

Forensic Nurses as Change Agents in Health Care

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Forensic Nursing

“The practice of nursing globally when health care and legal systems intersect”

*International Association of Forensic Nurses
September 2008*

“Forensic” comes from Latin word “forensis” meaning “of or before the forum”

Legal or related to the courts is now accepted as meaning of forensics

Forensic Nursing

- ▶ Specialty of nursing which combines the forensic aspects of health care with scientific investigation and treatment of survivors/victims and perpetrators of abuse, violence, criminal activity and accidents.

Collision

Nursing/Medicine/ and Law Enforcement
and /Legal/ Judicial Systems

HOW HAS FORENSIC NURSING
CHANGED HEALTHCARE IN
THE LAST TWO DECADES???

Forensic Nursing: Impact on Canadian Healthcare

BEFORE

- Sexually assaulted patients waited in acute healthcare for many hours. Often examined by professionals with little or no experience in assessment of sexual violence, recognition of significant findings, forensic evidence collection and documentation of injuries

AFTER

- **Specialized response time** of 0-60 minutes in centers in 8/10 provinces and 1/3 territories with care increasingly provided by specially trained HCP
- Courts have access to **objective** evidence collected in a scientific manner.
- **Objective** documentation of physical findings increases likelihood of criminal investigation (with consent)
- Community agencies **collaborate** to provide before, during and after resources for the SA patient

Forensic Nursing: Impact on Canadian Healthcare

BEFORE

- IPV patients in Emergency Departments not recognized as intentional injuries vs unintentional injuries. Often patient's history of event was believed when it did not fit the physical findings

AFTER

- Specialized **screening tools** for IVP are being used in Emergency departments to determine those at high risk for IVP.
- Cost of IVP to healthcare has been determined by many studies (Varcoe: 6.9 billion \$\$ 2011) **increasing HC funding** for specialized care units
- Awareness of IVP as a **public health safety issue** is spreading and **WHO Global Action Plan**

Forensic Nursing: Impact on Canadian Healthcare

BEFORE

- Child maltreatment/neglect often undetected by health care providers in all health care settings

AFTER

- **Mandatory reporting** of child maltreatment **increasing** among HC professionals.
- **Child abuse teams** formed and expanding throughout Canada
- **Forensic nurses** specializing in SA examinations of children/youth increasing
- **Child ombudspersons** appointed to monitor child protection services
- Laws now require a **criminal record check** if working with children

Forensic Nursing: Impact on Canadian Healthcare

BEFORE

- In care deaths often had scene altered by HCP before an investigation
- Care facility deaths often attributed to natural causes and not investigated
- Coroners do not have medical training to perform the role

AFTER

- Death scene preserved by HCP who are aware of the need to have **objective investigation** of all in care deaths
- Awareness of the high incidence of **elder abuse** in care facilities. HCP screened prior to employment
- Nurse Coroners and death investigators bring a **medical expertise** to the role in the investigation of all deaths

Forensic Nursing: Impact on Canadian Healthcare

BEFORE

- HCP not aware of laws impacting their work
- Educational aspects of violence lacking in HC education

AFTER

- **Increased HCP awareness of laws** impacting their practice including privacy, mandatory reporting, professional practice, consent, criminal laws,
- Education in IPV/SA/SV/Child/Elder violence and trauma across the lifespan **slowly** becoming part of Healthcare on many levels

Forensic Nursing: Impact on Canadian Healthcare

BEFORE

- Limited documentation of trauma injuries by HCP
- No correlation between mechanism of injury and actual injury
- Documentation incomplete, often inaccurate use of medical terms, inconsistent and not always usable in court proceedings

AFTER

- Forensically trained HCP **document all findings** objectively, accurately and completely using correct medical terminology
- Provides both civil and criminal courts valuable documentation in order to reach a **just judgement**

Forensic Nursing: Impact on Canadian Healthcare

BEFORE

- Work Place Injuries/Fatalities investigated by non HCP with limited or no medical knowledge of mechanism of injuries

AFTER

- Worksafe BC hired a forensic nurse to investigate fatalities in the workplace. This is a first in Canada. Unfortunately he has moved to another area of forensic nursing. However the links to forensic healthcare have not been lost

Forensic Nursing: Impact on Canadian Healthcare

BEFORE

- Corrections Nursing and Forensic Psychiatric Nursing did not exist as specialties.

AFTER

- Forensic Psychiatric Nurse role in **specialized units** across Canada as well as attached to law enforcement agencies.
- Corrections Nursing does cross over into Forensic Nursing . On going discussions on whether there is a place for Corrections nursing within Forensic Nursing specialty

Forensic Nursing: Impact on Canadian Healthcare

BEFORE

- Trafficking in Persons /Human Trafficking was not regarded as a health care issue. This includes sex trade workers, sexual exploitation of youth and workers who are trafficked for labor/sexual or servitude purposes.

AFTER

- Trafficked persons have a need for health care services ranging from communicable infections, chronic illnesses to injuries from physical or sexual violence. Eg. BC developed a **Toolkit** for HCP to aid in the recognition of the Trafficked person when they present for **health care**.

What about Forensic Nursing Education?

BEFORE

- Nursing Education in the 1960's to 1980's did not address issues of violence and crime as relating to health care issues.
- Child abuse, sexual assault, forensic psychiatry, forensic corrections, intimate partner violence were not terms that were discussed in clinical practice

CURRENT

- ***Programs in Canada***
 - BCIT Forensic Health Sciences, Burnaby BC
 - Seneca College, Toronto Ont
 - Mount Royal University, Calgary Ab. on request
- ***Courses in Canada***
 - University of Saskatchewan
 - St. Francis Xavier University
 - George Brown University,
 - Douglas College, Coquitlam, BC

Forensic Nursing in Canada: The Future

- Barriers
 - Lack of **recognition** of Forensic Nursing as a specialty
 - Forensic Nursing not represented at all levels of health care when key decisions are made in policies related to violence and trauma.
 - Lack of **educational opportunities** in Canada for nurses interested in Forensic Nursing
 - Lack of full/part time **positions** in Forensic Nursing in many of the sub specialty areas
 - Lack of educational **funding** for specialized education
 - ????

Forensic Nursing in Canada: The Future

- Challenges
 - Emergency Departments are frequent presentation site for the forensic patient population yet few ED staff (MDs, RNs) have adequate education to provide safe and efficient care (Henderson 2012)
 - Significance of the ability of health care to impact the outcome of both patients and perpetrators of criminal activity is not recognized (Sekula 2005)
 - Lack of research in forensic nursing practice to demonstrate the positive effects of forensic nursing in clinical settings

Forensic Nursing in Canada: The Future

- Challenges
 - Funding, Funding, Funding
 - Others??

Forensic Nursing in Canada: The Future

- Opportunities
 - Forensic Nurses becoming active in communities working with both government and non government agencies in prevention of violence
 - Forensic Nurses becoming politically active on all levels of government in order to influence decision makers in issues related to violence, trauma and crime and health care.
 - Strengthening the power and voice of professional bodies like Canadian Forensic Nurses Association (CFNA) and IAFN globally
 - Creating new roles for Forensic Nurses

Forensic Nursing in Canada: The Future

- Opportunities
 - Integrating forensic nursing principles into basic nursing education
 - Developing partnerships with similar professional bodies such a National Emergency Nurses Association (NENA) , Legal Nurse Consulting Association of Canada (LNCAC) and others
 - Developing educational partnerships with police, paramedics, criminal justice, other educational institutions
 - ???

Forensic Nursing in Canada: The Future

Role Expansion in:

- Forensic nursing educators/consultants
- Nurse coroners/Death investigators
- Forensic Nurse Examiners in Sexual Violence/IPV/ Child abuse/Human Trafficking/Sexual Exploitation
- Legal nurse consultants
- Nurse attorneys
- Clinical nursing specialists in trauma, transplant, and critical care
- Forensic pediatric nurses
- Forensic gerontological nurses
- Forensic psychiatric nurses
- Forensic correctional nurses

Forensic Nursing Globally

- World Health Organization
- Global Plan of Action to strengthen the role of health system within a national multisectoral response to address interpersonal violence in particular against women and girls and against children (2016)

<http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/252276/1/9789241511537-eng.pdf?ua=1>

Discussion

Key points ¹

- strengthening health system leadership and governance
- strengthening health service delivery and health workers'/providers' capacity to respond to violence, in particular against women and against children
- strengthen programming to prevent interpersonal violence, in particular against women and girls, and against children
- improve information and evidence
- ¹ <http://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/topics/violence/action-plan-endorsement/en/>

What do we do about this plan??

"With the gift of listening comes
the gift of healing."

Catherine de Hueck

Thank you

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