Figure 3 shows that 42.5% had previous exposure on information regarding legal aspects of patient care but the majority 57.5% of nurses did not have previous exposure on information regarding legal aspects of patient care.

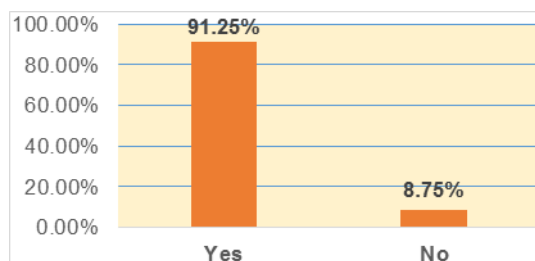
Figure 3 : Distribution of respondents according to legal problems faced by self as a nurse (n=80)

Figure 2 reveals that majority of nurses 91.25% did not face legal problems as a nurse and 8.75% of nurses had faced legal problems in clinical area.

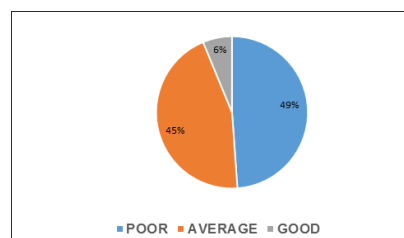
Section B: Analysis of knowledge score

Table 3: Distribution of respondents according to the knowledge score (n=80)

Grade	No. of samples	Percentage
Good (75 -100)	5	6%
Average (50 – 74)	36	45%
Poor (<50)	39	49%

Table reveals that 49% respondents had poor knowledge regarding the legal aspects of patient care. Knowledge score also shows only

6% had good knowledge and the remaining 45% had average knowledge.

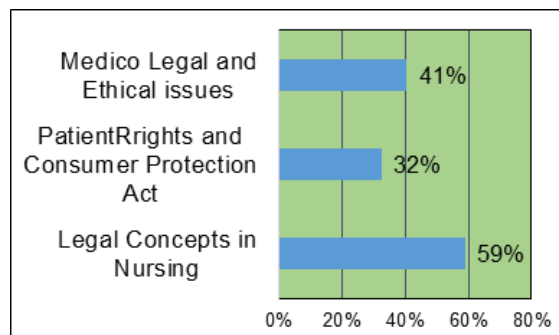
**Figure 4 : Distribution of sample according to their knowledge score**

The diagram explains that 49% of the samples had poor knowledge, 45% of the nurses had average knowledge and 6% of staff nurses had good knowledge regarding legal aspects in providing patient care

Table 4: Analysis of knowledge score based on different areas of legal aspects of patient care (n=80)

Area of knowledge	No of items	Mean score	Mean percentage (%)
Legal concepts in nursing	11	6.475	58.87
Patient rights and Consumer Protection Act	15	4.85	32.4
Medico legal and ethical issues	14	5.67	40.5

The data presented in the table 4 shows that the highest mean knowledge score was 6.475 for legal concepts in nursing and the least was 4.85 for patient rights and Consumer Protection Act. Among different areas of knowledge regarding legal aspects of patient care, 58.8% subjects obtained highest mean score in the area of legal concepts in nursing. In all other areas, the subjects had the mean score of less than 50%.

**Figure 5 . Distribution of respondents based on knowledge score on different areas of legal aspects in patient care.**

The diagram depicts mean percentage of nurses' knowledge score in different areas of legal aspects in patient care. The highest was legal concepts in nursing and the lowest was patient rights and Consumer Protection Act.

Section C: Table 5 Association between level of knowledge and selected demographic variables (n=80)

Sl. no	Socio Demographic variables	df	Chi-square	P value	Significant/ Not significant
1.	Age	6	0.825	0.991	NS
2.	Sex	2	0.499	0.779	NS
3.	Educational status	2	0.29	0.985	NS
4.	Year of working experience	6	0.284	0.999	NS
5.	Area of work	6	0.803	0.991	NS

6.	Previous exposure on information regarding legal aspects of patient care	2	0.590	0.744	NS
7.	Legal problem faced by self as a nurse	2	0.433	0.805	NS

*Significance level at 0.05

Table shows that in chi- Square test there is no significant association between knowledge level of staff nurses and the selected demographic variables like age, gender, educational status, total years of working experience, area of work, previous exposure on information regarding legal aspects of patient care and legal problems faced by self as a nurse.

Conclusion

From the findings of the present study, it was concluded that out of 80 participants, 75% respondents were in the age group of 21 – 30 years, 20% belonged to 31 - 40 years of age, 2.5% were in the age group of 41 - 50 and 2.5% were in the age group of above 50 years. The data revealed that 86.25% of the staff nurses were females and remaining 13.75% were males. The data showed that majority 62.5% had acquired GNM and remaining 37.5% had completed BSc Nursing. The data showed that 37.5% had 2 -5 years of experience, 33.75% had above 5 years of experience, 15% had 1 -2 years' experience and 13.75% had <1year experience. The data showed that majority 37.5% had experienced in general ward, 30% from operation theater, 26.5% had ICU experience and the least 6.25% had emergency experience. The study revealed that majority of nurses 91.25% did not face legal problems as a nurse and 8.75% of nurses had faced legal problems in clinical area.

The level of knowledge regarding legal aspects in patient care among nurses was inadequate during the assessment. In this study the proportion of nurses with poor, average and good knowledge were 49 % (39), 45% (36) and 6%(5) respectively. Chi -Square test showed that there is no significant association between knowledge level of staff nurses and the demographic variables. Therefore, the knowledge of the nurses can be further improved by providing ongoing teaching and educational programmes.

Recommendations

On the basis of the study the following recommendations are being made

- The study can be replicated on a larger sample to generalize the findings.
- This study can be conducted as a true experimental study
- Follow up study can be conducted to evaluate the long-term effect of the administration of Planned Teaching Programme and to find out the necessity of reinforcement.
- This study can be conducted testing self-instructional module on knowledge of staff nurses regarding the legal aspects in patient care.
- A study can be conducted to observe the significant changes in practice of nurses after providing them with the adequate knowledge on legal aspects.
- A study can be done to determine the incidence of malpractice suits against nurses and their consequences in practice.
- A study can be conducted to assess the knowledge of patients regarding their rights to treatment in hospital.

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