



Nurse's awareness on legal and ethical responsibilities in nursing

Abstract:

Introduction: Nursing ethics and law are necessary in nursing because nursing is concerned with providing services that impact on human life and health and some of the situations the nurse encounters in practice pose dilemma that if not well handled, may impact negatively on the client and all who are concerned. Nurses deal with the most fundamental human events like birth, death and suffering, they encounter many legal issues surrounding these sensitive areas. Legal responsibility in nursing means the way in which nurses are obligated to obey the law in professional activities.

Objectives: To determine the knowledge level of nurses on legal aspects and ethical responsibility, to find the association between the knowledge score and the selected variables, and to prepare a booklet about legal and ethical responsibility in nursing.

Methods and Materials: A Cross sectional descriptive study conducted among 101 nurses of Manipal Teaching Hospital, Pokhara-11, Nepal. Data were collected by using a simple random sampling and by administering a self-structured questionnaire.

Results: Out of 101 nurses, maximum (58.4%) of the nurses had inadequate knowledge regarding legal and ethical responsibility in nursing. There was no significant association between the Knowledge score and selected variables like age, education, professional qualification and work experience.

Conclusion: The study finding revealed that nurses were lacking knowledge on legal and ethical responsibility in nursing which is one of the most important aspects of nursing practice. There is need to improve the knowledge of the nurses on legal and ethical responsibility so that they can improve their practices and uplift the quality nursing services and effective nursing care that leads to patient's satisfaction.

Key Words: Nurse, Awareness, Legal & ethical responsibilities, Nursing, Nepal.

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Introduction

Nursing practice is surrounded by many legal aspects, because nurses are accountable for their professional judgment and action. Nurses today must have a clear understanding of the legal boundaries within which she must function to protect themselves from liability, to protect the client's right and also to

enhance their ability to be advocate basically concern a nurse accountability for nursing care and if the nurse don't perform her duty within the standard of care then she places herself in danger of legal action. So it is necessary to have a good knowledge of legal aspects of health care for providing quality nursing services.

A survey study to examine Nigerian nurses' knowledge of the legal aspects of nursing practice conducted among 161 nurses (20 males and 141 females) from different categories of hospitals in Ibandan. A simple random sampling technique was used in selecting respondents in each ward settings. The result of the study revealed that 58.4% of the respondents had good knowledge of general law, 78.9% had good knowledge of the function of law in nursing, but 77.6% of the respondents had poor knowledge of law governing nursing.¹

A cross sectional randomized study conducted to assess the level of legal awareness and knowledge on basic nursing procedures carried out among 510 nursing staff in a trust hospital, Healthcare Management Institute (HMI), KEM Hospital, Pune in 2010-2011. Result of the study found that regarding knowledge based on the experience of nursing staff, revealed that the knowledge of nursing staff on various legal provisions was highest among those with more than 10 years of experience and obtained highest average score of (28.75 %). Based on the knowledge of established basic nursing procedures the nursing staff with GNM qualification fared slightly better than those with ANM qualification and those who were more than 40 years of age. The nursing staff had poor knowledge on patients' rights and also in their legal obligation towards patients. About any legal complaints made against nurses and any action which was taken against them, a total of 47% nurses had some knowledge on such cases of negligence caused by nurses, which were mainly related to wrong administration of injections and drugs to patients. Punishments awarded were simple written warnings and to a change of department, in exceptional cases, the nurses were removed from service. However, no cases were referred to the 'State Nursing Council' for action.²

A non-experimental, descriptive study conducted to assess knowledge regarding legal responsibilities among 150 staff nurses of selected hospitals, Ludhiana, Punjab in December

2014. Data were collected by administering Self structured questionnaire with purposive sampling technique. The study revealed that 96.67% of the participants were female, 73.33% of them belonged to the age group of 21-30 years of age, 68% were diploma holders, 90.66% of staff nurses were trained from private institutes and 64.67% of them were with 0-5years experience. 30.67% of staff nurses did not attend any in service education. Regarding knowledge, maximum 56% of staff nurses had average knowledge regarding legal responsibilities in nursing. There was no significant relationship between nurses knowledge with their age, gender, duration of clinical experience and in service education but there was a significant relationship between level of knowledge with their professional qualification and training institute ($p < 0.05$).³

The present study was conducted to determine the knowledge level of nurses on legal aspects and ethical responsibility in nursing; to find the association between the knowledge score and the selected variables and to prepare a booklet about legal and ethical responsibility in nursing.

Methodology

A Cross sectional descriptive study conducted among 101 nurses of Manipal Teaching Hospital, Pokhara-11, Nepal in the month of August- September 2016. The tools used for data collection were demographic proforma (6 items), knowledge questionnaire on legal and ethical terminologies(11 items), knowledge questionnaire on types of law(6 items), knowledge questionnaire on legal safeguards in nursing(10 items), knowledge questionnaires on medico-legal cases in nursing(5 items), and knowledge questionnaires on ethical principles in nursing (6 items) and asked the participants to write down any experience about any legal complaints made against nurses any action taken against them. Data were collected by administering a self-structured questionnaire. A simple random sampling technique was used to collect the data. The tools were validated

after discussion with the peer group, pretesting was done among 5 nurses of oncology ward. Reliability done among 15 nurses of private ward and correlation coefficient ratio $r = 0.7$ was obtained. Total item of the tool were 38. The questions were of multiple choices with multiple responses of three questions. The total score of the knowledge questionnaire was 47. The score was categorized as adequate and inadequate by taking mean of the total score of each part of the tool. The data obtained was analyzed by using SPSS- package (version 16.0).

Result

Out of 101 nurses, 79.2% were at the age group of 21-30 years, 100% were female, 63.4% were unmarried, 62.4% were having intermediate level of education, 84.2% were having PCL (Proficiency Certificate Level) nursing, 11.9% of the participants were working in Cardiology ward/CCU, 78.2% were having less than 5 years of working experienced and 87.1% of the participants were not having any training related to legal and ethical aspects in nursing.

Table 1 : Regarding distribution of frequency and percentage of knowledge n = 101

Sl. No.	Knowledge on	Adequate f (%)	Inadequate f (%)
1	Legal and ethical terminologies	47(41.6)	54(58.4)
2	Types of law	21(20.8)	80(79.2)
3	Legal safeguards in nursing	47(41.6)	54(58.4)
4	Medico-legal cases in nursing	47(41.6)	54(58.4)
5	Ethical principles in nursing	45(44.6)	56(55.4)

Table 1 shows that respondents have varying knowledge of the legal and ethical aspects in nursing. However respondents demonstrated inadequate knowledge on legal and ethical terminologies (58.4%); types of law (79.2%); legal safeguards in nursing (58.4%); medico-legal cases in nursing (58.4%) and ethical principles in nursing (55.4%). No one has got any experience regarding legal complaints made against nursing during their work time.

Table 2: Range, minimum, maximum, mean and standard deviation of total knowledge score. n = 101

Variable	Range	Minimum Score	Maximum Score	Mean	SD
Knowledge	27	8	35	22.465	±5.954

Table 2 denotes that mean knowledge score was 22.465 (± 5.954).

Table 3: Chi square value computed between the knowledge score and selected variables. n = 101

Selected variables	Inadequate knowledge <24	Adequate knowledge ≥ 24	df	Chi-square (χ^2)	Remarks
Age					
≤20 years	7	4	2	0.158	NS
21-30 years	49	31			
>30 years	3	7			
Education					
SLC	16	14	2	0.300	NS
Intermediate	40	23			
Bachelor	3	5			
Professional qualification					
ANM	4	4	2	0.760	NS
PCL	51	34			
BN/B.Sc	4	4			
Work experience					
<5 years	50	29	2	0.151	NS
5-10 years	6	16			
>10 years	3	3			

$\chi^2 (2) = 5.99, p = 0.05$: NS = Not significant

The data presented in the Table 3 shows that there was no significant association between the Knowledge score and selected variables like age, education, professional qualification and work experience.

Discussion

The present study revealed the nurses had inadequate knowledge on legal and ethical terminologies (58.4%); types of law (79.2%); legal safeguards in nursing (58.4%); medico-legal cases in nursing (58.4%) and ethical principles in nursing (55.4%) which is contradicting with a descriptive study conducted

among 30 staff nurses to identify the knowledge regarding legal and ethical responsibilities at selected psychiatric centre of Jaipur, Rajasthan which was revealed that majority (90%) of the nurses' possessed moderate level of knowledge. however, there was no significant association between the knowledge with age, total clinical experience which is similar with the present study findings.⁴

A descriptive cross sectional study to assess the knowledge and practice of nursing ethics and laws was conducted among 60 selected nurses of Universal College of Medical Sciences and Teaching Hospital (UCMSTH), Bhairahawa, Nepal. The result of the study revealed that (55%) of the nurses had inadequate knowledge regarding nursing ethics which is supporting the present study finding that (55.4%) of the nurses had inadequate knowledge. Further the result found that most of the respondents (53%) had adequate knowledge of nursing law which contradicts the present study finding as majority of the nurses (79.2%) had inadequate knowledge.⁵

The present study showed that (55.4%) of the nurses had inadequate knowledge on legal and ethical responsibility in nursing which is similar with finding of a descriptive study conducted to determine the awareness on legal aspects of health care among 180 registered nurses working at the Community Health Care Units, at Chennai, India and the study revealed that only 11.7% nurses had the adequate level of knowledge on Legal Aspects of Health Care and 88.3% nurses had a moderate level of knowledge.⁶

Conclusion

The present study highlighted that nurses are lacking knowledge on legal and ethical responsibility in nursing which is one of the most important aspects of nursing practice. It also can be concluded the need to identify the nursing professionals to sensitize them to legal and ethical issues and appropriately

training them. The researcher felt that there is need to improve the knowledge of the nurses on legal and ethical responsibility so that they can improve their practices and uplift the quality nursing services. As a felt need the researcher has prepared a booklet on legal and ethical responsibility in nursing and distributed to all the nurses of respective departments of the hospital that will give improvement on the knowledge regarding legal and ethical responsibilities in nursing so as it will lead to quality outcome of the hospital services and nurses will be able to handle and protect themselves from liability of any kind of legal cases.

Recommendations

1. A similar study can be conducted on a larger population of nursing in different hospital settings so as to make the generalization of the findings a possibility.
2. Interventional studies can be conducted in different hospital setting about the ethical and legal aspects in nursing in order to increase their knowledge and to protect them from any liabilities during their practice.

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Ethical Clearance

Prior permission was obtained from the ethical committee of MCOMS/MTH to conduct the study and written consent was taken from the participants during the data collection.

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