Nursing Research Presentation

Title: Nurse’s Perceptions in Caring for Hospitalized Medical-Surgical Patients with Substance Abuse/Dependence

Problem/Purpose: To investigate how RNs perceive caring for Med-surg patients that have comorbid conditions related to substance abuse and/or dependence.

Literature Review: Previous literature suggests that, within a substance abuse unit, 6 RNs in a qualitative study showed inappropriate judgment, did not provide proper advocacy for their patients, and required more education on their patients. Another study showed that RNs in hospital-based settings rarely receive any in-service or education about substance abuse or drug dependency (only 22% of 1,605 RNs reported being educated on such matters). A third study revealed that having RNs educated about their substance abuse/dependency patients brought on a marked improvement by 16.2% in patient care and therapeutic attitude.

Methods: A qualitative approach using subjective data from a descriptive, non-experimental study investigating nurses’ attitudes toward suicide in hospitalized patients. This is used because substance abuse and dependence lead to a substantially increased risk of suicide in physically ill patients. Two additional questions were also added on to this: 1) What are your thoughts and feelings about working with patients with substance abuse and/or dependence issues in the hospital settings? And 2) How does caring for a patient with substance abuse/dependence influence your nursing care provided to hospitalized patients?

Sample: Convenience sample of nurse participants participating on 5 inpatient units. N=25. These participants are located in the NE US. These hospitals did not have any services or units dedicated to substance abuse patients. Mostly female (n=23), and BSN prepared (n=20). Mostly white (n=17), and having 11-30 years of experience (n=18).

Ethics: Implied consent form, confidential data, no names collected, only the principal investigators had access to the data. RNs had the option to drop out of the study at any point.

Themes: ***Ethical Duty of Care***: Substance abuse, as in any other medical illness, is a disease, and patients undergoing or diagnosed with the disease are deserving of optimal care and treatment. ***Intolerance, anger, and the demand of patients with substance abuse/dependence necessitating greater attention and nursing care***: “I have no tolerance for substance abuse patients. They are manipulative and needy and drug seeking and take time away from other patients who are really physically sick and dependent on my nursing care. Working with patients who abuse drugs and alcohol makes me very angry.” ***Nurses’ perception of being manipulated or distrusting of these patients***: “As a healthcare provider, you always have to have your guard up because substance abuse patients are very good at manipulating people and events to their benefit.” ***Patients could be aggressive and potentially threatening***: “As for ETOH abuse, I tend not to bother them much, since I am afraid of sudden outbursts. When I have patients with substance abuse, it increases my stress because there are more safety issues to worry about, and patients can be aggressive. I do not feel comfortable working with these patients.” ***Lack of training***: “I do not have enough training in this area to be comfortable taking care of these patients.”

Discussion: RNs mentioned safety as their number one concern. Having support programs with methods on how to work with the substance abuse/dependency population would be a major help and can easy RNs anxiety. RNs must also have role support from their supervisors.

Additional Research: More research is needed to determine whether or not the enhanced education and support network help RNs treat their substance abuse patients without stigma.

Relates to Nursing By: showing us how RNs require more education and training in certain specialties. We will most likely run into several substance abuse/dependent patients, and we should be prepared to take care of them like they are any other patient with an illness.

Ethical Issues: Nurses don’t give appropriate care. They brush off the needs of substance abuse patients and mistrust them. They do not strongly advocate for their healthcare needs. They are afraid of these patients and may not want to be in a room with them, alone, while performing nursing care, therefore, leading to lower quality or no nursing care at all.