

Relationship between the nurses' observance of professional ethics and quality of nursing care from the patients' point of view

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ABSTRACT

Introduction and Aim: The observance of professional ethics is an integral part of the nursing profession. The mission of the nursing is to provide the highest level of the health care and rehabilitative services to ensure, maintain, and promote community health. Given that, nurses are the largest group of health-care providers in hospitals and health-care centers and they have a significant impact on the health-care quality and also the observance of ethical standards is an effective factor for improving the nurses' performance and increasing the quality of their care; therefore, this study was conducted to investigate the relationship between the nurses' observance of professional ethics and quality of nursing care from the patients' point of view in the Ali Ebne Abitaleb Hospital of Zahedan, Iran. The professional ethics questionnaire developed by Maarefi *et al.* and Quality Patient Care Scale was used to collect the data, and its validity and reliability were confirmed by a study conducted by Khaki *et al.* Descriptive statistics (such as mean and standard deviation), the Spearman correlation coefficient, and independent *t*-test were used for data analysis. All statistical analyses were performed using SPSS version 16. **Results:** In total, 188 subjects participated in the study, of whom 165 included in the study and 72 excluded from the study. Of the 165 patients, 95 (57.6%) were female and 70 (42.4%) were male. There was a significant correlation between the nurses' observance of professional ethics and quality of nursing care from the patients' point of view. Thirty-eight (64.4%) of the patients who reported a poor score for the nurses' observance of professional ethics were somewhat satisfied with the quality of nursing care and 21 (36.5%) were satisfied. Furthermore, 96 (90.6%) of patients who reported a good score for nurses' observance of professional ethics were satisfied with the quality of nursing care and 10 (9.4%) were somewhat satisfied and $P = 0.001$ ($P < 0.001$). **Conclusions:** The results of this study showed that nurses got a good score from the observance of professional ethics and patients were satisfied with the quality of nursing care. Training programs for nurses, meeting the needs of them, and creating a safe environment by considering the shift and other needs of the nurses can improve the quality of nursing care and thus the nurse will pay more attention to the patient's needs and ethics.

KEY WORDS: Patients, Professional ethics, Quality of nursing care

INTRODUCTION

The observance of professional ethics is an integral part of the nursing profession. The mission of the nursing is to provide the highest level of the health care and rehabilitative services to ensure, maintain, and promote community health.^[1] Although ethics is considered as an essential element of all professions, it is fundamental to nursing because the ethical behavior of nurses with patients plays an effective role in their

health improvement and restoration, so nursing is a profession rooted in professional ethics and ethical values.^[2] An approach designed for today's world can be viewed as a return to rationality and morality. From this point of view, ethics can be considered as the center for future world developments. This approach affects the professions that provide services to people. The current global developments include features that have made requirement of ethics approach in fields of medical-related professions an undeniable necessity.^[3] It can be said that the cornerstone of nursing care, competent for today's society, and the future world is the trained nurses who are qualified professional ethics.^[4] Nursing as an independent

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program is a sub-branch of medical science whose mission is to provide the highest level of health care and rehabilitative services to ensure, maintain, and promote community health.^[1] Although ethics is considered as an essential element of all professions, it is fundamental to nursing because the ethical behavior of nurses with patients plays an effective role in their health improvement and restoration, so nursing is a profession rooted in professional ethics and ethical values. Professional ethics makes a commitment to work conscientiously in providing care for clients and thus nurses have a professional and legal obligation to properly carry out their duties so that nurses avoid causing harm to patients and providing care for clients can improve their health.^[2,5,6] Nursing ethics may be regarded as competency in nurses without any direct effect on their clinical activities, which can be separated from practical duties of nursing; however, such ethics is highly interwoven with clinical practices that cannot be alienated from them.^[7] When one has to make a decision about a living being, there is a moral situation. Even the decision to delegate this right to the individual requires ethical thinking and decision-making.^[6,8] Nurses are often facing situations where they need to find solutions and make appropriate ethical decisions. To develop a code of nursing ethics, a system of structures and concepts related to nursing must be designed and evolved.^[6,8] Since nurses are the largest group of health-care providers in hospitals and health-care centers, who have a significant impact on the health-care quality, the observance of ethical code for nursing practice is an effective factor in improving the performance of the nurses in providing quality nursing care.^[9] As the patient satisfaction is one of the indicators of quality of care, various factors can affect it, so if keeping patient privacy is positively associated with patient satisfaction, it can improve the quality of nursing care.^[10] Lack of educational resources can prevent nurses from providing quality care to patients.^[11] If professional competence is considered as a major factor contributing to health promotion, then there are all the prerequisites for the provision of high-quality nursing care due to its underlying integrity.^[12]

If the competence in professional ethics generalizes, in other words, professional virtue ethics is developed through the system; the nursing profession focuses on good ethical practice, resulting in developing professional competence and what society expects from us.^[13,14] Therefore, the dynamic and growing system of nursing profession requires nurses with professional ethical competence who can provide ethical nursing care.^[15] As the nursing workforce constitutes the largest group in health care, nursing activities play a significant role in improved patient outcomes. Health authorities are responsible for ensuring the quality of care and services.^[16] In other

words, optimal quality of care is the right of all patients and all nurses are responsible for providing optimal quality of care.^[17] Quality has been a topic of attention in health care during the 1940s and 1950s, and more recently, some healthcare institutions have begun recognizing the quality and value of health care.^[18] Quality is not a single discrete variable but a complex structure of people's values, beliefs, and attitudes who interact with one another in the health-care system.^[19] Furthermore, considering that, nurses play a key role in quality promotion who provide nursing care and patient satisfaction is an important and commonly used indicator for measuring the quality in health care, special attention must be given to view of patients and nurses so as to clarify the concept of quality and better impact the nursing care.^[20]

Aminbeidokhti and Mardani conducted a study on 195 nursing staffs working in two public hospitals in Ahvaz during 2014 and investigated the association of mental health with observance of the professional ethics, and the results showed that there was a significant association between the observance of professional ethics and some domains of mental health of nursing staff.^[21] Khaki *et al.* investigated the association between the nurses' observance of professional ethics and quality of nursing care from the patients' point of view in Tehran during 2015. They found that ethical standards and quality of care should be evaluated using a client-centered approach.^[22] Shannon, Mitchell, and Cain in the US assessed the views of 489 patients on quality of clinical care. They concluded that the mean score of quality of clinical care from the patients' point of view was 81.69.^[23] Foroutan *et al.* conducted a study on 575 patients in different wards of Imam Hussain Hospital in Shahroud during 2015 and investigated patient's views on standards of professional ethics in nursing practice. The results demonstrated that the nurses' observance of professional ethics was relatively good and at a desirable level. Therefore, it is recommended to utilize a variety of learning styles and employ the services of professors of nursing ethics so as to improve the quality of nursing education with respect to professional ethics.^[24] It is, therefore, necessary to adopt measures to develop education programs regarding the importance of the nurses' observance of professional ethics. Therefore, this study was conducted to investigate the relationship between the nurses' observance of professional ethics and quality of nursing care from the patients' point of view.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A descriptive-analytical cross-sectional study was conducted on 188 patients who had at least 72 h of stay in Ali Ebne Abitaleb Hospital of Zahedan, Iran. This hospital is the largest hospital in the Province

of Sistan and Baluchestan. This study was approved by the Ethics Committee of Zahedan University of Medical Sciences (code: 8365). Some patients who feared disclosing their information were reluctant to cooperate with the researcher, and then, the researchers assure participants that any information that can identify them will remain confidential. Illiterate individuals who had inadequate literacy to complete the questionnaire were excluded from the study. The subjects were selected as described in the previous study.^[25] The nurses' observance of professional ethics and patients' satisfaction with quality of nursing care which was 0.4, measurement error (0.05), and the sample size ($n = 188$) was estimated.

The study participants were selected using simple random sampling. The data collection tool for observance of professional ethics was the professional ethics questionnaire developed by Moarefi *et al.*, consisting of two parts; the first part contained demographic characteristics and the second part included questions on the nurses' observance of professional ethics containing nurses' professional commitment (7 items) and nurses' clinical service provision (7 items) with a minimum score of 1 and a maximum score of 70. Each item was scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 0 = I do not know; 1 = never; 2 = rarely; 3 = sometimes; 4 = often; and 5 = always and a score of 3 or above in this scale was considered desirable. Scores of the nurses' observance of professional ethics were classified as good (score from 47 to 74), medium (score from 24 to 46), and poor (score from 0 to 23) and the questionnaire cutoff point was confirmed Maarefi *et al.*^[26] The content validity index of all items with respect to relevance, clarity, and simplicity was calculated (91.25% for relevance, 70% for clarity, and 78.12% for simplicity). The test-retest was used to assess the reliability of the instrument. The test-retest reliability was performed on 15 patients during two stages occurring with an interval of 5 days and the reliability coefficient was calculated as 84% after collecting data from two stages.

Data collection tool for quality of nursing care was Quality Patient Care Scale (QUALPAC), used in the study of Khaki *et al.*^[22] The QUALPAC was used to investigate the effect of professional ethics observance on quality of nursing care in the USA, England, and Nigeria since 1975. This scale was evaluated in 2003 in Tabriz and adapted to Iranian culture. The QUALPAC consisted of two parts: The characteristics of professional ethics including psychosocial aspect (28 items) and communication aspect (13 items). Each item was scored on a 3-point scale (1 = rarely, 2 = sometimes, and 3 = often). By calculating the mean score of an item for each individual, patient's views were classified as dissatisfied (score <1.5),

somewhat satisfied (score from 1.2 to 2.49), and satisfied (score >2.49). Furthermore, the validity and reliability of this scale was confirmed using the Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Thirty-one subjects completed the QUALPAC and Cronbach's alpha was calculated to be 97%.

To conduct this study, after obtaining the approval of university's ethics committee and permission and an introduction letter of the hospital authorities, first, the researcher received a list of relevant wards and the number of people working per shift from the hospital information system. The number of samples needed for a hospital ward was calculated by the number of patients admitted to wards. After determining the sample size, the researcher referred to the relevant ward and patients who had at least 72 h of stay in and literacy skills (reading and writing) were included in the study and they were selected using convenience sampling. The subjects were informed about the purpose of the study. After obtaining a verbal informed consent, the questionnaire was given to the subjects and asked them to complete it. The researcher assures participants that any personal information collected that could identify them will remain strictly confidential. At the end of each shift, the researchers, then, referred to relevant hospital wards and collected the completed questionnaires. Descriptive statistics (such as tables, frequency distribution, measures of central tendency, dispersion, and graphs), the Pearson's correlation coefficient, the Spearman correlation coefficient, and ANOVA at 95% confidence level were used for data analysis. All statistical analyses were performed using SPSS version 16.

RESULTS

In total, 188 subjects participated in the study, of whom 165 included in the study and 72 excluded from the study. Of the 165 participants, 95 (57.6%) were female and 70 (42.4%) were male. Regarding the age, 83 (50.3%) of the participants were under 35 years old, 40 (24.2%) were 35–50 years old, and 42 (25.5%) were over 50 years old. Regarding the education level, 62 (37.6%) of the participants were primary or middle school graduates, 48 (29.1%) had a high school diploma, 14 (8.5%) had a bachelor's degree, 32 (19.4%) had a master's degree, and 9 (5.5%) had a doctor's degree. Regarding a history of admission to hospital wards, 75 (45.5%) of the participants had prior experience of hospitalization and 90 (54.5%) had no prior history of hospitalization.

Scores of the nurses' observance of professional ethics from the patients' point of view were classified as good, medium, and poor. In the present study, patients reported that 59 (35.8%) of nurses had a poor observance of professional ethics score, 105 (63.6%)

had a medium score, and 1 (0.6%) had a good score. Based on the QUALPAC, scores of quality of nursing care from the patients' point of view were classified as satisfied, somewhat satisfied, and dissatisfied. In the present study, 5 (3%) of the patients were dissatisfied with quality of nursing care, 43 (26.1%) were somewhat satisfied, and 117 (70.9%) were satisfied.

There was a significant correlation between the nurses' observance of professional ethics and quality of nursing care from the patients' point of view. Thirty-eight (64.4%) of the patients who reported a poor score for the nurses' observance of professional ethics were somewhat satisfied with the quality of nursing care and 21 (36.5%) were satisfied. Furthermore, 96 (90.6%) of patients who reported a good score for the nurses' observance of professional ethics were satisfied with the quality of nursing care and 10 (9.4%) were somewhat satisfied and $P = 0.001$ ($P < 0.001$).

Table 1 summarizes the relationship between the nurses' observance of professional ethics and quality of nursing care from the patients' point of view.

DISCUSSION

The results of the present study demonstrated that 63.6% of the nurses had a poor observance of professional ethics score from the patients' point of view so that the nurses got the highest score from the observance of professional ethics who provided information to the patients before performing any nursing practice for the possibility of well-informed acceptance or rejection of the service, and the nurses got the lowest score who avoided intruding into patient privacy and refused any gift from the patients and their guardians.

The results of the study of Khaki *et al.* revealed that 8.73% of patients evaluated the nurses' observance of professional ethics at a good level and 91.7% of nurses evaluated their performance in professional ethic at good level at a good level.^[22] Dehghani *et al.* found that according to the nurses' perspective, 72% had responsible aspect and respectful patients care quality performance was 70%. However, from patient's perspective, 40% of nurses had responsible aspect, quality performance 45%, and patients respect 69% to meet ethical standard.^[25] Furthermore, patients evaluated the nurses' professional commitment to the

quality of clinical care at a good level.^[26] Moreover, 70.9% of patients were satisfied with the quality of nursing care and for the communication aspect, the nurses got the highest score who paid more attention to patient's needs while talking to them and the nurses got the lowest score who met the needs of patients in a calm environment and also for the psychosocial aspect, the nurses got the highest score who provided an appropriate environment for answering patients questions, and the nurses got the lowest score who introduced themselves to the patients, those were very calm when the patients behaved inappropriately, those informed the patients about their recovery process, and those answered patiently all patient's questions about the disease. Maarefi *et al.* did a research in Jahrom to assess viewpoints of patients regarding the nurses' observance of professional ethics. Their results showed that patients evaluated the nurses' observance of professional ethics at a good level.^[27] Aminbeidokhti and Mardani concluded that most patients were dissatisfied with the quality of nursing care in terms of psychosocial and communication aspects.^[21] Tafreshi *et al.* in their study reported that the majority of patients with HIV were dissatisfied with the quality of nursing care in terms of psychosocial and communication aspects, which was not consistent with the findings of the above-mentioned study.^[16] There was a significant correlation between the nurses' observance of professional ethics and quality of nursing care from the patients' point of view ($P < 0.001$) so that the patients who reported a good score for the nurses' observance of professional ethics were satisfied with the quality of nursing care and the patients who reported a poor score for the nurses' observance of professional ethics were somewhat satisfied with the quality of nursing care which obtained better results than those of the study of Khaki *et al.* with a similar title conducted in five hospitals affiliated to Shahid Beheshti University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran,^[22] showing that the patients who reported a good score for the nurses' observance of professional ethics were satisfied with the quality of nursing care, which may be due to cultural differences, life facilities, the level of patients' expectations, and several social factors.^[24] Nursing is a profession to respect human values, rights, and dignity. Point of nursing included three basic principles of caring as follows: Ethics, clinical judgment, and care.^[26] Our research had two limitations: (1) – Caution should be taken in

Table 1: The relationship between the nurses' observance of professional ethics and quality of nursing care from the patients' point of view

Professional ethics score group	Somewhat satisfied		Satisfied		Chi-square <i>P</i> -value
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	
Fair	38	64.4	21	35.6	<0.001
Medium	10	9.4	96	90.6	

generalizing the results of other cities because we studied teaching hospitals and (2) – information was collected through a self-report, and no validation method was used as Maarefi *et al.*^[27]

CONCLUSIONS

The results of the present study showed that the nurse got a good score from observance of professional ethics and the patients were satisfied with the quality of nursing care. It is necessary to develop a plan for maintaining and promoting observance of professional ethics in nursing practice and quality of nursing care because the nurse plays a key role in patients' recovery process and the observance of ethical standards and quality of nursing care in terms of in the psychosocial and communication aspects is of particular importance. Training programs for nurses, meeting the needs of them, and creating a safe environment by considering the shift and other needs of the nurses can improve the quality of nursing care and thus the nurse will pay more attention to the patient's needs and ethics. Therefore, it is recommended that a study needs to be conducted on both nurses and patients simultaneously using a large sample size.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

This paper is obtained from a student research project approved by the Student Research Committee at Vice-Chancellor for Research and Technology affiliated to Zahedan University of Medical Sciences (2017) and allocated this ethical code (code:8365; IR. zaums. rec.1396.276).

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