

20TH GLOBAL NURSING EDUCATION CONFERENCE

March 21-23, 2018 | New York, USA

Assessment of neonatal nurses' knowledge, attitude and practice towards caring for infants with neonatal abstinence syndrome and their mothers

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Background: Our regional perinatal center in Appalachia has seen a tenfold increase in neonatal abstinence syndrome (NAS) in last 15 years. Neonatal nurses have struggled with care for this unique patient population that suffers from withdrawal symptoms and frequently has challenging family dynamics.

Objectives: This study evaluated the knowledge, attitudes and practices of neonatal nurses who care infants with NAS and their mothers along with demographics and training of neonatal nurses.

Design/Methods: An anonymous cross-sectional survey was completed by total 82 neonatal nurses in a two block survey during the course of five years. Measures included baseline knowledge about NAS, attitudes towards caring for substance-exposed infants and their mothers and nursing demographics. Attitudes were assessed using a Likert scale of 1 to 5. Descriptive and multivariate analyses were conducted by SPSS software.

Results: 34% of nurses had positive or neutral attitudes toward the infants with NAS, whereas 66% had moderately negative attitudes. None had severe negative attitudes towards the infants. Only 4.3% of nurses had positive or neutral attitudes towards the mothers of babies with NAS, while 63.8% and 31.9% having moderately or severely negative attitudes, respectively. Factorial analysis was conducted on 4 groups of 4 items and items were loaded on one factor. The scale also demonstrated acceptable reliability ($\alpha = 0.73$). Our regression model significantly predicted the scale ($r^2=0.31$, $p<0.05$). Specifically, the results showed that when controlling for age, race, education level and NAS education, type of employment and self-rated need for more education were significant in predicting the scale. Nurses working full-time reported more negative views than did nurses working part-time. More negative attitudes towards mothers of infants with NAS were associated with nurses with >10 years of experience.

Conclusions: Generational attitudes and burnout related to full-time employment may yield more negative attitudes towards parents of infants with NAS. Neonatal nurses, especially those with more years of experience or full-time employment, may benefit from focused educational interventions to improve knowledge and attitudes, which will consequently enhance the quality of care for infants with NAS and their mothers.

Biography

Rachel Miller is a Pediatrics Physician at East Tennessee State University, where she works for Niswonger Children's Hospital which has one of nation's first dedicated neonatal abstinence units. Her research interests include neonatology, the substance-exposed mother-infant dyad and team-based care.

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