

## FORENSIC NURSING IN INDIA - NEED OF THE HOUR

**DR. R.K. GOREA<sup>1</sup>, DR. O.P. JASUJA<sup>2</sup>, MS. VIRGINIA LYNCH<sup>3</sup>, DR. KARAMJIT SINGH<sup>4</sup>**

1. Professor & Head, Deptt. of Forensic Medicine, Govt. Medical College, Patiala
2. Reader & Head, Deptt. of Forensic Science, Punjabi University, Patiala
3. Director, Forensic Nursing & Health Sciences, University of Colorado, U.S.A.
4. Junior Resident, Deptt. of Forensic Medicine, Govt. Medical College, Patiala

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### ABSTRACT

It is a common practice amongst the forensic pathologists to get help from uneducated assistants while doing the postmortem examinations, who are ignorant of the value of trace evidences. Similarly while doing medico legal examinations of the injured & poisoning cases rarely we have trained helpers. It has also been noticed that the police people while doing inquest, destroy the valuable trace evidences many times, little knowing their forensic value. Keeping this in view role of forensic nursing is being highlighted in this paper.

**KEYWORDS** : Forensic nursing, scene of crime, trace evidences

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### INTRODUCTION

Nurses are the persons trained to care for the sick and help doctors or dentists [1] and forensic nurses are those nurses who cares for the forensic patients and helps the forensic pathologists or forensic odontologists or applies forensic knowledge to the nursing profession. Application of knowledge and practices of nursing for the purpose of law is forensic nursing.

Nursing profession actually started as forensic nursing when Florence Nightingale with a lamp in her hand provided nursing care to war victims without any consideration of friend or foe which is probably synonymous with the present post-trauma care unit.

Bhai Kanhaya served war victims with water and was a sort of male nurse.

Both these personalities provided ethics in the field of forensic nursing.

In Italy and France crude form of forensic nursing was being used between 12th-16th century for deciding cases of nullity of marriage on the basis

of impotence. A couple performed sexual intercourse in front of doctors and nurses and they gave the opinion about the capabilities of males & females [2].

Forensic nursing started in U.S.A. about 15 years back when perturbed over the failure of prosecution cases in crimes like rape, one of the authors, Virginia Lynch telephoned police to know the reason. She got the response that it was due to poor preservation of the samples leading to failure to detect semen. Hurt over this, she decided to start forensic nursing in U.S.A. Then it was gradually introduced in South Africa, Japan, Hongkong, Sweden & other countries.

First lecture in India on Forensic Nursing was delivered at Sri Guru Har Sahai Nursing School, Raikot jointly by two authors Ms. Virginia Lynch & Dr. R.K. Gorea and was later on introduced in many other nursing schools in Punjab. Govt. Nursing School Patiala had a distinction to introduce lectures on forensic nursing due to efforts of visionary DRME, Punjab, Dr. Ravinder Singh and the authors.

## **OBSERVATIONS**

It was observed that due to lack of trained assistants forensic pathologists feel handicapped while performing the postmortem examination at most of the places and many a times much time is wasted due to lack of such assistants. Preservation of viscera, clothes and trace evidences and other biological evidences get hampered due to this. Similar problems arise while dealing with poisoning cases, injury cases and sexual assault cases.

Similarly police people while handling the dead body, destroy many valuable trace evidences and create many postmortem artefacts. It is the lack of forensic knowledge which causes hindrances in successful prosecution of the cases.

## **DISCUSSION**

To overcome all these problems we suggest that forensic nursing should be introduced all over India and forensic nurses can help in various ways for successful prosecution of the cases e.g.

1. At the scene of crime : Forensic nurses can visit the scene of crime and guide the police officials about handling of the dead body and preserving the trace evidences e.g. putting of envelopes over hands so that no trace evidence falls during transportation of the dead body, he/she can be representative of the forensic pathologist at the scene of crime. A male nurse will be of more use & help in our circumstances.
2. In Trauma Cases : A female nurse can be of particular help if victim is female. They can help in documentation of the injuries and help in collecting trace evidences and can be a witness to the whole procedure.
3. In Poisoning Cases : Can keep proper record of signs/symptoms & treatment. Forensic nurses can preserve the gastric lavage, urine and any other sample like vomited matter, faecal matter & clothes soiled with any of the above.
4. Sexual assault cases : A female nurse can

make a better rapport with patient & can also console & comfort her. She can encourage victim to get herself examined properly & be cooperative so that the culprit can be prosecuted properly. She can help in taking samples & preserving them.

5. Social Forensic Nursing : Battered wives and children can be more forthcoming in front of the female forensic nurse as they will be able to elicit better history and may notice even small injuries which a busy doctor may ignore. Early detection of such cases will ultimately help in stopping dowry death cases & deaths in battered children.
6. Human rights violations : In such cases forensic nurses can be of immense help particularly when the victim is female, to the forensic physician.
7. Criminal abortions : Usually the forensic nurses will be the first person to come into contact with such patients and will encourage ladies to report such cases and collect the evidence properly.
8. Forensic pathology : Can help the forensic pathologist in doing the dissection, in collecting the trace evidences is preserving the biological & other samples, they can do the record keeping in addition to receiving the dead bodies and relevant documents, dealing with relatives & telling them about the legal requirements & procedures.

This is not an exhaustive list and there are many other occasions & places, where forensic nurses can be a lot of help. But first we will have to be prepared to accept their role and then get it introduced at our respective places; only then we will realise how immense help we are getting from forensic nurses.

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