

The Role of the Generalist Forensic Nurse and Advanced Forensic Nurse

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ABSTRACT

At the beginning of the first decade of the 21st century in India, there was little awareness of forensic nursing science. The first decade of the present century saw an increase in awareness, leading to the initiation of postgraduate diploma programs in the second decade. Further increase in awareness about forensic nursing science led to the introduction of forensic nursing science in the undergraduate nursing programs throughout India in the third decade of the present century and this decade also witnessed the initiation of degree programs in forensic nursing. Now we will have future nurses who all will know forensic nursing science and we will have some nurses who will become forensic nurses by choice. India has a future where advanced forensic nurses will be available. This will change the scenario of dealing with medicolegal cases efficiently and will improve the outcome of successful prosecution of criminal cases in India and other countries that will adopt forensic nursing science.

Keywords: Generalist forensic nurse, Specialist forensic nurse, Forensic nursing science, The role of forensic nurse.

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INTRODUCTION

General Nurse with knowledge of forensic nursing science

General nurses usually had no exposure to the medicolegal cases in their curriculum during their diploma and degree courses all over the world. Gradually with the development of forensic nursing science in developed countries and some literature becoming available on the net some nurses had exposure to the works done by forensic nurses in developed countries. In India and other developing countries, some academics started discussing forensic nursing in 2002 and publishing on it.^{1,2}

Gradually awareness was raised amongst the nurses and other stakeholders through various platforms and ultimately, Indo Pacific Academy of Forensic Nursing Science [INPAFNUS] came into existence, members of which further worked to increase awareness in India and other countries. With these efforts, India became the first country in the world to have an assessed Forensic Nursing Science teaching module incorporated in the fifth semester of the undergraduate course by the Indian Nursing Council.

They will understand the importance of working as a team member of the investigative team and they will be able to deal in a better way with the victims, survivors and their family members.

Nurses with exposure to forensic nursing science will know about forensic science and forensic science laboratories and the utility of these labs, especially in different types of violence and scenarios of violence.

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They will be aware of the fundamental rights of the patients as well as will be aware of other rights of the patients who are the victim of violence, abuse and neglect. They will be aware that in case of violation of these rights, victims can go to the Human Rights Commission which acts as a watchdog to protect the rights of all human beings.

Nurses will know the law of their countries which can apply to them and their dealings with patients. Now the nurses will have an idea of the Indian Penal code, Criminal Procedure Code and Indian Evidence Act, along with other important Acts while dealing with the human body. They will understand that if they are dealing with children, how they have to protect the children from Sexual offenses and how to report such cases Under the POCSO Act.

They will also become aware of the legal issues in mental health, understand the rights of mentally ill persons, and respect these rights. They will also become aware of handling narcotic and psychotropic substances. They will be better equipped with the knowledge of admitting and discharging such patients so that proper precautions can be taken at their

level and they will better understand their role in dealing with such patients.

With the help of this awareness, nurses will be able to identify and preserve the evidence in medicolegal cases and there will be fewer chances of valuable evidence being destroyed while treating such patients. They will understand the importance of maintaining the chain of custody of the shreds of evidence. They will become aware of the value of documentation of such cases.

They will understand the ethics of working in such an environment and the importance of ethics in dealing with violent situations and circumstances. They will be able to take care of the physical, psychological, legal, cultural and spiritual aspects of dealing with medicolegal cases. They will become aware of the intricacies of precautions needed while admitting and discharging such patients.

General Forensic Nurse

The general forensic nurse usually is a nurse who has the knowledge and skills to deal with all the cases involving forensic science which may be civil, criminal or to protect public health.³

After graduation, general nurses can do diploma or postgraduate degree to get the knowledge and skills to deal with all medicolegal cases. These courses were available in advanced countries but now these courses have started in India and National Forensic Science University has become the first institution in India to start such courses.

General forensic nurses can work in the emergency wing of hospitals, wards of hospitals, jails and prisons, psychiatric wards and mental health facilities and institutions, NGOs dealing with sexual assaults, and in the USA in the offices of coroners and medical examiners.³ In India they can work in the mortuaries too where medicolegal post-mortem examinations are being conducted.⁴ They can also work for the victims of child abuse and neglect.⁵

They have multiple avenues where the services of forensic nurses will improve the medicolegal system. There is an urgent need to create jobs in these areas so that the momentum of the expansion of forensic nursing is not jeopardized in India.

Advanced Forensic Nurse

Advanced practice forensic nurse

Advanced Forensic Nurse (AFN) is another certification in this direction which is awarded by the International Association of Forensic Nurses. These nurses have caregiving roles as well as expert witness roles.³

Such courses are also offered where the person becomes competent to practice keeping in mind the culture of the community, they are taught evidenced based practice to deal with different age groups of adults, old persons and children. Such nurses provide holistic care to the victims of any type of violence. Training is provided to investigate such cases throughout their life.⁶ Advanced training is given to investigate paediatric and adult cases and nurses get SANE-A and SANE-P certifications.

There are various online advanced forensic nursing courses in different countries depending upon the needs of that particular country.^{7,8} Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner is a course where specialized training is given for the examination of cases related to sexual assault.⁹ There are micro-credential courses too.¹⁰

Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner

In such courses care of the sexual assault victims is taught for their injuries and pharmacological care is also taught to such practitioners. How the comorbidities of sexual assault are handled is also taught in such courses. Support for the victims of sexual assault is also taught.⁹

Social, historical and political context needs to be understood in any country regarding various crimes in all age groups.

Competencies need to be developed by SANEs for the holistic care of survivors of sexual assault in such a way that they are patient-centered. These include the assessment and treatment of the survivors. Stabilization and referral of survivors of sexual assault is an important area not to be neglected. Collection of evidence and preservation of evidence is a very important aspect for nurses and should be learned. Sealing all the samples and maintaining the chain of custody of evidence is a vital aspect

Collaborative interventions should be done. It should be in collaboration with the Sexual Assault Response Teams (SART). It should be based on research-related best practices. Everything should be done ethically. Comprehensive lifespan care for survivors of sexual assault should be provided by SANE.⁶

Presenting the documents and testimony should be comprehensive and per the case's facts and not based on sympathy with the victims or survivors.

Requirements in the USA are as follows:

- BSc Degree in Nursing
- Two or more years as RN
- 40 hours of classroom training
- SANE clinical preceptorship
- 300 hours of SANE practice within the last 3 years with set numbers of hours for:
 - Observing court cases
 - Riding with local law enforcement
 - Patient care of survivors of violence
- In addition to this Master's Degrees and Doctorate degrees can also be joined.³

Advanced Practice forensic nurses will ultimately develop in the areas of psychiatric forensic nursing, custodial forensic nurse, death investigator, legal nurse consultant, clinical forensic nurse and Nursing Jurisprudence, forensic Nursing Scientist and forensic nursing educator.

After some time, it is envisaged that forensic nurses will also evolve as forensic toxicology nurses dealing with poisons and environmental pollution patients.



But for all these specialities to develop their responsibilities and functions must be demarcated and their competencies and skills must be defined. For all these specialities to be developed proper initial patient assessment, diagnosis, planning, intervention, and evaluation must be carried out for dealing with all these victims of different types.

DISCUSSION

With the introduction of forensic nursing in the curriculum of the general nursing course, there will be a big change in the outlook of forensic nursing in India. Now all the nurses being trained in India will have exposure to the forensic aspect of the nursing practice. Now there will be better identification, preservation, and transport of the forensic pieces of evidence along with the documentation of these aspects which ultimately will help in the successful prosecution of the cases.

There will be an expansion in the postgraduate forensic nursing courses in various parts of India and more forensic nurses will come into the field to work. This will further improve the outcomes of medicolegal cases in future when forensic nurses will be available to teach and practice forensic nursing science to the new entrants in this field.

Advanced forensic nurses will be required in each country, depending upon the needs of each country. Initially, in India, there will be a requirement for academic forensic nurses who should be able to teach and guide those who are in this field. Gradually more disciplines will evolve depending on the needs of the countries.

This movement is catching up in other countries and various stakeholders have been made aware in Saudi Arabia, Sri Lanka and Pakistan too and it is expected that these countries will follow suit and develop forensic nursing according to their needs.

CONCLUSION

India has taken the lead in introducing forensic nursing science at the undergraduate level throughout the whole world. This will motivate other countries to introduce forensic nursing in undergraduate courses. With the initiation of postgraduate degree and diploma programs in the universities, the ground

is ripe for the future development of forensic nursing science in India.

In the coming decades, a need will arise for the development of advanced forensic nursing programs to specialize in various disciplines of forensic nursing science in India and the Indo pacific Region.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

None

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