

Knowledge and practices of medico-legal activities related to nursing practice among nursing officers in Teaching Hospitals Karapitiya and Mahamodara

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Introduction

In current Sri Lankan society, there is a higher prevalence of trauma due to road traffic accidents, violence etc. Since we do not have forensic nursing professionals, all registered nursing officers are supposed to take care of various stages of medico-legal activities. Contribution of the nursing officer is valuable to perform a successful medico-legal examination and investigation. The aim of the study was to assess the knowledge and practices of nursing officers on different medico-legal activities.

Methods

A descriptive cross sectional study was conducted among nursing officers in Teaching Hospitals Karapitiya and Mahamodara using an interviewer-administered questionnaire. A convenient sample of 140 nursing officers was selected with the ratio of 3:1 from the two hospitals. The knowledge domain of the questionnaire was categorized as; poor (00-39.9%), average (40-59.9%) and good (60-100%). The practice domain was categorized as; inadequate (00-49.9%) and adequate (50-100%) contribution to the practice.

Results

The majority (89.3%) of the study participants was females. In the sample 80.7% had Diploma in Nursing and 37.9% had 5-10 years of service. In the entire sample, 23.6% of nursing officers had faced at least one medico-legal problem at their respective wards or units. Mean (SD) knowledge score was 54.4 (12.54). Mean (SD) practice score was 64.6 (18.44). Average knowledge was achieved by 50.7% and 87.1% of nursing officers had contributed adequately to medico-legal activities. Majority of nursing officers had good knowledge and adequate contribution to the practice on suspected injury identification and maintaining patients' documents. Ability to identify suspected injuries among nursing officers was significantly positive when correlated with duration of service ($P=0.012$, $r=0.212$). Majority of nursing officers had poor knowledge and inadequate contribution to the practice on documenting dying declaration and inquest procedure. Practice on medico-legal activities had significant association with gender and female nursing officers had better practice than male nursing officers ($P=0.012$, $t=0.009$).

Conclusions

Nursing officers studied had an average knowledge regarding medico-legal activities and most of them had given an adequate contribution to such activities. Programmes on improving knowledge on medico-legal activities are beneficial to advance their contribution.