Knowledge & Implications of forensic evidence collection by emergency nurses in the acute care setting: A literature review

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INTRODUCTION

• Violent crimes are becoming more prevalent in today's society.
• In the health care setting nurses are often the first to encounter victims of crime and therefore play a critical role in the preservation of forensic evidence.
• Inadequate evidence collection by nurses can hinder criminal investigation and be potentially liable for this.

AIM

To highlight and review the literature pertaining to the knowledge of collection, identification and preservation of evidence by emergency room nurses.

METHODS

• A comprehensive data base search was conducted using: CINALH.Journals@OVIDfull text,Science Direct, EBSCOhost and Proquest with keywords emergency nursing, evidence collection, evidence, forensic nursing and trauma nurse knowledge.
• A manual search of relevant journals was also performed.
• Critical Analysis and thematic review was then performed on 15 primary articles from 1999-2009.

RESULTS

• Nurses lacked adequate knowledge on forensic aspects of care and did not perform adequate collection, documentation and preservation of evidence.
• Nurses believed forensic aspects of care are vital in trauma care and would like the provision of further education & training on the matter.
• The provision of institutional education, updated procedural manuals & policy regarding forensic aspects remains a low priority.
• Adequate forensic evidence collection can result in positive legal outcomes such as laying of charges and conviction.

CONCLUSION

Little primary research exists in regards to emergency nursing and forensic evidence collection. Nurses need further education on forensic aspects of care. The provision of such training for nurses could yield beneficial effects in the efficacy, successful prosecution and holistic treatment of victims of crime similar to that seen in the sexual assault field. However further research is needed to best inform teaching methods, clinical practice and protocols available.