

The Effects of Teaching Communication Skills to Nursing Students on the Quality of Care for Patients

Reza Taghizadeh, Shahriar Shakhaei, Hassan Ebrahimpour Sadagheyani, Hossein Motaarefi

Department of Medical Surgical Nursing, Khoy University of Medical Sciences, Khoy, Iran

Abstract

Introduction: Nursing profession requires not only the academic knowledge but also the interpersonal relationships, technical, and intellectual abilities. **Aim:** This study aimed to determine the impact of teaching communication skills to nurse students on the quality of care given by nursing students. **Materials and Methods:** This study was a quasi-experimental research that was performed on 66 past year students and 132 patients using a goal-oriented sampling method in 2016. The data collection tools included a demographic information form of the units under study, a checklist of students' communication skills, and a quality of care questionnaire for patients (QualPaC). The study tools were completed by the students and patients before the intervention and after completion of the training course. After collection, data were analyzed using SPSS v16 and descriptive and inferential statistics such as paired t-test and Pearson correlation coefficient. **Results:** The results showed that there was a significant difference between the mean quality of patients' care before and following the intervention ($P \leq 0.001$). Furthermore, there was a significant difference between the means for nursing student's communication skills before and after the intervention. Moreover, there was a significant correlation between the mean scores of students and the quality of care and communication skills ($P \leq 0.001$). **Conclusion:** It is recommended that the professionals in the field of nursing incorporate "communication skills" into their instructional programs so that the nursing students acquire the requisite experience in the field before entering into this profession. Furthermore, teaching communication skills should be followed up after the students' graduation.

Key words: Communication skills, nursing students, quality of care

INTRODUCTION

Nursing is the science of taking care of or doing service for people.^[1,2] Nursing profession involves not only the academic knowledge but also it requires the interpersonal relationships as well as technical and intellectual abilities. In other words, it involves a combination of clinical work and interpersonal relationships. These relationships are deemed as a vital element in the profession in its different areas and interventions including prevention, treatment, care, rehabilitation, education, and health promotion.^[3]

As our body and mind are quite intertwined, paying attention to the patients' mental and psychological states play a significant role in alleviating their pain or expediting their recuperation. Nurses are the only health professionals with whom patients have the most contact or relationship.^[4,5] In this profession, various types of relationships

from a wide spectrum of social and cultural backgrounds are established.^[6,7] Nurses should acquire and employ the requisite skills in effective communications and good rapport with patients before embarking on their careers since the bulk of problems between patients and nurses arise from failure to acquire such skills.^[6,8]

Training of nurses in these areas must be started before starting their career or even during their practice as part of regular in-service training for all nurses.^[9,10] Research findings in recent years showed that there has been a wave of an increasing number of complaints about nurses' failure

Address for correspondence:

Hossein Motaarefi, Assistant Professor, Department of Medical Surgical Nursing, Khoy University of Medical Sciences, Khoy, Iran. E-mail: motarefy_h@yahoo.com

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to develop good relationships with patients as well as the health professionals' negligence in this respect. This has been confirmed by the department of health in 2013.^[11,12]

Advances in medical sciences along with a large number of academic publications and professional knowledge, and health-care professionals' failure to keep pace with these developments, in addition to lack of academic education, have led to inadequate social and communication skills in dealing with patients among graduates. In fact, real health services will be feasible only when nurses and all health service providers have all acquired the necessary social and communication skills and are familiarized with the culture, traditions, and social etiquettes of their own societies during and following their graduation.^[13,14]

University professors play a key role in employing proper interpersonal relationship skills, and they can provide the appropriate conditions for the promotion of learning on the part of students in a way that a great number of colleges and institutes these days require that all their students pass at least a two-credit course on interpersonal skills.^[15-18]

The researcher, during the course of 10 years of professional expertise as a nursing instructor, believes that the most salient shortcoming of nursing students which has resulted in widespread discontent among hospitals health professionals with these students' performance - is their failure to establish a good relationship with the patients and other health professionals in different wards. The current study sought to examine the effects of teaching communication skills to nurse students on the quality of care given by students in the Islamic Azad University of Mahabad.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present study is a quasi-experimental pre-test and post-test research that was performed on 66 past year students of the Islamic Azad University of Mahabad in Imam Khomeini Hospital and 132 patients using a goal-oriented sampling method in 2016. The criteria for entering the study include not having a record of participation in communication skills training courses, entering an internship in the field, and willingness to participate in the research. Exclusion criterion was the absence in more than one session in the communication skills training course. The data collection tools included a demographic information form of the units under study, a checklist of students' communication skills, and a quality of care questionnaire for patients. To examine the communication skills of students, a checklist of 16 questions was evaluated by four individuals: The respective trainer, a student of the same level, the head of the department', and the student himself/herself before and after the intervention, in the form of a 360° observational test, with a Likert criterion of dissatisfaction, relative satisfaction, and complete satisfaction

with Grades 1-3, which the minimum score is 16 and the maximum score is 48. The high average score obtained was indicative of good (desirable) communication skills. The standard care quality questionnaire had 18 questions in psychosocial aspects, communication, and professional interventions with the Likert scale of rarely, sometimes, often, and always. The lowest score of the questionnaire was 18 and the highest score was 72. The questionnaire was provided to two patients that each nursing student was responsible to take care of for 2 consecutive days. It was presented to a total of 132 patients. The high average score indicates the high quality of care. In this research, content validity method was used to determine the scientific validity of the tools, namely, the questionnaire and the checklist were submitted to 10 faculty members of the university, and after reviewing and necessary corrections, the content validity was obtained. To determine the reliability of the communication skills tool with a preliminary study on 20 students, Cronbach's alpha was calculated 0.81. To obtain Cronbach's alpha for the quality of care questionnaire, 40 patients were evaluated, and the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was determined 0.83. The quality of care questionnaire has been evaluated in several studies and different groups such as Khodadadi (2004), Neishabouri (2010), and Karimi Monaghi (2012) and is considered a standard and reliable tool. The study was conducted with the clinical trial registration number IR.IAU.TMU.REC.2015.14. The study tools were completed by the students and patients before the intervention and after completion of the training course. To intervene, communication skills training course totally lasted for 6 h, in 2 consecutive days, and two sessions of 1½ h a day, delivered by lectures and workshops using educational equipment and technology for students. After 2 weeks from the time of the course, students were re-evaluated by the checklist. After collection, data were analyzed using SPSS v16 and descriptive and inferential statistics such as paired t-test and Pearson correlation coefficient.

RESULTS

The findings indicated that the most of the students in this study were male (73%) and 70% of patients in this research were also male, 76.5% of patient were married and hospitalized, 34.1% of them were in neurosciences ward.

The results also demonstrate that the mean for an interpersonal relationship with the patients was 33.98 before the training course while this figure reached 42 after the training which shows a significant difference between establishing proper relationships with the patients before and after the training [Table 1].

The results indicated that the mean for "the quality of care" before training was 53.84 while this value after training rose to 66.29. The findings are indicative of a significant difference between the "quality of care" before and after the training sessions on communication skills [Table 2].

Table 1: Comparing communication skills before and after training sessions

Variable	n	Mean±SD	Statistical index
Score pre communication skills	66	33.98±4.21	$t=-16.67$ df=65
Score post communication skills	66	42±2.79	
Difference	66	8.02±1.42	$P\leq 0.001$

Table 2: Comparing quality of care for patients before and after training sessions on communication skills

Variable	n	Mean±SD	Statistical index
Score pre quality of care	66	53.84±10.62	$t=-13.98$ df=65
Score post quality of care	66	66.29±5.37	$P\leq 0.001$
Difference	66	12.45±5.25	

The findings of this study also show that between difference mean score of communication skills and quality of care before and after the intervention were significant with the Pearson correlation coefficient ($r = 0.53$; $P \leq 0.001$). In other words, there is a direct and significant relationship between the “quality of care” given to patients and “nursing students’ communication skills.”

DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that there exists a statistically significant difference between the “quality of care” given to patients before and after the training sessions on communication skills; thus, the main hypothesis of the study is confirmed. This is indicative of the salient impact of training communication skills on the “quality of care.” These results are accordant with the findings of studies conducted by Karimi *et al.*^[19] In a study conducted by Khodadadi *et al.* in Tabriz, Iran, the “Communication Skills Training on Quality of Care” intervention was implemented on the nurses and then communication skills were assessed. The findings showed a statistically significant difference between the rate of quality of care in patients with control and experimental groups after the intervention.^[20] They all came up with the findings that the mean score for “quality of care” for the group who received training on “communication skills” changed after the training sessions. The findings indicated a statistically significant difference between developing the proper relationship with patients before and after the training sessions on the part of the patients. Therefore, the relationship between training and enhanced communication skills was confirmed. In a study directed by Edwards *et al.* in Canada, the “Therapeutic relationships” intervention was done on the nurses’ practice, and then the nurses’ communication skills were evaluated. Results showed that communication skill

training leads to an increase in communication skills level in nurses who are consistent with the results of the present study.^[22] Peyman *et al.* carried out a study and found that there exists a significant difference between scores obtained from four areas of (1) general aspects of relationship, (2) psychological support, (3) therapeutic relationship, and (4) nonverbal communication realized in “communication skills questionnaire” before and after intervention.^[21] Karimi *et al.* also demonstrated that enhanced communication skills of nurses led to improved quality of medical care.^[19] Roter *et al.*^[23] found that teaching “communication skills” can result in more effective relationships between health professionals and culminate in the promotion of effective relationships. In a research conducted by Rowan in the USA, the communication skills education was conducted on medical personnel that ultimately caused an increase in their level of communication skills.^[24]

The findings of this study demonstrated that the mean score for “quality of care” after training on communication skills increased in comparison with that of the pre-training stage. Besides, the mean score for the communication dimension increased after the training sessions as opposed to the pre-training mean score. There was also a significant correlation between communication skills and the “quality of care” students’.

The Pearson correlation coefficient revealed that there is a positive and significant relationship between the two variables of the “nursing students’ communication skills” and the “quality of care” given to patients both before and after the intervention; that is as the students’ communication skills increase, the quality of care given to patients will enhance accordingly. This is in agreement with the study of Nasiripour and Saeedzadeh that communication skills are correlated with the quality of clinical care in the respective hospitals.^[7]

CONCLUSION

Considering the findings on the role of “communication skills” in enhancing the quality of nursing care, it is recommended that the instructors and professors in the field of nursing, who are responsible for designing syllabi and clinical education, incorporate “communication skills” into their instructional programs so that the nursing students acquire the requisite experience in the field before entering into this profession. Furthermore, it seems that training like communication skills should be followed up after the students’ graduation which could, in turn, result in the good rapport between nurses and patients and more satisfaction on the part of the patients.

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