

HEALTH LITERACY OF NURSES AND PATIENTS WITH DISABILITIES

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Research Question: Special needs of people with disabilities are an essential part of life. Almost every person will become temporarily or permanently dependent during their lifetime, and those who get to be old will face more and more problems. Persons with disabilities face numerous obstacles, therefore the attitude towards them is of great importance. The awareness of the significance of health literacy gives healthcare workers an opportunity to support patients and their families to surmount obstacles in the areas of health and welfare.

Purpose: The purpose of the research was to establish the amount of knowledge on working with patients with disabilities gained by nurses during their formal education, to establish their need to acquire additional knowledge, to establish the impact of their personal experiences on their point of view and attitude towards patients with disabilities, and to determine what kind of experiences they have with relatives of patients with disabilities.

Method: A qualitative research design was employed; data were collected with a survey. The reason for this approach was that, in Slovenia, no relevant instrument exists for assessing the health literacy of nurses and their attitude towards working with patients with disabilities. Data were collected with a structured questionnaire. For the interpretation of the data and the text written by respondents, a multi-phase approach of qualitative context text analysis was used. Context analysis of respondents' answers yielded three main topics: (1) experiences on nursing patients with disabilities, (2) experiences with the relatives of patients with disabilities, and (3) the importance of knowledge on working with patients with disabilities. Collected data were coded and the interpretation of findings was made.

Results: Our results revealed that nurses require formal education in the area of disabilities in their undergraduate and postgraduate curricula. They gain knowledge for working with patients with disabilities during the working process and by attending additional training and education. Nurses have both personal and professional experiences in the area, and describe their relations with patients with disabilities and their relatives positively.

Organization: The implementation of formal education in the area of disabilities in undergraduate and postgraduate nursing curricula would foster quality improvement of healthcare provision for patients with disabilities. Persons with disabilities should be included in the education and training as the ones doing the teaching as this would contribute to the detabooization of the topic and to accepting diversities. Preparation of evidence-based guidelines for the establishment of needs and treatment with the emphasis on patient-centered care would improve healthcare provision. Health literate organizations should

provide not only equal but special health care.

Society: Nursing has a long and important history of adjusting to changes in the society and its health needs, and responds to demands of the society. Nurses play an important role in health care so the necessary changes need to start with them. Nurses have an impact at personal and individual level and at organizational level. They are the most important when it comes down to promotion of health literacy as they are the ones working closest to patients and have contacts with patients on daily bases.

Originality: The research is the first one of the kind in Slovenia.

Limitations / further research: First, the number of respondents was too low. Second, this was the first research of this kind in Slovenia, so there are no other Slovene research data to compare our results with. Third, the instrument was made for the purpose of the research as the foreign instrument was out-of-date and unsuitable. The research also gives an idea for further research in the area as it is an important part of work of nurses.

Keywords: disabilities, patient, nurse, health literacy, knowledge.

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