

A Call to Action: Advancing Forensic Nursing in India and Globally

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ABSTRACT

Nursing is a caring profession that functions under the scope of practice defined by the regulatory bodies. There are moral and legal principles guiding the day-to-day practice. The dynamic health needs of society demand widening the scope of practice. Nurses have to deal with patients met with accidents, assaults, deliberate injuries, exploitation etc in the hospital setup. Similarly, in public health setup, they may have to deal with cases of domestic violence, child abuse etc. The knowledge of forensic science will improve their performance in dealing with medico-legal cases. Public health and safety issues are growing day by day and the authorities are struggling to manage them. Comprehensive multidisciplinary education and training of nurses in forensic science will be a valuable resource for medico-legal case management. They will be the liaison between the healthcare institutions and the law enforcement agencies. Only a few institutions in India are conducting forensic nursing courses. Now the Indian Nursing Council included this subject in the B.Sc Nursing curriculum. Many works of literature support that most nurses are interested in learning forensic nursing and are curious to learn. To provide quality services, there must be standard education, a defined practice setting and research opportunities. The scientific knowledge to meet millennium goals is essential. The science of forensic nursing will provide assistance to combat human destruction through universal presence, coexisting with forensic medical science and the criminal justice system. A blended multidisciplinary approach with a sound curriculum, evidence-based practice and research will advance the forensic nursing specialty in India and globally.

Keywords: Forensic Nursing, Advancing, Call to action.

Int J Eth Trauma Victimology (2023). DOI: 10.18099/ijetv.v9i01.06

INTRODUCTION

As per National crime records Bureau, 2021 report it is evident that the crime rates are increasing in India. A few facts from the report are listed. The crime rate affecting the human body has increased to 80.5 in 2021 which was only 77.4 in 2020. Crime against children increased to 33.6 in 2021 from 28.9 in 2020. Juveniles in conflict with the law increased to 7.00 from 6.7 in 2020. Crimes/ Atrocities against SC & ST increased to 8.7 and 3.9 respectively. Cybercrimes are increased to 3.9 from 3.7. The murder rate increased to 1.7 in 2021 whereas it was 1.6 in 2020. In India, there are 0.33 forensic scientists available per 0.1 million population whereas in abroad it is 20 – 50 forensic scientists per 0.1 million population. In India, there are around 80 Universities and colleges conducting forensic science and risk management courses in India. The pending cases in forensic labs during 2005 were 0.5 million and it increased to 0.7 to 0.8 million in 2021. Every year around 50 to 60 thousand unidentified dead bodies are brought for DNA analysis. As per 2020 data, there are 64 independent postgraduate institutes of medical education and research and 554 recognized medical colleges are having forensic departments.

Problems with forensic pieces of evidence in India

In India, there are some problems faced with forensic evidence. They are 1. Erroneous convictions are based on faulty pieces of evidence. 2. Most investigating officers are not adequately trained in the collection, preservation, packaging and

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How to cite this article: Jeyadeepa R. A Call to Action: Advancing Forensic Nursing in India and Globally. *Int J Eth Trauma Victimology*. 2023;9(1):43-45.

Source of support: Nil

Conflict of interest: None

Received: 13/02/2023;

Received in revised form: 23/04/2023;

Accepted: 28/04/2023;

Published: 30/07/2023;

forwarding of forensic evidence due to a lack of education and training. 3. Lack of scientific auditing at the crime scene. The factors which affect the reliability of evidence are lack of scientific certainty, lack of research, scarce resources, lack of well-defined code of ethics, lack of certification of experts, non-available databases and non-availability of error rate statistics. To make forensic pieces of evidence more effective there shall be a policy on forensic case management and legislation to ensure patients legal, civil and human rights.¹

Forensic Nursing

The word forensic means “about the law”. Hence forensic nursing is the application of nursing science to the public and legal proceedings. Forensic nursing incorporates knowledge from nursing science, forensic science, criminal justice and forensic medicine. The definition of forensic nursing given by Virginia Lynch in 2004 is “Application of nursing process to

public and legal proceedings and the application of forensic health care in the scientific investigation of trauma/ death related to abuse, violence, criminal activity, liability and accidents. The qualifications of forensic nurse examiners are certification in forensic specialization, practical training in the speciality, basic education and advanced practice knowledge and skills.^{2,3}

ABCs of Forensic Nursing by Mc Cracken

1. Assessment of Victim
2. Bridge the Gap – Liaison between the medical officer and the law enforcement agencies
3. Chain of custody – Know the methods of evidence collection and establish continuity of evidence possession and disposition.
4. Documentation of findings
5. Evidence
6. Families – Keep them informed
7. Going to court – be prepared to provide written and oral testimony
8. Hospital policies – Know where and how to access institutional forensic protocols.
9. Index of Suspicion – Be aware of signs of abuse and violence.²

Strategies for advancing forensic nursing services

The activities to be done are classified into three categories.

Education

- Assess the minimum level of instructions required to ensure competent practice
- Defining the population
- Establishing minimum duration for the course
- Provision for the training of trainers
- Specific recommendations for clinical preceptorship
- Organizing CNEs and workshops
- Forensic departments attached to medical colleges shall train the nursing personnel
- Establishing forensic labs in the nursing colleges
- Effective oral and written communication training to deal with victims, family and other team members
- Inclusion of teaching-learning pedagogies like inquiry-based learning, observation-based learning, experiment-based learning, case-based learning and project-based learning.⁴
- The components to be included are Forensic photography, nursing and emergency medical technician responsibility, bite mark interpretation and analysis, death investigation, psychological abuse, deviant behaviour and psychopathology assessment, interpretation of blunt, sharp or fast injuries, sexual abuse and rape, jurisprudence, injuries to individuals held in legal custody, elder abuse, child abuse and neglect, substance abuse, psychological or physical abuse from occult or religious practices and tissue and organ donation.

- Additional components like cultural and traditional practices of people around the world, human rights and international law, transcultural nursing, issues unique to immigrants and refugees, prevention of HIV/AIDS and its relation to sexual assault, abuse of women and children, measures to curb infant mortality and ethical and moral dimensions of health care.
- NFSC Act 2020: National Forensic Science University Act 2020 states the need to create opportunities for studies, training and research in forensic science, applied behavioural science, criminology, legal studies and other allied areas. It also insists to establish institutions, departments, laboratories, libraries, and centres for skill development within and outside the country. Creating facilities for distance education to train the existing health care team, affiliating the existing institutions with forensic departments for higher learning, the public-private partnership in India and Abroad and establishing off-shore campuses outside the country shall be done to advance forensic nursing practices.
- Steps to be followed to advance forensic nursing: The first step is to introduce the course into the existing curriculum. Now Indian Nursing Council included forensic nursing in the basic nursing curriculum. The next step is creating awareness among the people on the need to have specially trained nurses in the forensic departments. Those who are interested shall be re-enforced. Then the baseline facilities are to be broadened to train more people. Various courses on forensic nursing shall be introduced with varying durations. The standards of the courses and training to be accredited by the suitable accrediting agencies. The regulatory bodies to be established. Enough job opportunities for forensic nurses in Government and privates to be generated. There shall be the provision for career growth for professional development. This cycle should continue to develop forensic nursing services.

Research

Research is fundamental for any profession to go. The same for forensic nursing too. The existing forensic and crime labs are to be strengthened. New technologies in forensic investigations are to be developed depending on the needs. Funding is an essential component of research. More funds are to be allocated for forensic nursing research. Fast and easy methods are to be invented to find drugs and their toxic effects. Professionals to be motivated to engage in forensic research. Publishing forensic research finds and strengthening the quality of forensic journals are essential to advance forensic practices. More research on microbial forensics, Artificial Intelligence in forensic science, humanitarian forensics, DNA phenotyping, biosensors for fingerprint analysis, immunochromatography, Geolacting a suspected victim by using staple isotopes of water, forensic palynology, Blockchain-based forensics like cloud forensics, digital vehicle forensics, social network forensics, 3D technology to determine physical fit, Drone forensics etc to be conducted and utilized.



Practice

Defining the scope of practice for forensic nurses is a very essential component in practice guidelines. Forensic nurses shall work as medico-legal investigators, clinical forensic nurses, clinical nurse forensic nurse specialists, forensic psychiatric nurses, Legal nurse consultants, emergency department nurses, sexual assault nurse examiners, forensic nurse educators/consultants, forensic accident examiners/ Reconstructionists and nurse attorneys. Additional roles like forensic post-mortem examination, Forensic traumatology, forensic toxicology, member in insurance company, member in the investigations and member in the legal team shall also be included.

Practice guidelines for forensic nursing advancements

- Establishing designated posts
- Defining Code of Ethics for forensic nurses
- Clear job descriptions for forensic nurses
- Developing forensic nursing protocols
- Establishing Indian Forensic Nurses Association
- Encourage collaborative practice for knowledge exchange and shared success
- Encouraging nursing process application in forensic services like
 1. Assessment – Identification of forensic situation and potential victims
 2. Planning – Investigation
 3. Intervention – Documentation about the situation, collection of evidence, interviewing, provision of appropriate care, and reporting to the appropriate legal agency.
 4. Evaluation – Post-intervention review.

Capacity Buildings of Forensics in India:

1. Providing scientific aid to the investigation of crime at the crime scene
2. Scientific SOPs for lifting, packing and forwarding the crime scene exhibits.
3. Undelayed quality examination of reports should be available at the investigation stage
4. Practice and develop technology in all the conventional and modern branches of forensic science.
5. Provide quality forensic science education

6. Generate preventive forensics to check on the crime and criminals.
7. Generate DVI teams and zone-wise working groups to identify human remains/ dead bodies at mass fatality incidents.
8. Strong reinforcement is required at all levels
9. All Stakeholders must be involved in planning and executing the policies and protocols.
10. Good leadership is essential

CONCLUSION

Forensic nursing is an emerging speciality which needs more understanding by nurses. It requires a multisectoral approach to establish and advance the practices of forensic nursing. The basic knowledge, skills and attitudes of nurses will be highly beneficial to the Department of Forensics in the process of investigation and human care. Justice shall be delivered at the earliest. Knowledge of forensic science will fine-tune the nurses' daily practice. The responsibility is to create individuals who will have the skill of

- F – Fine
- O – Observation to
- R – Recognize
- E – Pieces of evidence and
- N – Navigate it to
- S – Solve
- I – Intentionally or unintentionally executed
- C – Crimes.

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