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Safe patient-handling techniques: Does the theory match the practice?

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Back pain is prevalent among nurses. Specific manual handling tasks are associated with an increased risk of lower back pain. Employing mechanised methods of patient transfer reduces this risk. The early introduction of student nurses to safe patient transfer techniques is now part and parcel of preparation for clinical practice. Manual handling courses incorporate theoretical knowledge combined with practical applications within the clinical-skills classroom. To assess the appropriateness of a manual handling course, delivered to student nurses, we surveyed participants regarding their real life patient-handling experiences in relation to aspects of manual handling theory. The study included 230 student nurses who had started their clinical attachments as part of a University degree program. A 25-item questionnaire was used; designed to document the participants' experiences in clinics and canvass their opinions on why unsafe transfers were sometimes practiced. 205 completed questionnaires were returned (response rate 89%). Back pain was reported by 115 (61%) participants during their clinical training. 47% of respondents had been asked to move patients without use of equipment during their practicum period. 44% claimed no equipment was available in the clinics they attended and 18% claimed patient transfer equipment was 'never' used in their experience. Out of those that reported this lack of usage, 56% attributed this to the non-availability of equipment. Fewer than 4 out of 10 students reported their clinical experience to be a pain-free experience. Poorly equipped clinics may be a factor leading to a gap between classroom theory and clinical practice.

Biography

Hana Kadhom has 33 years experience in nursing as a practitioner and educator. Her experience has been across the Middle East and UK. She obtained her PhD from the University of Hull (UK) and she has Postgraduate diplomas from British universities (in nursing education and Health & Safety). She is currently a senior Lecturer and Director of a Nursing Degree Bridging program in Bahrain and Saudi Aramco.

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