

Introduction of Forensic Science in BSc Nursing: A Paradigm Shift in Indian Healthcare

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Abstract:

Forensic science, the interface of legal and scientific knowledge, has emerged as a required branch in today's healthcare. The inclusion of forensic science in BSc nursing courses in India has gained pace in the past few years, providing a golden opportunity to fill the gap between healthcare and law. This review article discusses the introduction of forensic science or forensic medicine in Indian BSc nursing courses and its possible impact on nursing practice, patient care, and the healthcare system. India can solve significant issues like medico-legal cases, violence against women, child abuse, and deaths under suspicious circumstances and improve the quality of healthcare delivery by imparting forensic training to nurses.

Keywords: Forensic science, medico-legal cases, healthcare system.

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Introduction

Forensic science and forensic medicine are interdisciplinary fields that combine medical knowledge with legal expertise to investigate crimes, accidents, and other incidents requiring legal scrutiny. Integrating forensic science into BSc nursing education is a progressive step in India, where the healthcare system often intersects with legal challenges. Nurses, as frontline healthcare providers, are usually the first to encounter victims of violence, abuse, or accidents. By incorporating forensic science into their training, nurses can play a pivotal role in identifying, documenting, and preserving evidence, contributing to justice and improving patient outcomes (**American Nurses Association, 2017**).

Forensic Science in BSc Nursing: The Indian Scenario

In India, BSc nursing courses have traditionally emphasized clinical competence, patient care, and community health. However, the integration of forensic science as a specialized course or module is still in its infancy. A few nursing colleges and universities have started integrating forensic nursing as an elective or course, valuing its application in managing the increasing number of medico-legal cases (**Burgess, 2016**).

Forensic nursing includes several areas, such as:

1. Medico-legal documentation: Educating nurses to document injuries correctly, collect evidence, and ensure chain of custody (**Burgess, 2016; NCRBR, 2020**).
2. Victimology: Educating nurses to provide sensitive care to victims of violence, abuse, or trauma while keeping forensic evidence intact.
3. Death investigation: Educating nurses to assist in post-mortem examination and detect evidence of foul play.
4. Sexual assault examination: Educating nurses to perform forensic exams in sexual violence cases, meeting both medical and legal requirements (**NCRBR, 2020; INC, 2021**).

The Indian health system, saddled with heavy caseloads and meager resources, benefits greatly from integrating forensic science in nursing courses. Nurses with forensic training can link the health system and law enforcement agencies, ensuring justice is delivered while keeping patient care as the paramount concern (**Burgess, 2016; NCRBR, 2020**).

Benefits to the Nursing Profession

1. Improved Clinical Competence: Forensic training allows nurses to identify and manage cases of abuse, violence, or neglect, sharpening clinical judgment and decision-making.
2. Improved Patient Advocacy: Forensic nurses are educated to advocate for vulnerable groups, like victims of domestic violence, child abuse, or human trafficking, ensuring their rights and safety are protected.
3. Career Diversification: Integrating forensic nursing opens new career avenues for BSc nursing graduates, such as forensic hospital jobs, legal consultancy, or specialized trauma care units (**INC, 2021; IAFN, 2015**).
4. Ethical and Legal Awareness: Nurses gain a broader awareness of medico-legal concerns, enabling them to handle intricate ethical issues and comply with legal requirements in practice.

Benefits to the Medical Field

The integration of forensic science into BSc nursing education holds immense potential to transform the medical field in India. Forensic nurses, with their specialized training, can address critical gaps in healthcare delivery, particularly in cases involving violence, abuse, and medico-legal issues (**Kumar and Kumar, 2019; Lynch and Janet, 2010; Patel, 2021**). Below are the key benefits of the medical field:

1. Streamlined Medico-Legal Processes: Forensic nurses are trained to handle medico-legal cases with precision and efficiency. They can assist physicians in documenting injuries, collecting evidence, and preparing reports for legal proceedings. This collaboration reduces the burden on doctors, allowing them to focus on clinical care while ensuring that legal requirements are met. For example, in cases of road traffic accidents or workplace injuries, forensic nurses can provide detailed documentation crucial for insurance claims and legal investigations (**Sekhar, 2018; Sharma, 2020**).
2. Improved Evidence Collection and Preservation: One of the most significant contributions of forensic nurses is their ability to collect and preserve forensic evidence at the point of care. In cases of sexual assault, domestic violence, or child abuse, the timely collection of biological samples, photographs of injuries, and other evidence is critical for legal proceedings. Forensic nurses are trained to maintain

the chain of custody, ensuring evidence is admissible in court. This not only strengthens legal cases but also ensures justice for victims (**Sharma, 2020**).

3. **Holistic Patient Care:** Forensic nursing emphasizes a patient-centered approach that addresses medical and legal needs. For instance, in cases of sexual assault, forensic nurses provide compassionate care while conducting forensic examinations. They ensure that victims receive medical treatment, psychological support, and legal guidance, all under one roof. This holistic approach improves patient outcomes and enhances the reputation of healthcare institutions (**Patel, 2021**).

4. **Public Health Impact:** Forensic nurses play a vital role in identifying patterns of violence, abuse, and neglect. By documenting and reporting such cases, they contribute to public health initiatives to prevent violence and promote community safety. For example, forensic nurses can identify clusters of domestic violence cases in a particular area, enabling policymakers to implement targeted interventions.

5. **Enhanced Interdisciplinary Collaboration:** Forensic nurses act as a bridge between healthcare providers, law enforcement agencies, and legal professionals. Their expertise facilitates better communication and collaboration among these stakeholders, leading to more effective handling of medico-legal cases. For instance, forensic nurses can provide expert testimony in court, helping judges and lawyers understand the medical aspects of a case (**Sekhar, 2018**).

Challenges and the Way Forward

The integration of forensic science into BSc nursing education in India faces several significant challenges. Firstly, there is a lack of awareness among nursing institutions and healthcare professionals about the importance and scope of forensic nursing. Many view it as a non-essential addition to the curriculum rather than a critical component of modern healthcare. Secondly, there is a shortage of trained faculty and standardized curricula, which limits the ability of nursing colleges to offer forensic nursing courses. Thirdly, traditional nursing education models often resist change, making introducing new subjects like forensic science difficult. Additionally, limited career opportunities for forensic nurses in India discourage students from pursuing this specialization. Finally, forensic nurses often face ethical and legal dilemmas, such as balancing patient confidentiality with legal obligations, and the absence of clear guidelines for

forensic nursing practice further complicates their role (**WHO, 2014**).

To address these challenges, a multi-faceted approach is required. Raising awareness about the importance of forensic nursing through workshops, seminars, and policy advocacy is crucial. Developing a standardized forensic nursing curriculum in collaboration with legal and medical experts will ensure consistency and quality in education (**WHO, 2014**). Partnerships with forensic science institutes and law enforcement agencies can provide hands-on training opportunities for nursing students. Advocacy for policy changes at the national level to recognize forensic nursing as a specialized field within the Indian Nursing Council (INC) framework is essential to legitimize the profession. Creating dedicated forensic nursing roles in hospitals, trauma centers, and community health settings will expand career opportunities and attract more students (**IAFN, 2015; Kumar and Kumar, 2019; Patel, 2021**). Finally, developing ethical guidelines and protocols for forensic nursing practice, along with training on ethical decision-making and legal compliance, will empower forensic nurses to navigate complex situations effectively. By addressing these challenges systematically, India can establish a robust framework for forensic nursing that benefits both the healthcare and legal systems (**sekhar, 2018**).

Conclusion

Integrating forensic science into BSc nursing education in India is a transformative step that can revolutionize healthcare delivery and the justice system. By addressing the challenges and implementing the recommended solutions, India can create a robust framework for forensic nursing that benefits both the medical field and society. With their unique skill set, forensic nurses can bridge the gap between healthcare and legal systems, ensuring that victims receive compassionate care while contributing to the resolution of legal cases. This paradigm shift will elevate the nursing profession and strengthen India's healthcare system, paving the way for a more just and equitable society.



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