



FROM VIGILANCE TO SAFETY: PATIENT SAFETY PRACTICES AND PERCEPTIONS AMONG NURSING OFFICERS IN ARMED FORCES MEDICAL SERVICES

Hospital Management

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ABSTRACT

Patient safety is a critical component of healthcare quality and a key indicator of effective healthcare delivery systems. Nursing Officers play a central role in ensuring safe patient care through continuous monitoring, adherence to protocols and coordination within multidisciplinary teams. Despite increasing emphasis on patient safety, gaps in safety culture, communication, staffing and error reporting continue to impact healthcare outcomes, particularly in complex settings such as Armed Forces Medical Services (AFMS) hospitals. This study aimed to assess patient safety perceptions and practices among Nursing Officers, identify barriers affecting patient safety and determine areas requiring improvement to strengthen patient safety culture within AFMS hospitals. This descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted among 360 Nursing Officers working in selected AFMS hospitals across the nation. Participants were selected using convenient sampling. Data were collected using a structured self-administered questionnaire based on the validated Survey on Patient Safety Culture (SOPS) Hospital Survey 2.0. The tool assessed patient safety perceptions, communication openness, teamwork, staffing adequacy, incident reporting culture and organizational support. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The findings revealed that the majority of Nursing Officers reported a good perception of patient safety (66%), followed by excellent (17%), average (16%) and poor (1%), indicating an overall positive safety perception. However, 67% of participants reported barriers affecting patient safety practices. The most commonly identified barriers were staffing crisis (26%), punitive culture (22%), and communication and fear-related barriers (19%). Major areas requiring improvement included staffing adequacy (26%), elimination of punitive culture (22%), enhancement of communication and safety systems (19%), strengthening learning culture (17%) and standardization of safety practices (16%). The study concludes that although Nursing Officers demonstrate a strong foundation of patient safety awareness, systemic and organizational challenges continue to hinder optimal safety practices. Strengthening staffing, improving communication and fostering a non-punitive environment are essential to enhance patient safety culture in AFMS hospitals.

KEYWORDS

Patient safety, Nursing Officers, safety culture, AFMS, communication, staffing, incident reporting

INTRODUCTION

Patient safety is a global healthcare priority and a key determinant of quality healthcare delivery. World Health Organization defines patient safety as the prevention of errors and adverse effects associated with healthcare delivery. Healthcare-associated errors remain a major concern worldwide and are often linked to communication failures, staffing shortages, workload pressures, ineffective reporting systems and poor coordination among healthcare professionals.

A positive patient safety culture promotes open communication, teamwork, incident reporting, and organizational learning. However, fear of blame, punitive responses and communication gaps often hinder effective reporting and limit opportunities for quality improvement.

In military healthcare settings, patient safety assumes greater importance due to complex healthcare delivery systems, diverse patient populations and operational readiness requirements. Armed Forces Medical Services hospitals provide healthcare services ranging from primary to tertiary care, requiring robust safety systems and effective clinical governance.

Nursing Officers play a vital role in ensuring patient safety through continuous patient monitoring, medication safety, infection prevention, clinical decision-making and multidisciplinary coordination. Their perceptions and practices significantly influence the overall safety culture within healthcare organizations.

Despite increasing emphasis on patient safety, limited evidence exists regarding patient safety culture among Nursing Officers in AFMS hospitals. Therefore, this study was undertaken to assess patient safety practices and perceptions among Nursing Officers across AFMS and identify barriers and areas requiring improvement to strengthen patient safety culture.

Need and Scope of the Study

Patient safety is essential for quality healthcare and depends on effective communication, teamwork, adequate staffing and a strong safety culture. In Armed Forces Medical Services hospitals, ensuring patient safety is crucial due to complex healthcare demands.

Nursing Officers play a vital role in safe patient care. This study aims to assess patient safety practices and perceptions, identify barriers and explore areas for improving patient safety culture within AFMS healthcare settings.

Objectives

1. To assess Nursing Officers' perceptions regarding patient safety practices.
2. To identify barriers affecting effective patient safety implementation and error reporting.
3. To determine areas requiring improvement for strengthening patient safety culture.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study adopted a quantitative approach with a descriptive cross-sectional research design and was conducted across selected Armed Forces Medical Services hospitals. The study population comprised Nursing Officers working within AFMS healthcare settings who fulfilled the inclusion criteria and were available during the data collection period.

A total of 360 participants were selected using a convenient sampling technique. Nursing Officers serving in diverse clinical areas were included in the study.

Data were collected using a structured self-administered questionnaire based on the validated Survey on Patient Safety Culture (SOPS) Hospital Survey 2.0. The tool consisted of sections assessing patient safety perceptions, communication openness, teamwork practices, incident reporting culture, staffing adequacy, organizational support and continuous learning related to patient safety.

The data collection tool was administered electronically through Google Forms in a standardized manner to ensure uniformity and consistency in responses. All participants received the same questionnaire with identical instructions and participation was voluntary with assurance of confidentiality and anonymity.

The collected data were organized, coded and analysed using appropriate descriptive and inferential statistics in accordance with the

study objectives.

RESULTS

A total of 360 Nursing Officers participated in the study, representing healthcare professionals engaged in patient care across Armed Forces Medical Services hospitals. The findings provided comprehensive insights into patient safety perceptions, barriers and areas requiring improvement in patient safety practices.

Perception of Patient Safety

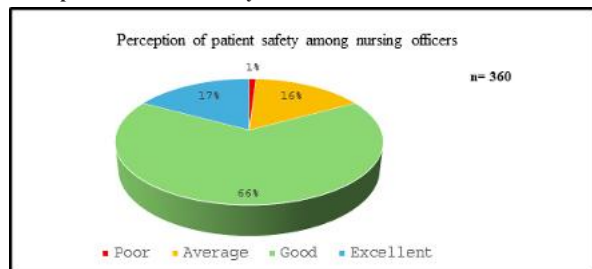


Fig 1.: Perception of patient safety among nursing officers

As shown in Figure 1, the majority of participants reported a good perception of patient safety (66%), followed by excellent (17%), average (16%) and poor (1%). This indicates that most Nursing Officers possess a positive perception of patient safety within their clinical environment, reflecting awareness and commitment toward safe healthcare practices.

Barriers in Patient Safety

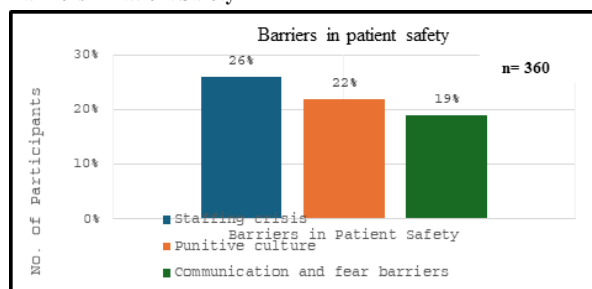


Fig 2.: Barriers in patient safety

Barriers in patient safety were reported by 67% of participants, as illustrated in Figure 2. Among these, the most commonly identified barrier was staffing crisis (26%), followed by punitive culture (22%) and communication and fear-related barriers (19%). These findings indicate that human resource constraints, fear of blame and communication issues significantly influence patient safety practices.

Areas for Improvement in Patient Safety Practices

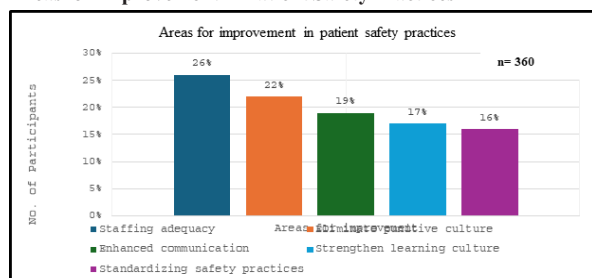


Fig 3.: Areas for improvement in patient safety practices

As depicted in Figure 3, the major areas identified for improvement included staffing adequacy (26%), elimination of punitive culture (22%), enhancement of communication and safety systems (19%), strengthening learning culture (17%) and standardization of safety practices (16%).

Overall, the findings indicate that while Nursing Officers demonstrate a strong positive perception of patient safety, systemic challenges such as staffing limitations, punitive reporting culture and communication gaps need urgent attention. Strengthening organizational support

systems, promoting a non-punitive environment and enhancing communication and training mechanisms are essential for improving patient safety culture within AFMS hospitals.

DISCUSSION

This study's findings are in agreement with previous national and international research on patient safety culture among nurses. Similar to Ghosh et al. (2020) and El-Jardali et al. (2021), nursing staff generally show positive patient safety perceptions but continue to report gaps in organizational support and safety systems.

Staffing shortages identified in this study are strongly supported by Aiken et al. (2024) and Sorra et al. (2018), who reported that inadequate staffing significantly reduces patient safety and increases adverse events.

The influence of punitive culture and fear of blame is also widely reported. Nieva and Sorra (2023) and Okuyama et al. (2020) found that non-punitive environments improve error reporting, while fear of punishment limits learning from mistakes.

Communication barriers observed in this study are consistent with O'Daniel and Rosenstein (2025) and Manser (2019), who identified poor communication and handover failures as major contributors to clinical errors. In structured systems, Rosen et al. (2018) also noted that hierarchy can restrict open communication.

Overall, the study aligns with existing evidence, highlighting that despite positive perceptions, staffing issues, punitive culture and communication gaps remain key challenges to patient safety across healthcare systems.

CONCLUSION

The present study highlights that Nursing Officers across Armed Forces Medical Services (AFMS) demonstrate a strong commitment and positive perception towards patient safety practices. Their awareness regarding the importance of teamwork, prevention of adverse events and delivery of safe patient care reflects a strong foundation for developing an effective safety culture. However, organizational challenges such as communication barriers, staffing constraints, workload pressures and concerns related to error reporting require focused attention. Strengthening patient safety within AFMS necessitates a structured and proactive approach involving leadership commitment, transparent communication systems, continuous professional education, regular safety audits and establishment of dedicated patient safety mechanisms. Development of Patient Safety Cells and dedicated Patient Safety Nurses can facilitate systematic monitoring, reporting and improvement of safety practices. Promoting a non-punitive learning environment will encourage reporting of incidents and near misses, enabling healthcare teams to identify risks and implement preventive strategies. A resilient patient safety culture will ultimately enhance quality, efficiency and safety of healthcare delivery within AFMS institutions.

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