



Original communication

Forensic experience of Saudi nurses; an emerging need for forensic qualifications



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ABSTRACT

Forensic nursing was recognized as a nursing subspecialty after the perceived need for forensic nurses to bring about their nursing duties while at the same time helping legal authorities to deliver justice. With the increased rate of cases that are presenting to the forensic centers in Saudi Arabia, there was a need for the presence of nurses to work side by side with physicians. This study was aimed at determining the forensic qualifications of nurses working in emergency departments in the area of Dammam and their knowledge about principles of forensic nursing.

A self-administered questionnaire was distributed to registered nurses who are working in Emergency departments of secondary hospitals in the area of Dammam. Questions included knowledge, awareness and attitude toward forensic nursing.

A total of 96 participants responded to the questionnaire with females representing 78% ($n = 75$). Diploma was the highest earned nursing degree in 95% ($n = 91$) of participants. Only 33% ($n = 32$) were aware of the term forensic nursing and the majority of the respondents gave invalid or didn't know the answers to knowledge questions. A total of 77% ($n = 74$) agreed that they are not adequately trained for handling forensic cases.

Saudi nurses need forensic education. The presence of qualified forensic nurses would help delivering optimal forensic services and would assist in bringing justice.

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1. Introduction

Forensic medicine was established in Saudi Arabia after recognizing the need for the application of medical sciences in conducting social justice. It involves postmortem examination together with examining living cases of sexual and physical assault.

This branch had witnessed many changes since the appointment of the first specialized forensic medicine doctor in the city of Riyadh, 1968. A big leap in this specialty was seen after the establishment of the Saudi specialty certificate in forensic medicine, 2006. Male and female national specialized forensic medical examiners have graduated and are working in different centers throughout the country.¹

The first specialized forensic clinic started receiving child and women complainants of assault in 2007. Over the following years there was an obvious increase in the rate of presenting cases.² Forensic physicians, who recognized that the care of complainants runs side by side to the need for conducting social justice, felt the demand for the presence of a nurse working in such clinic. While legal authorities find general nurses working with forensic cases as advocates for the complainant, the nurses in turn find legal authorities as invaders of patient's privacy.³ The presence of specialized forensic nurses narrowed this gap.

Forensic nursing was first recognized in USA in 1990.⁴ The forensic nurse acts as a liaison between physicians and criminal justice system, and being in the place of first contact with the patient; she is expected to conduct a proper evaluation and collection of evidence, which other wise will compromise the legal proceedings.⁵

Other duties of a forensic nurse include; suspecting violence, care of trauma, maintaining chain of custody and providing

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support.³ Distracting the child victim from insulting situations and preparing him/her to the examination needs special skills that a forensic nurse can provide. Testimony at the court is a less known duty of the forensic nurse being a member of the forensic team.^{1,5}

In Saudi Arabia, general nurses are faced with forensic cases as part of their routine nursing work. Although they are involved with the assessment and evidence collection, however, no specialized forensic nursing programs or training courses are provided to support their work. Studying the forensic awareness and qualifications of Saudi nurses could emphasize the importance of establishing specialized programs of forensic nursing in Saudi Arabia and improving the forensic practice in the country.

Up to the knowledge of the authors, no study has been conducted in Saudi Arabia to assess the forensic qualifications of Saudi nurses.

The study was constructed to determine the need for qualified forensic nurses to handle victims of abuse in Saudi Arabia. The objectives were to assess the knowledge of registered nurses in Saudi Arabia about forensic nursing, to assess the qualifications of registered nurses whom their work involves forensic practice, and to evaluate the attitude of registered nurses towards forensic nursing specialty.

2. Methodology

A descriptive analysis study was conducted in the area of Dammam and included all secondary hospitals (Maternity and Children’s Hospital, Dammam Medical Tower and Qatif Central Hospital). Registered Saudi nurses of pediatric, OBGYNE and general ER were included in the study.

A questionnaire was constructed and included demographic data, awareness and knowledge of forensic medicine and nursing and the attitude of registered nurses towards forensic nursing specialty. Questions for the attitude were adapted from a published pilot study^{4,6} while the principal author constructed a pilot assessment of knowledge, which focused on principles of forensic nursing. The co-authors then reviewed the questionnaire.

The questionnaire was translated into Arabic language to ensure better understanding of the questions. It was then distributed to head nurses of pediatric, gynecology and general ER departments of targeted hospitals to review it and give comments about its content. The numbers of registered ER nurses in each ER department was taken from the head nurses to determine the number of questionnaires to be distributed. The questionnaire was reconstructed taking in consideration the suggestions of head nurses.

Authors distributed 140 questionnaires to the registered nurses of ER departments. The questionnaires were distributed and collected over a period of one month. Data was entered and analyzed using the SPSS program version 21.

Approval was obtained from the General Directorate of Health Affairs in the Eastern Province and consent was considered by agreeing to fill the questionnaire and submitting it while all information remained anonymous.

3. Results

The response rate to the questionnaire was 98% (n: 96). Median age (IQR) of the participants is 25 (23,28). Females represented 78% (n: 75) while males 22% (n: 21). The highest earned degree in nursing was diploma (two years after the high school) in 95% (n: 90) while 4% (n: 4) have baccalaureate degree (four years after the high school) and one participant had finished a master degree (a post graduate degree) (Fig. 1).

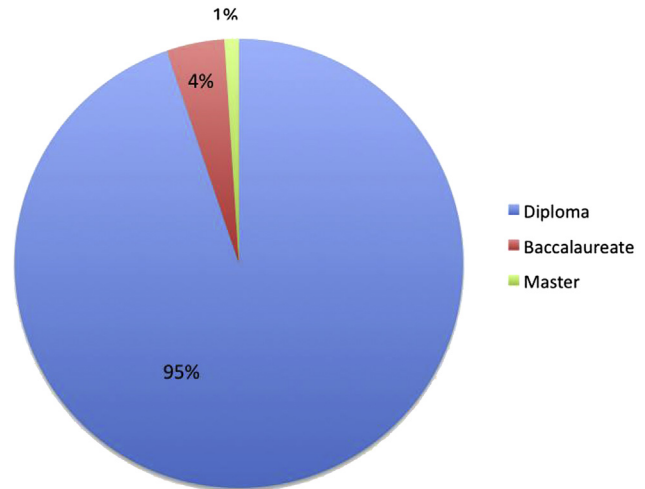


Fig. 1. Highest nursing degree.

Most of respondents 79% (n: 74) have 5 or less years of experience, the maximum experience was 18 years in one participant.

Majority 71% (n: 62) have most experience in general emergency department (ER) followed by 22% (n: 19) in OBGYNE and 7% (n: 6) in pediatrics ER (Fig. 2). Minimum number of handled legal cases was 0 while maximum was 200.

A total of 65% (n: 62) were aware of the term forensic medicine while only 34% (n: 32) were aware of the term forensic nursing. Awareness was more (52%) in more experienced nurses (6–20 years of experience), while only 29% in those with 5 or less years of experience. A percentage of 94% (n: 90) stated that they received no lectures on dealing with legal cases and 85% (n: 82) stated that they received no training on handling forensic cases.

Most of respondents 69% (n: 66) stated that there are standing protocols for dealing with forensic cases while 24% (n: 23) said there are no protocols and 7% (n: 7) mentioned that they don't know if such protocols exist at their institution or not. Most of the knowledge questions were answered by the majority as either invalid or don't know (Table 1).

Seventy-seven percent (n: 74) agreed that they are not adequately trained in forensics and 62% (n: 59) agreed that there is no time for forensic cases in ER setting. Fifty-two percent (n: 49) don't want to work with forensic cases because of legal liability while 49% (n: 47) were willing to practice forensic nursing in case it is present.

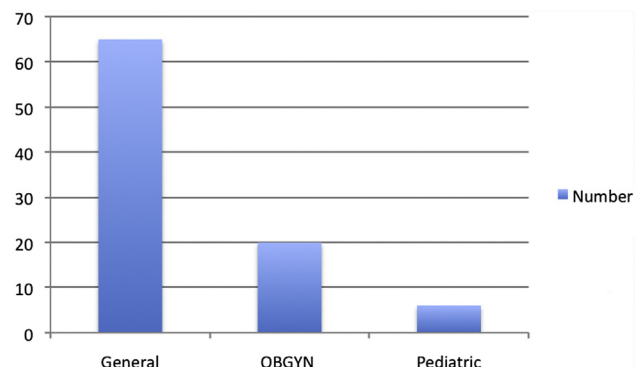


Fig. 2. The number of respondents according to emergency department.

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