



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Need to teaching communication skills of nursing students from the viewpoint of the faculty members of Guilan University of Medical Sciences

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Abstract

Introduction: Communication skills have been recognized as an integral part of nursing services. Promoting the communication skills of nursing students is an important objective of nursing education, and the perspective of the faculty members, one of the most reliable groups involved in nursing education, is of great significance. The current study was carried out to perform a need to teaching communication skills of nursing students from the perspective of the faculty members of Guilan University of Medical Sciences.

Materials and Methods: In this descriptive-analytical study, all faculty members of nursing faculty (N=45) at Guilan University of Medical Sciences were included in the study by census sampling in summer, 2015. Data were collected by a self-administered questionnaire including three sections: sociodemographic characteristics, faculty members' views about communication skills and open-ended questions. The obtained data were analyzed by descriptive and inferential statistics (t-test, Kruskal-Wallis and one-way ANOVA).

Results: The highest number of faculty members (%66.7) reported a high need for teaching communication skills to the nursing students. The mean score of female faculty members was a little higher than that of the male counterparts, but the difference was not statistically significant. The results of one-way ANOVA showed a significant relationship between the viewpoint of the faculty members on the need for teaching communication skills and age ($P<0.05$) and teaching experience ($P<0.01$). The analysis of open-ended questions by frequency distribution highlighted teaching communication skills as a one-unit course to students before apprenticeship as well as simultaneous theoretical and practical teaching of these skills in clinical settings.

Conclusions: Based on the positive view of the faculty members about the need for teaching communication skills to nursing students, it seems helpful to provide a favorable ground to revise the curriculum to promote the students' communication skills.

Keywords: Communication skills, faculty member, student, education.

Introduction

Communication is a dynamic process among the humans that is used to have an influence, to gain mutual support and to acquire what is necessary for health and survival [10]. The ability to make proper communication is one of the basic skills of social life [2]. Many authorities consider the ability to make proper communication one of the most important characteristics of the healthcare personnel [3]. Since nurses are the most important human resource of the hospital and the closest treatment staff during hospitalization, the patient-nurse communication in clinical cares has been greatly emphasized and is generally necessary for a favorable patient-nurse communication [4].

Nurses-patient communication skills are one of the most significant factors associated with patient care quality [5]. One of the objectives of the Joint Commission's 2009

National Patient Safety Goals is promotion of effective communication among the patient care providers [6]. This is important because communication skills create a common sense between the health team members and patients and their families [7] and can encourage the patients to share their problems with nurses. Hence, the nurses' communication skills can help to get vital information from the patients, which is very useful in the treatment process and patients' improvement [8].

Deficiency in communication skills affects the patients' satisfaction and deprives the health system of the important and valuable data provided by the patients to nurses [9]. Nurses need to have good communication skills in order to provide better services, to empower the patients and to increase their satisfaction [10,11]. Also, communication skills help to keep the safety [12], to promote the patient's

health [13], to provide more cooperation of patients in decision-making and professional development following the exchange of experiences, knowledge and information with colleagues [14], to decrease stress [15] and job burnout and anxiety [7,16] and to increase job satisfaction among nurses [17].

The necessity of correct communication, as a major element for performing nursing cares, has been emphasized over and over, and some nursing authorities consider the ability to communicate with patients as the core of all nursing cares [18]. Despite the significance of communication skills and their positive effects, studies have shown the weakness of nurses and other healthcare personnel in communicating with patients [19-21]. Several studies have reported many problems for nurses in communication with their patients, and communication problems are still one of the principal concerns in the realm of nurses' performance [22-25].

One of the most important methods to increase the quality of healthcare services is teaching communication skills to these service providers [26]. In the recent years, teaching communication skills has been highly emphasized, and in some countries communication skills have been proposed as the major component of nursing undergraduate program [27]. However, there is no special place for teaching communication skills to the medical students during clinical education in Iran [3]. A review of the nursing undergraduate curriculum indicates that teaching communication skills as a separate course has not been considered, and limited hours have been allocated to it in some courses [28]. That is why the nursing students learn communication skills indirectly and experimentally from their teachers and clinical staff, and they are not able to communicate with patients effectively, as expected [3].

The results of various studies conducted in this regard have shown different communication skills in the nursing students. In a study analyzing the communication skills of nursing students, % 67 were found to have good communication during the course, but they disregarded this issue at the end of the course [29]. The analysis of nursing students' communication skills showed that they did not have sufficient skills before teaching communication skills, and more effective training had been highlighted [2, 27]. Other studies have also reported poor communication skills for nurses while communicating with patients [18, 25, 31-34].

Teaching communication skills to nursing students not only causes behavioral changes in them but also helps them to develop their communications and notice the errors they make in their interactions with patients and consequently enhance the patients' satisfaction with the healthcare process. Developing courses by which nursing students can make correct communication with patients is important, so it

seems necessary to perform a survey about need to teaching communication skills of nursing students based on the perspectives of the faculty members, as a basis for further educational interventions, because the views of the faculty members, as one of the most reliable groups involved in nursing education, are of great significance.

Methods

This descriptive-analytical study was carried out on the faculty members of the school of nursing and midwifery at Guilan University of Medical Sciences, who were teaching apprenticeship and internship courses in the summer, 2015. The whole study population (N=45) were selected as the study sample by census sampling. To evaluate the knowledge and attitude of the participants about teaching communication skills, a three-section questionnaire was used. The first section included sociodemographic information (age, gender, major, university degree and teaching experience). The second section consisted of 20 items on the need for teaching communication skills to the nursing students in the opinion of the faculty members. The responses were rated based on five-point Likert scale, from 0 to 4. The maximum score of the scale was 100. The total score of 0-25 showed poor perspective, 26-50 average perspective, 51-75 good perspective and 76-100 very good perspective. The third section of the scale included 4 open-ended questions on teaching communication skills (time, method, duration and simultaneous theoretical and practical methods).

The data collection tool was taken from the clinical teachers' perspectives scale by Zamani et al. [35], designed to determine the viewpoint of the clinical faculty members about teaching communication skills to the medical students. The face and content validity of the questionnaire had been confirmed by the faculty members of Isfahan school of medicine. The reliability of the scale was confirmed by split-half reliability ($R=0.9$). The questionnaire was used in one stage in the school of nursing and midwifery at Guilan University of Medical Sciences. After approving the research subject at deputy of research and taking the ethical code, arrangements were made with school of nursing and midwifery at Guilan University of Medical Sciences and the self-administered questionnaires were submitted to the study units by the educational experts of the faculty, where the faculty members were briefed on the completion of the questionnaire, objectives of the study and confidentiality of the data.

The obtained data from the questionnaires were encoded and fed into SPSS-18 software and analyzed by descriptive (mean and standard deviation) and inferential statistics (t-test, ANOVA and Kruskal-Wallis). The open-ended questions were analyzed by descriptive statistics (frequency

distribution). $P < 0.5$ was considered statistically significant.

Results

From the 45 participants of the study, 84.4% were female and % 15.6 were male. The frequency distribution of age groups included 30-45 (%4.4), 40-50 (%71.1) and >50 (% 24.5). The mean age of the participants was 84 ± 6.5 . As for the participants' field of study, % 68.9 were internal-surgical faculty members, %13.4 were pediatric nursing faculty members, % 11.1 were community health nursing faculty members, %4.4 were psychiatric nursing faculty members and % 2.2 were nursing management faculty members. Also, %66.7 of study units had master's degree, % 15.5 had Ph.D.

degree and % 17.8 were Ph.D. students. In terms of teaching experience, % 71.1 had over 20 years of teaching experience, % 17.7 had 16-20 years of teaching experience, % 6.7 had 11-15 years of teaching experience and % 4.5 had 5-10 years of teaching experience.

The results showed % 56.7 of the participants reported a high level, %40.3 reported a good level and %3 reported a moderate level for need to teaching communication skills. On the other hand, the majority of the faculty members had a positive attitude toward teaching communication skills to nursing students. The perspectives of the faculty members about teaching communication skills to nursing students are presented in [Table 1].

Table 1: Percentage and frequency of faculty members' views about need to teaching communication skills to nursing students.

Items	Completely agree	Agree	No idea	Disagree	Completely disagree
	Percentage & frequency	Percentage & frequency	Percentage & frequency	Percentage & frequency	Percentage & frequency
Patients' satisfaction depends on effective nurse-patient communication.	11 (42/44)	23 (17/21)	2 (4/44)	0	0
Effective communication is an integral part of the healthcare process.	13 (86/98)	41(13/11)	0	0	0
Teaching communication skills to nursing students is associated with better patient care.	43 (57/55)	01 (22/32)	1 (2/22)	0	0
Correct care is the result of acquiring correct information from patient during the nursing process evaluation.	32 (15/21)	02 (44/44)	2 (4/44)	0	0
Providing correct caring plans by the nurse is exclusively resulting from getting correct information from the patient during the nursing interview.	92 (46/44)	41 (13/21)	2 (4/44)	0	0
Absence of teaching communication skills to the nursing students leads to patient confusion.	91(24/12)	62(75/97)	0	0	0
Teaching effective communication with patient to nursing students in specific conditions (patients with AIDS, chronic diseases, various disabilities and dying patients) is necessary.	32 (15/21)	12 (64/66)	1 (2/22)	0	0
Teaching communication skills is suggested to be performed by a team familiar with nursing, cultural and social issues.	13 (86/88)	41(13/21)	0	0	0
The teaching team of communication skills must have taken training courses in this regard.	22 (84/05)	12 (64/66)	2 (4/44)	0	0
The teachers of communication skills should be selected from among the clinical faculty members.	71 (73/77)	82 (26/42)	0	0	0
The teachers of communication skills can teach these skills to real or hypothetical patients.	92 (46/54)	51 (33/33)	1 (2/22)	0	0
Teaching communication skills includes teaching, practice and practical presentation.	23 (17/11)	31(82/98)	0	0	0
The educational content of communication skills is different depending on the academic year.	42 (35/43)	91 (24/22)	2 (4/44)	0	0
Teaching communication skills is different depending on the cultural characteristics.	72 (06)	81 (04)	0	0	0

Students are required to have the ability to attract the patient cooperation in risky treatment conditions.	32 (15/01)	12 (64/66)	0	0	0
Students are required to have the ability to attract the patient cooperation in using special cares.	03 (66/66)	41 (13/21)	1 (2/22)	0	0
A supportive learning environment is required for teaching communication skills.	72 (06)	81(04)	0	0	0
At the moment, assessment of nursing students' communication skills is done parallel to their acquisition of clinical skills.	82 (26/22)	41 (13/21)	3 (6/66)	0	0
At the moment, the nursing students are trained on how to deliver bad news to patients and their companions.	03 (66/66)	41(13/21)	1 (2/22)	0	0
The communication problems of nursing student graduates have been eliminated at the time of their graduation.	02 (44/44)	61 (53/65)	9 (02)	0	0

The results of t-test showed the mean score of the male participants' viewpoints (72.1 ± 5.33) about the need to teaching communication skills was less than that of female counterparts (75.12 ± 6.18), but the difference was not statistically significant ($T = 2.17, P < 0.14$) [Table 2].

The findings of Kruskal-Wallis, comparing the opinion of the faculty members, showed no significant difference between various nursing education departments ($P < 0.7$). The highest and lowest mean scores for need to teaching communication skills were reported for internal-surgical nursing department (77.12 ± 7.04) and community health nursing department (67.90 ± 5.61) [Table 2].

Moreover, the results of one-way ANOVA indicated no

significant difference between university degree and faculty members' perspectives about need to teaching communication skills ($P < 0.9$). However, a significant difference was found between teaching experience and faculty members' viewpoints about need to teaching communication skills ($P < 0.05$). On the other hand, the participants with > 20 years teaching experience reported a higher need to teaching communication skills. Further, the results of ANOVA showed a significant difference between age and faculty members' viewpoints about teaching communication skills ($P < 0.01$). That is the age group >50 had a more positive attitude about teaching communication skills [Table 2].

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation of scores of need to teaching general communication skills according to sociodemographic information in the opinion of the faculty members.

Sociodemographic characteristics	Number	Mean \pm SD	Test type & P-value
Age	2	4/22 \pm 58/30	
40-30	32	7/10 \pm 74/02	ANOVA
50-40	11	7/15 \pm 76/18	$P < 0/01$
50<			
Gender	38	(6/18 \pm 75/21)	t-test
Female	7	(5/33 \pm 72/01)	$P < 0/012$
Male			
Nursing education department	31	7/04 \pm 77/21	
Internal-surgical	6	6/22 \pm 76/14	Kruskal-Wallis $P < 0/7$
Pediatric nursing	5	5/61 \pm 67/09	
Community health nursing	2	6/64 \pm 76/19	
Psychiatric nursing	1	6/35 \pm 70/43	
Nursing management			
Academic education	30	6/01 \pm 74/13	
Master	8	7/30 \pm 78/39	ANOVA
Ph.D. student	7	7/16 \pm 77/03	$P < 0/9$
Ph.D.			
Teaching experience	3	4/63 \pm 50/82	
10-5	8	6/59 \pm 70/11	ANOVA
15-11	32	6/61 \pm 76/19	$P < 0/05$
20-16	2	7/54 \pm 78/17	
20<			

The analysis of responses to open-ended questions presented by the faculty members showed 77.55% of them

believed the best time for teaching communication skills was before apprenticeship program in a separate course, 20% of

them believed in simultaneous teaching of communications skills and patient transport service (PTS) apprenticeship, and % 4.45 believed in holding workshops on teaching communication skills during higher clinical education courses.

As for the opinion of the faculty members about the teaching methods of communication skills, % 60 believed these skills should be taught practically in clinical settings, 22.22% suggested interview observation, % 13.33 reported clinical patient-teacher interaction, 60% reported teacher's presentation in classroom and % 4.45 proposed theoretical presentation in training workshops.

With regard to the duration of teaching communication skills, % 37.77 of the faculty members reported presentation of communication skills as a special one-unit course, % 31.12 believed in presenting communication skills as a one-unit clinical course, 20% did not believe in a separate one-unit course for communication skills and believed in increasing the time of theoretical teaching of communication skills and % 11.11 suggested a short-term course as a training workshop.

Regarding simultaneous theoretical and practical methods of teaching communication skills to nursing students, % 60 of faculty members emphasized simultaneous theoretical and practical teaching methods, % 26.67 did not believe in simultaneous training and % 13.33 reported the necessity of practical teaching methods.

Discussion

This study evaluated the perspectives of the faculty members of the school of nursing and midwifery at Guilan University of Medical Sciences on need to teaching communication skills of nursing students. The majority of faculty members had a positive attitude toward need to teaching communication skills to nursing students. A study conducted on the clinical faculty members of Isfahan school of medicine showed that 85% of the faculty members had very good attitude toward teaching communication skills to nursing students [35]. The study of Fazel et al. carried out to assess the attitude of the clinical faculty members of Hormozgan University of medical Sciences about teaching communication skills revealed that 54.8% of the participants had a positive attitude toward teaching communication skills to medical students [36]. The results of the present study showed an urgent need for education system to put more emphasis on practical teaching and improvement of communication skills. It seems that the faculty members need to be more familiar with communication skills, and appropriate policies are required to develop these skills in the faculties.

The faculty members, irrespective of the department,

had a positive attitude toward need to teaching these skills. However, the internal-surgical department, owing to more experience in dealing with different patients and consequently a higher need to promote communication skills to take patient history and attract more patient cooperation, gained a higher score in their attitude toward teaching communication skills. In addition, hospitalization in internal-surgical wards is accompanied by more stress [3], and the faculty members are aware of it, so they paid more heed to communication with patients and had a better attitude in this regard.

In the current study, the faculty members with mean age of 50 years and teaching experience of over 20 years had a more positive attitude toward need to teaching communication skills than others. These results were in line with those of the study by Sharifi Rad et al. in which they assessed the knowledge, attitude and implementation of communication skills among the faculty members of Isfahan school of public health and reported a better attitude in the older faculty members toward teaching communication skills [37]. However, the results of Zamani et al. on the association between communication skills and age and teaching experience were in contrast with the findings of the present study. In the present research, the younger clinical faculty members with less teaching experience at Isfahan school of medicine had a more positive attitude than other groups, which can be partly due to the age of this group of participants. In the study of Zamani et al., the highest frequency was found for the younger age groups, while % 72 of the study sample comprised of the faculty members with mean age of 40-50 years.

It seems that one of the methods to improve communication skills is creating a sense of proper communication with patients. It is evident that this need in the faculty members is increased with a rise in age and clinical teaching experience in communicating with patients, thereby inducing more positive attitude in the faculty members regarding the need to teaching communication skills.

As for the faculty members' viewpoint about the best time for teaching communication skills to nursing students, many of them proposed presentation of a one-unit course before apprenticeship program. Vaghei et al. reported the best time for teaching communication skills to nursing students was before students enter clinical environment and during apprenticeships in order to enhance the application of problem-oriented coping strategies and promote the quality of patient care [27]. It seems that teaching communication skills to nursing students on their entry to university as well as holding specialized courses on teaching communication skills can be helpful to promote the communication skills of the nursing students [34].

With regard to the faculty members' opinion about the

teaching methods of communication skills, the majority of them believed these skills should be taught practically in clinical settings. In the study of Zamani et al., most of the faculty members reported training rounds in response to the teaching method question [35]. In their study analyzing how to learn communication skills using the opinion of the faculty members and students at Iran University of Medical Sciences and Kermanshah University of Medical Sciences, Arabshahi et al. emphasized the implementation of communication skills in clinical departments by the faculty members [38]. It seems that teaching communication skills in clinical settings provides a definite framework and model of the knowledge of therapeutic communication skills for the nurses to complete and reinforce their existing communication skills. Nowadays, researchers consider direct and controlled training of the real patients as one of the best and most effective methods for teaching communication skills [2].

Regarding the duration of teaching communication skills to nursing students, the majority of faculty members believed in presentation of a one-unit course for communication skills. Ghasemi Panjah et al. believed it was necessary to include the concept of communication skills as a separate course in the curriculum [23]. Further, Naebi et al. emphasized running specialized training courses on communication skills to promote the communication skills of the nursing students (34). Moreover, Arabshahi et al. suggested inclusion of communication skills as an official course in the curriculum of medical disciplines [38]. The results of studies have shown more attention is needed to be given to theoretical and practical teaching of interpersonal communication skills, especially in clinical settings in order to acquire the ability required to fulfill the new expectations of the health system, and as an inevitable necessity for the nurses and nursing students.

As for the simultaneous theoretical and practical teaching of communication skills to nursing students, many faculty members believed in simultaneous presentation of theoretical and practical teaching methods. Furthermore, Sabet Dizkoohi et al. emphasized reinforcing communication skills in practical courses along with theoretical courses [39]. The results of Sabsevari et al. showed that theoretical teaching of communication skills is not adequate and students are required to practice the theoretical materials in clinical environments under the supervision of trainers [3]. The study of Hemmati-Maslakpak et al. suggested that faculty members teach correct and practical communication skills to students and require students to apply the learned communications skills in clinical settings [1].

Conclusion

Considering the positive perspective of the faculty

members about need to teaching communication skills to nursing students, it seems helpful to provide a favorable ground for revising the curriculum in order to promote students' communication skills. Hence, to present effective education and to promote nurses' communication skills, new teaching methods are required to be applied. It is also necessary to teach communication skills before starting apprenticeship and in clinical settings practically.

By taking into account the significance of communication skills in providing healthcare services by nurses, it is necessary to include this concept as a separate course in the curriculum and to consider theoretical and practical teaching of these skills separately in the curriculum of nursing faculties. Moreover, the results of this study suggest the faculty members emphasize the implementation of communication skills in clinical settings along with teaching correct and practical methods of communication skills to students.

Based on different clinical experiences of the faculty members in various domains of nursing education, the most important limitation of this study was different perception and interpretations of the faculty members about the efficacy of the teaching strategies of communication skills.

Conflicts of Interest

There are no conflicts to declare.

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