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### RESEARCH ARTICLE

#### UNVEILING THE SPECIALISED REALM OF FORENSIC NURSING IN INDIA

Ankita Sharma<sup>1</sup> and Pushpa<sup>2</sup>

1. Senior Nursing Officer, M.Sc. Nursing: Cardiology and CTVS nursing, Continuing Nursing Education Cell, All India Institute of Medical Sciences, Basni phase 2, Jodhpur, 342005, Rajasthan, India.
2. Nursing Officer, M.Sc. Nursing: Community Health Nursing, Continuing Nursing Education Cell, All India Institute of Medical Sciences, Basni phase 2, Jodhpur, 342005, Rajasthan, India.

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#### Abstract

This review article delves into the multifaceted field of forensic nursing, scope of the forensic nursing, examining the pivotal role these professionals play at the intersection of healthcare and the legal system. Through an in-depth analysis of key literature, we explore the scope of forensic nursing, eligibility criteria, diverse responsibilities of forensic nurses, their impact on patient care, evidence collection, challenges, opportunities for forensic nurses and their crucial role in the judicial process in Indian context.

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#### Introduction:-

The term "forensic nursing" was officially coined in 1992, during the first national convention St. Paul, Minnesota when a small group of about 70 nurses met at its first national convention for sexual assault nurses that led to the founding of the International Association of Forensic Nurses. Virginia Lynch from the USA is considered as a pioneer of forensic nursing. In 1995, the American Nursing Association (ANA) recognised it as a specialty. The International Association of Forensic Nurses was formulated soon after the convention. American Nurses Association (ANA) officially accepted Forensic Nursing as a specialty in the year 1995.<sup>1</sup>

Forensic nursing has scope in various fields. If the critically injured patient was the victim of an accident or human violence or other criminal acts and is admitted to a hospital where generally evidence against the criminal is overlooked and hence lost. The presence of a forensic nurse ensures that this will not happen. A Forensic nurse is trained to look into every aspect of the case and collect evidence. This way the criminal does not easily escape from the law. There is a desperate need to check the fast growing crime rates in our society which makes forensic nursing a necessity.<sup>2</sup>

Nursing in forensic science is a wide field and has specializations for different works. Some of these are SANE (Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner), Emergency Room Nursing, Medical Legal Consultant, Medical Examiner's office, Medico-legal death investigator, Law enforcement teams, Evidence collection trainer and so on.<sup>3</sup>

Nurses are more readily available than the doctors to preserve the evidence. They provide services in remote and rural communities and have displayed more empathy towards survivors of abuse than doctors. Thus, Nurses can empower the victims of abuse and improve the rate of reporting cases. Steps should be undertaken to have forensic nursing recognized as a specialty by the Indian Nursing Council. It is also important to recognize the forensic nursing as a means of improving health care delivery and the administration of justice.<sup>1</sup>

#### Corresponding Author:- Pushpa

Address:- Nursing Officer, M.Sc. Nursing: Community Health Nursing, Continuing Nursing Education Cell, All India Institute of Medical Sciences, Basni phase 2, Jodhpur, 342005, Rajasthan, India.

Forensic nursing stands as a unique and critical speciality within the broader healthcare landscape, where nurses combine medical expertise with legal acumen. Forensic nursing is a specialized field within nursing that combines healthcare and legal expertise to address the intersection of healthcare and the legal system. Forensic nurses play a crucial role in the investigation and treatment of victims of crime, violence, and abuse. They are trained to collect and preserve evidence, provide compassionate care to patients, and collaborate with law enforcement and legal professionals.<sup>4,5</sup>

Forensic nurses often work in diverse settings such as hospitals, community clinics, correctional facilities, and forensic laboratories. Their responsibilities include conducting thorough assessments of patients, documenting injuries, collecting and preserving evidence, and testifying in court as expert witnesses when necessary.<sup>6</sup>

This comprehensive review aims to elucidate the nuanced responsibilities of forensic nurses, shedding light on their contributions to both healthcare and the legal system. Drawing upon a range of scholarly references, we provide a holistic understanding of this specialised field.

### **Key Concepts In Forensic Nursing<sup>7</sup>**

Registered Nurse's already practice many forensic nursing concepts, including compassionate, patient centred, objective, culturally sensitive, and evidence-based care. However, forensics' education expands on these key concepts to incorporate a thorough understanding of trauma-informed care, including knowledge of the neurobiology of trauma and interventions to promote healing and restore power and control to patients who've experienced violence and other trauma.

#### **Objectivity:**

Objectivity is critical to forensic nursing, both in terms of nonjudgmental and quality based care. Documenting findings, facts and in interactions with the legal system when serving as a witness or consulting for prosecuting and defence attorneys.

#### **Cultural sensitivity:**

Culturally sensitive forensic nursing care involves an awareness of cultural and societal influences on violence, abuse, and trauma. It also requires a commitment to the social justice and access to care.

#### **Evidence:**

All aspects of forensic nursing care from client's assessment to evidence collection and documentation of injuries these must be based on research and best practice guidelines.

#### **Violence prevention:**

Violence prevention is also a foundational and main concept within forensic nursing. Under International Association of Forensic Nursing's Vision of Ethical Practice, the scope of forensic nursing practice includes a responsibility to address the violence prevention to promote healthier communities, societies and nations.

The scope for forensic nursing in India is evolving, and there is potential for growth in this field. Here are some factors to consider regarding the scope of forensic nursing in India<sup>8</sup>:

#### **Emerging Awareness:**

There is an increasing awareness of the importance of forensic nursing in India, particularly in the context of addressing issues such as sexual assault, domestic violence, and child abuse. Healthcare professionals and law enforcement agencies are recognizing the need for specialized nursing care that integrates medical and forensic expertise.

#### **Legal and Policy Changes:**

Changes in legal frameworks and policies may influence the scope of forensic nursing in India. If there are developments in the legal system that emphasize the importance of evidence collection and the role of healthcare professionals in legal proceedings, it could contribute to the growth of forensic nursing.

**Training Programs:**

The availability of specialized training programs for forensic nursing is a key factor in determining the scope of the field. If educational institutions and healthcare organizations in India start offering formal training and certifications in forensic nursing, it could lead to the development of a skilled workforce.

**Collaboration with Legal System:**

Forensic nurses can play a crucial role in collaboration with law enforcement, forensic laboratories, and legal professionals. Establishing effective communication and cooperation between healthcare and legal systems is essential for the growth of forensic nursing.

**Public Awareness and Acceptance:**

Public awareness of the role of forensic nursing and its benefits in the overall justice system can contribute to the acceptance and growth of the field. Advocacy and education efforts can help in building understanding and support for forensic nursing services.

**Research Initiatives:**

Research in the field of forensic nursing can contribute to evidence-based practices and further establish the importance of this specialty. Academic and research institutions engaging in forensic nursing studies can enhance the credibility and scope of the profession.<sup>8</sup>

**The Role Of Forensic Nurse<sup>6, 9, 10, 11</sup>:**

Nurses who apply strategies of forensic science in their specialty practice include the following:

**Clinical forensic Nurse:**

Provides care for the survivors injured from the violence, crime and deaths that occur within the health care institution. This specialty has a duty to defend the patient's legal rights through the proper collection and documentation of evidence.

**Forensic Nurse Investigator:**

Employed in the medical examiner's/ coroner's jurisdiction and represents the decedent's right to social justice through scientific investigation of the scene and circumstances of death. This role may also include the investigation of criminal behaviour, insurance fraud and abuse.

**Forensic Nurse Examiner:**

Provides a complete analysis of physical and psychological trauma, questioned deaths, and/or psychopathology evaluations related to forensic cases and interpersonal violence.

**Forensic Correctional, Institutional or Custodial Nurse:**

Specialises in the care, treatment, and rehabilitation of persons who have been sentenced to prison or jails for violation of criminal statutes and require medical assessment and intervention.

**Legal Nurse Consultant:**

Provides expert witness testimony and education to judicial, justice and health care professionals in areas such as personal injury, product liability, and malpractice among other legal issues related to civil and criminal cases.

**Nurse Attorney:**

A registered nurse with a Jurisprudence Doctorate Degree who practices as an attorney at law, generally specializing in civil or criminal cases involving health care related issues.

**Nurse Coroner:**

A registered nurse serving as an elected officers of death duly authorized by state and jurisdictional statutes to provide the investigation and certification of questioned deaths, to determine the cause of death as well as the criminal statutes pertaining to the decedent's identification and notification of next of kin.

**Key responsibilities of forensic nurses include:****Patient Care:**

Forensic nurses provide comprehensive care to patients who have experienced trauma, violence, or abuse. They address physical and emotional needs, offering support and guidance throughout the healing process.

**Evidence Collection:**

Forensic nurses are trained to collect and preserve evidence from victims, which can be crucial in legal investigations. This may involve documenting injuries, taking photographs, and collecting samples for forensic analysis.

**Collaboration:**

Forensic nurses collaborate with law enforcement, legal professionals, and other healthcare providers to ensure a coordinated response to cases involving violence or criminal activities. They may participate in multidisciplinary teams to facilitate effective communication and case management.

**Education and Advocacy:**

Forensic nurses educate other healthcare professionals, law enforcement, and the community about the role of forensic nursing. They may also advocate for policies and practices that improve the care and support available to victims of crime.

**Research:**

Some forensic nurses engage in research to contribute to the advancement of knowledge and practices within the field. This research can inform evidence-based approaches to patient care and legal procedures.

**Victim Support:**

Providing emotional and psychological support to victims of violence or abuse, while maintaining a compassionate and non-judgmental approach.

**Medical Examinations:**

Conducting thorough medical examinations to document injuries, collect forensic evidence, and assess the overall health of the patient.

**Documentation:**

Accurate and detailed documentation of findings, including injuries, observations, and evidence collected, which may be used in legal proceedings.

**Expert Testimony:**

Serving as an expert witness in legal proceedings, explaining medical findings and interpretations to judges and juries.

**Forensic Photography:**

Documenting injuries or evidence through photography, ensuring a visual record for investigative and legal purposes.

**Crisis Intervention:**

Responding to emergencies and crises, such as sexual assault or domestic violence, with sensitivity and expertise.

**Continuing Education:**

Staying current on forensic nursing practices, techniques, and legal developments through ongoing education and training. Forensic nurses play a vital role in the multidisciplinary approach while addressing crime and supporting victims through the intersection of healthcare and the legal system.<sup>5, 12, 13</sup>

**Patient Centred Care And Support**

Forensic nurses play a crucial role in providing compassionate and patient-centred care to individuals who have experienced trauma. This section underscores the importance of their role in addressing the unique needs of victims, ensuring their physical and emotional well-being while navigating the complexities of legal processes. In the context

of forensic nursing, patient-centred care and support are essential components that prioritize the well-being and dignity of the individual involved in a forensic examination or treatment.

**Key aspects include:**

1. **Trauma-Informed Care:** Recognizing and addressing the potential trauma experienced by the patient, understanding its impact on their physical and mental health, and providing care in a supportive and empathetic manner.
2. **Informed Consent:** Ensuring that patients are fully informed about the forensic examination process, their rights, and the potential outcomes. Respecting their autonomy and obtaining informed consent before any procedures.
3. **Cultural Sensitivity:** Acknowledging and respecting the diverse cultural backgrounds of patients, understanding how cultural factors may influence their experiences, and adapting care accordingly.
4. **Confidentiality and Privacy:** Safeguarding the confidentiality of sensitive information and maintaining the privacy of the patient during examinations, interviews, and interactions.
5. **Communication:** Establishing open and clear communication with patients, explaining procedures, addressing concerns, and actively involving them in decisions regarding their care.
6. **Advocacy:** Advocating for the patient's rights and needs within the legal and healthcare systems, ensuring they are treated with respect and receive appropriate support and resources.
7. **Support Services:** Connecting patients with support services, such as counselling, legal assistance, or community resources, to help them cope with the emotional and practical aspects of their situation.
8. **Empowerment:** Empowering patients by involving them in the decision-making process, providing information about available options, and fostering a sense of control over their own healthcare.
9. **Holistic Approach:** Considering the physical, psychological, and social aspects of the patient's well-being and tailoring care to address their unique needs in a comprehensive manner.
10. **Follow-up Care:** Providing information about follow-up care, both medical and support services, to ensure ongoing assistance and monitoring of the patient's recovery.

By incorporating these principles into forensic nursing practice, professionals can contribute to a more compassionate and patient-centred approach that respects the rights and dignity of individuals involved in forensic examinations or treatment.<sup>2, 5, 14</sup>

**Training And Education**

The evolving landscape of forensic nursing education programs, emphasizes the need for continuous professional development to keep pace with advancements in both medical and legal fields. Forensic nursing education in India typically involves a combination of theoretical coursework and practical training. Courses cover topics such as forensic science, legal aspects of healthcare, and nursing skills specific to forensic settings. Practical training may include simulated crime scene scenarios and interactions with legal professionals. Outside India, forensic nursing programs often follow similar structures, with variations based on local legal systems and healthcare practices. These programs aim to equip nurses with the knowledge and skills to address the intersection of healthcare and the legal system. Internationally, organisations like the International Association of Forensic Nurses (IAFN) provide resources, certifications, and networking opportunities for forensic nurses. Continuous education is crucial, given the evolving nature of forensic science and healthcare practices.<sup>5</sup>

**Origin of forensic nursing education in India and further development**

In 1986, Lynch initiated a formal curriculum for forensic nursing at the university of Texas at Arlington. American academy of forensic sciences formally recognised forensic nursing in the year 1991. In India, Gian Sagar Nursing college along with Colorado University introduced a course in forensic nursing in the year 2009.<sup>8,15</sup> The Indian Nursing Council has introduced forensic nursing as a part of the third year graduate nursing (B.Sc. nursing; V semester) curriculum in the year 2021. This course is designed to help students to know the importance of forensic science in total patient care and to recognise forensic nursing as a speciality discipline in professional nursing practice.

The inclusion of forensic nursing as a subject “Introduction to forensic nursing and India laws” in the nursing curriculum introduces the students to a wider role in nursing practice that contributes to our own and community health safety. The implementation of graduate and postgraduate programs in forensic nursing further reduces the gap between the health care delivery systems and judiciary systems.<sup>15</sup>

**Colleges providing program of forensic nursing in India:**

Post Basic Diploma in Forensic Nursing at National forensic sciences university (NFSU), Gandhinagar is a 1 year course at the PG level.<sup>16</sup>

Master of Science (M.Sc) in Forensic Nursing is a two-year full-time program that is the postgraduate level in the IKON nursing college course offered by Rajiv Gandhi University of Health Sciences, Bangalore, and approved by the Indian Nursing Council (INC).<sup>17</sup>

Some college like AIIMS, Delhi gives “No Objection Certificate” for pursuing forensic nursing diploma/degree from NFSU.

As of 2015, the International Association of Forensic Nurses offers two professional certifications under its certification body, the Commission for Forensic Nursing Certification (CFNC), for Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners: the Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner-Adult/Adolescent (SANE-A) and the Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner- Pediatric (SANE-P).<sup>18</sup>

**Eligibility criteria<sup>19</sup>:**

The candidate who is applying for persuading forensic nursing should be a Registered Nurse and Registered midwife or equivalent with respective State Nursing Registration Council.

The minimum education requirements shall be the passing of:

- B.Sc. Nursing / B.Sc. Hons. Nursing / Post Basic B.Sc. Nursing with minimum of 55% aggregate marks.
- The candidate should have undergone in B.Sc. Nursing / B.Sc. Hons. Nursing / Post Basic B.Sc. Nursing in an institution which is recognised by INC).
- Minimum one year experience in relevant work after Basic B.Sc. Nursing.
- Minimum one year experience in relevant work prior or after Post Basic B.Sc. Nursing.
- Candidate shall be medically fit.

**Challenges And Opportunities<sup>3, 4, 20</sup>**

The challenges faced by forensic nurses, including the emotional toll of dealing with victims of violence and navigating legal complexities. Simultaneously, it explores opportunities for growth, research, and collaboration within this dynamic field.

**Challenges:**

1. Emotional Toll: Dealing with the emotional impact of working with victims of violence, trauma, or abuse, which can lead to burnout and compassion fatigue.
2. Legal Complexity: Navigating the intricate legal processes and requirements associated with forensic examinations, evidence collection, and court appearances.
3. Limited Resources: Facing challenges related to limited resources, both in terms of staffing and specialized equipment, which can impact the quality and efficiency of forensic nursing services.
4. Interdisciplinary Collaboration: Coordinating with various professionals, such as law enforcement, legal personnel, and healthcare providers, can be challenging due to differing priorities, communication styles, and expectations.
5. Continuing Education: Keeping abreast of evolving forensic techniques, legal regulations, and healthcare practices requires ongoing education, which may be challenging in some healthcare settings.
6. Workplace Safety: Addressing potential safety concerns, especially when dealing with forensic cases that involve criminal elements, to ensure the well-being of forensic nursing professionals.

**Opportunities:**

1. Advancements in Technology: Embracing technological advancements in forensic science and healthcare, such as improved evidence collection tools or tele-health services, to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of forensic nursing.
2. Research Opportunities: Contributing to and benefitting from research in forensic nursing, which can lead to the development of evidence-based practices and innovative approaches to care.
3. Community Outreach: Engaging in community education and outreach to raise awareness about forensic nursing, promote preventive measures, and provide resources for those affected by violence or abuse.

4. Policy Advocacy: Advocating for policies that support the rights of victims and enhance the role of forensic nursing in the legal and healthcare systems.
5. Interdisciplinary Training: Collaborating with other professionals through interdisciplinary training programs to improve communication, understanding, and coordination in addressing forensic cases.
6. Specialized Training Programs: Taking advantage of specialized training programs and certifications to enhance the skills and knowledge of forensic nursing professionals.
7. Global Collaboration: Collaborating with international organizations and professionals to share best practices, research findings, and advancements in forensic nursing on a global scale.

Despite the challenges, forensic nursing presents opportunities for growth, collaboration, and positive impact on individuals affected by violence or trauma. By addressing challenges and leveraging opportunities, forensic nursing can continue to evolve as a crucial field in healthcare and criminal justice.

### **Conclusion:-**

In conclusion, this comprehensive review illuminates the indispensable role of forensic nurses in bridging the realms of healthcare and the legal system. Through an extensive examination of relevant literature, we provide insights into the evolving responsibilities, challenges, and opportunities within this specialized nursing domain.

It's crucial to check with relevant nursing authorities in India for the most up-to-date information on licensing, certification, and education requirements for forensic nursing. Additionally, consider reaching out to professionals already working in the field for guidance and advice.

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### **Conflict Of Interest**

Nil.

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