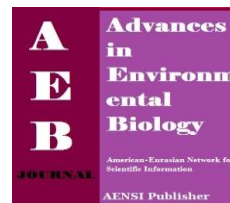




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The Effects of Teaching Communication Skills to Nurses on Patients' Satisfaction, Running Title: Patients' Satisfaction And Nurses' Communication Skills

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Patient satisfaction is the result of a complicated series of different factors. In order to achieve it, different services like nursing and medical care, support, and other organizational sectors should coordinate their efforts and through respecting the patient's rights provide a proper situation to enhance it. The present study was aimed at examining the effects of teaching communication skills to nurses on patient satisfaction. **Method:** This was a quasi-experimental study including an experimental and a control group. The study included 60 nurses working at Shahid Beheshti Hospital of Ghorveh and Bijar. They were selected using census method and divided into an experimental group (Ghorveh) and a control group (Bijar). **Results:** The results of the study showed that most of the nurses in both groups were female with an average age of 30-40, married, and alternate shifts. The patients were 41-50 years old, female, illiterate, and spent more than 3 days of hospitalization. **Conclusion:** According to the results of the study, it is recommended that nursing managers provide more chances for creating an effective communication by standardizing nurse-to-patient relationship. Moreover, revising nurse responsibilities and identifying nurses with master's degrees and their role in regulating health care programs can be effective. It is also recommended that while teaching nursing students, nursing instructors attach more emphasis on communication skills in clinics.

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INTRODUCTION

Patient satisfaction is the result of a complicated series of different factors. In order to achieve it, different services like nursing and medical care, support, and other organizational sectors should coordinate their efforts and through respecting the patient's rights provide a proper situation to enhance it [1]. The importance of patient satisfaction in health service and delivery is increasing because disease experience and necessity of pursuing care and cure processes increase the patient's vulnerability and their need for comprehensive support. Furthermore, changes in social circumstances and an increase in public awareness have recently enhanced patients' expectation of receiving more services. Patient satisfaction can be interpreted as the patients not only receive necessary healthcare and cure but they are also satisfied with the services provided by the staff and the whole system that they tend to refer back to the center if necessary and even recommend it to others [2]. In this regard, different studies have showed that inter-personal communication (IPC) among medical-health care providers and patients is the most important factor in an individual's satisfaction of health-medical systems. That is, out of the two aspects of healthcare and inter-personal communication, the latter has more influence on patient satisfaction [3]. Nurses are the largest group of service providers within any health care system. They have a remarkable potential that can affect the quality of health care services. Moreover, good behavior and effective communication are among factors that can effectively influence the development of the nurses' performance and quality of services [4].

Communication skills that are important for nurses include informing, asking questions, creating a friendly relationship, establishing cooperation, and making emotional-social conversations. Conducted studies have indicated that nursing services have been unable to attract patients' satisfaction and at the time of discharge 65% of patients are dissatisfied. Statistics show that most of the general complaints and wrong application of physician order by the patients are due to inefficiency of health care staff; but they mostly originate from

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communication problems [5]. In another study, despite the fact that there were sufficient facilities and equipment; patients were dissatisfied with service reception, which was reported to be due to lack of respect by the health care staff [6].

Teaching communication skills to health care staff can help them become more aware of their mistakes made during interactions with patients and enhance their communication skills, so does patient satisfaction. Therefore, teaching communication skills to health care staff has been considered as one of the main methods to enhance the quality of health care services [7].

In Iran, a large number of studies have been conducted on satisfaction of nurses and managers working at hospitals, the results of which indicate that there have been few training careers of inter-personal communication skills for nurses. There have also been few studies on teaching nurses in order to enhance patient satisfaction. Bearing in mind the abovementioned points and the importance of communication in health care services based on the researcher's experience, the present study was aimed at examining the effects of teaching communication skills to nurses on patient satisfaction.

Methods:

This was a quasi-experimental study including an experimental and a control group. The aim of our study was to specify the effect of teaching communication skills to nurses on patient satisfaction. The study include 60 nurses working at Shahid Beheshti Hospital of Ghorveh and Bijar. They were selected using census method and divided into an experimental group (Ghorveh) and a control group (Bijar). There were also 80 patients in different wards, who were selected through convenience sampling. Study inclusion criteria for the nurses included having nursing bachelor's degree, working in different shifts, being able and having tendency to participate in the study, and not taking part in communication skills courses in recent 6 months. Study inclusion criteria for patients included age ranges between 18 to 80 years, a minimum of 48 hours of hospitalization, and tendency to fill out the questionnaires. Patients who were not conscious or could not speak and answer the questions were excluded from the study.

Nurses in the two groups of experimental and control were homogenized regarding variables like age, sex, marital status, working shift, and work experience. And patients of the two groups were homogenized in regard with age, sex, marital status, education, occupation, type of insurance, and duration of hospitalization. Before and after the intervention, satisfaction about nurses' communication was examined through the patient satisfaction questionnaire. This questionnaire had 38 questions; 10 questions were related to individual information and 28 questions were about satisfaction in 3 areas of physiological needs (13 items), safety needs (4 items) and social needs (11 items). The score of the questionnaire ranged from 28 to 84. Nurses' communication skills were also examined through the questionnaire of communication skills before and after the intervention. This instrument included 33 questions; 6 items were about individual information and 27 items about communication skills. Its score ranged from 27 to 81.

To check the validity of the questionnaires, content validity method was utilized. And their reliability was calculated through Cronbach's Alpha. Reliabilities of the satisfaction questionnaire and the questionnaire of communication skills were 0.94 and 0.91, respectively. Pre-intervention stage was finished by completing 80 satisfaction questionnaires and 60 questionnaires of communication skills, the results of which were utilized in lesson planning. After the first stage of data collection, lesson plan was designed in accordance with the schedule of communication skills workshop, the nurses' needs, and available facilities. Lesson plan was designed in the form of a training workshop that was held for the experimental nurses in two successive days and lasted for 8 hours a day.

During the workshops, effective communication skills between nurses and patients were taught through practical activities and other methods. After the workshop was held, second stage of data collection from the control group was conducted. One month after the workshop, new data were collected from the experimental patients and nurses and were compared with those of the control groups and analyzed. Data analysis was conducted through t-test and chi-square test using SPSS software. Significance level was set at $p < 0.05$.

Results:

The results of the study showed that most of the nurses in both groups were female with an average age of 30-40, married, and alternate shifts. The patients were 41-50 years old, female, illiterate, and spent more than 3 days of hospitalization. Comparing communication skills in the experimental group before and after the intervention showed that there was a significant difference between these two stages ($p = 0.008$). In the control group; however, there was not such a difference ($p = 0.123$).

There was a significant difference between satisfaction scores of the two groups before the intervention ($p = 0.005$). However, no significant difference was observed between them after the intervention ($p = 0.220$). In addition, there was a significant difference between satisfaction scores of the experimental group before the intervention and after it ($p = 0.000$). However, this difference was not observed in the control group ($p = 1$).

In ranking examination of satisfaction, it was also concluded that before the intervention the experimental group was satisfied with the nurses' communication by 70.1%. This figure reached 90.7% after the experiment. In the control group; however, after the study, there was no change in the number of patients who were satisfied with the nurses. There was also a significant difference between the two groups before and after the experiment in regard with the relation between patient satisfaction and the nurses' communication skills ($p=0.001$). However, no difference was observed between the two groups in the areas of physiological and safety needs.

According to the results of the study, it can be stated that teaching communication skills to nurses can enhance patient satisfaction.

Table 1: Frequency of patients based on satisfaction score in the experimental and the control groups before and after the intervention.

Group	Experimental				Control			
	Before		After		Before		After	
	N.	%	N.	%	N.	%	N.	%
Dissatisfied (Low)	0	2	2	2.7	0	0	0	0
Somewhat satisfied (Average)	23	29.9	5	6.7	7	10.9	9	11.1
Satisfied (High)	54	70.1	68	90.7	57	89.1	71	88.9
Total	77	100	75	64	64	100	80	100
Sig.	p=000				p=1			

Discussion:

The results of the present study showed that there was an almost high level of satisfaction in both groups. Level of patient satisfaction in studies conducted by Farahani *et al* [10], Madani *et al* [11], and Jolaei *et al* [12] reported to be 72.9%, 66.5%, and 72%, respectively, which are almost in line with the results of the present study. Interpretation of satisfaction scores suggests that relative high score of satisfaction is not necessarily an indication for the quality of good healthcare but a sign for a low level of patients' expectations from health service providers. On the other hand, patients might have expressed their satisfaction in order to appeal to the researcher or fear of receiving future healthcare services. In the present study, it seems that satisfaction expression is due to cultural norms that are opposed to complaining and expressing dissatisfaction. The result of the second stage showed that in the experimental group, patient satisfaction has changed from 70.1% to 90.7%. Fischer test indicates a statistically significant difference between these two stages. In the control group; however, there was no significant difference before and after the intervention. The experimental patients' satisfaction after the intervention can be related to the improvement in the nurses' communication skills because all of the other variables were the same for the two groups. In their study, Farahani *et al* reported the same results while Brown *et al* reported the opposite [12].

Although patient satisfaction has risen after the intervention, there has not been much change in the nurses' communication method since the patients had expressed a relatively high level of satisfaction. The fact that there was no difference between the two groups regarding their satisfaction because the control group had a high level of satisfaction before the study that did not change after the study while the level of satisfaction in the experimental group increased significantly.

Nowadays, patient satisfaction plays an important role in health care services. Patient satisfaction about nursing services indicates the quality of nursing care. It also reflects a positive reaction to community nursing. Therefore, causes of patient dissatisfaction should be identified. In the present study, before and after the intervention no significant difference was observed in the experimental group in regard with areas of physiological and safety needs. In social area; however, the results showed that there was a significant difference between these two stages ($p=0.002$). Therefore, since satisfying social needs is more complicated, nurses need more communication skills and knowledge. As a result, the conducted trainings were effective.

The results of the present study indicate that teaching communication skills to nurses can affect patient satisfaction to some extent and enhance it. However, other factors affecting it should not be ignored. For example, fewer number of nurses to patients, heavy workloads, lack of sufficient time, patient's unawareness of the nurses' situation, and incorrect communication of authorities with nurses can be among causes of patient dissatisfaction. Regarding teaching communication skills, the results of the study indicated that there was a significant difference before and after the intervention. It seems that nurses and patients have different views about effective communication principles. While the nurses give a higher score to observation of communication, respect, and emotion principles, patients give a lower score. This is due the fact that people dislike disregard for communication principles; they just act according to their habits and do not pay attention to the feedback of their behavior. However, since communication is a mutual phenomenon, one should pay attention to the feedback, too [13].

Conclusion:

Due to the importance of communication in nursing, it is necessary for nurses to enhance their communication skills. A nurse is responsible for caring for patients' needs through making an effective communication. This is possible when there is enough information. Lack of information causes failure in

providing healthcare. Therefore, re-learning careers focusing on communication skills can be effective. According to the results of the study, it is recommended that nursing managers provide more chances for creating an effective communication by standardizing nurse-to-patient relationship. Moreover, revising nurse responsibilities and identifying nurses with master's degrees and their role in regulating health care programs can be effective. It is also recommended that while teaching nursing students, nursing instructors attach more emphasis on communication skills in clinics.

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