

Nurses' attitudes towards suicide and substance abuse/dependence in medical surgical hospitalized patients

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Increasingly worldwide, suicide represents a major health issue. Suicide is the ninth leading cause of death in the United States. Inpatient completed suicide is the second most common sentinel event reported to the Joint Commission and has been identified as a National Patient Safety Goal. It is estimated that the suicide rate among hospitalized patients is three times higher than in the general population and this increased risk is due to the heightened states of both physical and emotional distress, commonly experienced during hospitalization.

Suicide prevention is contingent on the health professional's ability to accurately assess a patient's suicide risk. Attitudes towards suicide, perceptions of suicide, clinical experiences and context have been identified as important factors influencing the assessment process. Research evidence suggests that lack of knowledge and unfavorable attitudes towards suicide exists among nurses and negatively impacts healthcare delivery and patient safety. Understanding attitudes towards suicide may be useful in suicide prevention and in providing intervention for suicidal individuals. The purpose of this descriptive exploratory study was to investigate nurses' attitudes towards suicide in the physically ill hospitalized adult patient in an acute care setting.

Using the Attitudes towards Attempted Suicide Questionnaire (ATAS-Q) and a demographic survey in a sample of nurses (n=45), findings revealed that nurses had positive attitudes towards suicide. Statistically significant relationships between religion and positiveness towards suicide, and age and positiveness towards suicide risk were noted. Qualitative findings revealed patterns concerning professionalism, complexity of care, and safety issues. Additional patterns identified were manipulation, the quandary of professional caring, as well as the need for further education to address the challenges of the co-morbid condition of suicide risk and substance abuse/dependence. Implications will be discussed.

Biography

Kathleen Neville is a Professor in the School of Nursing at Kean University, Union; New Jersey. She has numerous publications in peer refereed journals, book chapters and published a textbook in adolescent oncology nursing. She has been the recipient of numerous awards for Distinguished Faculty Service and Scholarship for her own research activities and for mentoring undergraduate/graduate nursing students and nurses in practice in the pursuit of research. She is the former editor of the Research Connection, a publication of New Jersey Commission of Cancer Research, and is a research reviewer for several refereed nursing journals and conferences.

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