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RESEARCH ARTICLE

NURSE-LED CLINICS IN INDIA, AN INNOVATIVE APPROACH IN PATIENT MANAGEMENT.

Ruchika Rani¹ and Dr. Sukhpal Kaur².

1. Assistant Professor, College of Nursing, AIIMS Rishikesh.
2. Lecturer, National institute of Nursing Education, PGIMER, Chandigarh.

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Abstract

Today's nurses are empowered with competency and knowledge, act as backbone of the hospitals. To overcome the shortage of doctors in developing countries, there is need to focus on the utilization of nursing services and knowledge in the areas where they are enriched with core competencies needed for patient care. Nurse-led clinics appears to be an innovative ideas where the health needs of patients can be fulfilled in timely and cost effective manner. But, there is a need to broaden the scope of nursing curriculum by adding more concepts like competency based modules and critical thinking among nurses.

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Introduction:-

Health care system is an integrated and collaborative profession where health personnel of different line of system are working together to get the aim of betterment of patient's health and improved system of patient care. Physicians, Surgeons, Nurses, Physiotherapist, Technicians, house-keeping persons and lot of various cadres are involved in health care. With the advancement of Medical sciences, role of nurses has also expanded in lieu of Clinician, patient manager, leader, researcher and advanced nurse practitioner. This expansion has played a vital role in bridging the gap between medicine and nursing. Furthermore, this bridging has revealed the emergence of Nurse-Led clinics.

History and Scope of Nurse-Led Clinics

The term Nurse-led clinics has emerged from dates back nursing literature only. Although historically, nurses seems to be more independent in terms of running clinics of some sort which had been merged in later times with department of medicine only, where the term Nurse-led clinics had been replaced with Team-led clinics.

Need of Nurse-Led Clinics

In the most populous country like India, the doctor patient ratio is less than the prescribed limit by World Health Organization (1:1000). To improve the health status of people, there is a need to focus on the primary prevention, and maintaining the health at the first level, i.e. in the community. The health education services provided by nurses in the community and hospitals help to make people aware about acute and chronic illnesses.

In many Low and Middle socio economic countries, clinics are managed by nurses to overcome the shortage of doctors. Moreover studies showed the evidence that patients are more satisfied with nurses' clinics in terms of cost, accessibility and time spent to clear their concerns and doubts.⁵

Corresponding Author:-Ruchika Rani.

Address:-Assistant Professor, College of Nursing, AIIMS Rishikesh.

Nurse-led clinics focus on managing the conditions like hypertension, diabetes, asthma, tuberculosis, pre-chemotherapy preparation, chemotherapy administration, chemotherapy symptoms management, Screening clinics and Antenatal and postnatal care.

A qualitative study, conducted on patients' evaluation of Nurse-led Oncology Review clinics, analysis of patients' responses revealed that 60% patients judged the service to be excellent and 34% to be very good, whereas no one judged the service as fair or poor. Moreover patients demonstrated very high level of patient satisfaction regarding quality of the service.⁶

Scope of Nurse Led Clinics

Nurses, in today's times have expanded their role and scope out of hospitals, where they are working with people who are in acute need to get comprehensive and skilled care in cost effective way like home care nurse, geriatric nurses, palliative care nurses and nurse educators.

Nurse-led clinics are outpatient clinics that is run or managed by registered nurses only. Nurse led clinics will help the nurses to be autonomous, professional competent and manage patients caseloads. Nurses can adopt various roles in the clinics as an educator like diabetic councillor, chemotherapy councillor, antenatal and postnatal councillor, educating about various disease conditions and their prevention. She can act as Psychological supporter which can listen to patient's concern and fears and nurses can be the primary assessor for health check-ups and investigations and can refer the patients to required department like medicine, dermatology or surgery etc.

Likewise, in many countries, nurses have streamlined the clinics in the community to provide education regarding prevention of acute and chronic diseases, early identification and management of disease related complications. Nurses are working with patients of their own specialization as they are being enriched with knowledge and skilled in super-specialized arena.

Advantages

The main advantage of these clinics are patients don't need to wait for consultations especially for those health problems which can be easily and effectively handled by nurses, at low cost. This will reduce the workload of physicians and they can better spend their time on critical patients.

Similarly, the cancer patients receiving chemotherapy usually have lack of awareness regarding their diagnosis, procedures, chemotherapy cycles, side effects, what to take in diet and what to avoid. Most of the times patients search their diagnosis on the internet using various search engines for acquiring knowledge about disease conditions and its management. Sometimes, information provided on the internet may not be authenticated which can either frightened the patient or can put the patient in harm.

This harm can be prevented by providing accurate information from a proficient health care professionals. This task can be best managed by nurses, as they spent most of the time in caring the patient.

Nurse led chemotherapy clinics will be a great advantage to both patients and hospitals, where a nurse councillor will council the patient before initiating chemotherapy, educate them about various diagnostic tests and their importance, premedication and chemotherapy administration in an efficient manner, dealing very diligently with chemotherapy side effects and preventing them before their occurrence by using evidence based practice like use of ginger candies to control nausea, flavoured ice chips to prevent mucositis, ice caps to control alopecia etc. In this manner, she can be first-hand manager of their patients by keeping track of health records with collaboration of oncologists, radio-physicists. These day care clinics should be in large number in many cities to reduce hospital cost, travel cost and psychological distress of patient and family members.

Challenges

A challenge to the expansion of nurse-led clinics is the narrow scope of nursing syllabus, where nurses are taught theoretically more, but competency is lacking in each area of nursing. There is no clear job specifications for nurses working in hospitals. Moreover nurses are not willing to change and come out of their traditional thinking of obeying doctors' commands.

Strategies to Improve the Situation

Although doctors may feel discontent and insecure with these clinics. However, the upcoming nurses in India are getting their proficiency in particular skills and updating their knowledge with research evidences.

1. Broadening the scope of nursing by adding more competency and specialized based education, where nurses are proficient in particular skill.
2. Student nurses to be involved more in clinical rather than only feeding theoretical knowledge, as nursing profession is more based on skills.
3. Nurses should devote their time to learn and practice evidence based findings and should come forward to conduct various research projects to improve patient care and clinical decision making. Regular reading research papers and articles will help nurses for abreast and updated knowledge.
4. Nurses need to keep update themselves about various new technologies and gadgets which can reduce their time for record keeping and utilize that time for quality patient care.
5. Nurses should learn professionalism, autonomy, assertiveness and maintain the respect and dignity of their profession. They should get recognition for the services providing in the hospital, academics and administration. Indian nursing council and state nursing council can play an important role for this.

Conclusion:-

Historically nurses have been seen as doctors' assistant, now the time has been changed to emerge as independent, Autonomous health professional in Multidisciplinary team. This requires a cooperative and trustworthy relationship between doctors and nurses where prime aim is focused to provide quality and cost effective care to patients.

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