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

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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 ≤ 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 ≤ 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. 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.

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. In this profession, various types of relationships from a wide spectrum of social and cultural backgrounds are established. 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.

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. Research findings in recent years showed that there has been a wave of an increasing number of complaints about nurses’ failure...
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 ½ 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].
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 ($r = 0.53; P ≤ 0.001$). 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. 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. 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. 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. Karimi et al. also demonstrated that enhanced communication skills of nurses led to improved quality of medical care. Roter et al. 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.

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.

**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.

**ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

Hereby, the authors would like to sincerely thank all the staff who participated in this study and all the students who
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participated in this study. This study was funded by Islamic Azad University of Mahabad, Urmia, Iran.

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Source of Support: Nil. Conflict of Interest: None declared.