



Original Article

Nurses' Awareness of Patient Privacy and Confidentiality in Benghazi Medical Centre (BMC): A Cross-sectional Study.

Fatma.Abdalla.Atitalla.Omar,¹ Ainas Salem Eltarhuni,² Randa Mahmoud.Gadalla.Elamrony,² Huda.Kutran³

¹ lecturer, Health Services Administration, Faculty of Public Health, University of Benghazi, Libya.

² Assistant Professor. Health Services Administration, Faculty of Public Health, University of Benghazi, Libya.

³ Assistant Professor, Health informatics Department, Public Health Faculty, University of Benghazi, Libya.

ABSTRACT:

Background:- Respect for the privacy of patients and the confidentiality of their information, personal data is a fundamental principle of patient rights. All healthcare providers, especially physicians and nurses play a crucial role as guardians of patient safety and rights therefore this study aimed to assess the knowledge and awareness of patients' rights among nurses at the Benghazi Medical Center.

Methods: A cross-sectional descriptive study was conducted with 184 nurses at the gynecology and obstetrics department of the Benghazi Medical Center, using a self-administrated questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of three parts: personal characteristics, and the knowledge towards privacy part (21 statements), and confidentiality (11 statements). Data analysis was carried out using SPSS version 23. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations) were used to describe the knowledge of privacy and confidentiality among nurses. A relation test was used to measure the association between privacy and confidentiality with personal data. Also, statistical significance was set at a P- value of <0.05.

Results: 67.9% of the nurses reported that they had experienced patient rights. The knowledge about privacy among nurses in the target hospital was high, and the most common knowledge was: during the examination, treatment, and care, all healthcare professionals should be careful about the protection of patient privacy (91.8%) and nursing care to protect privacy in the work environment (91.3%). Concerning confidentiality, nurses had a high level of knowledge in general, and the highest level of knowledge was in the statement 'patients must get all kind of health service in an environment that is suitable for confidentiality'. The result found there was no association between personal characteristics and privacy and confidentiality.

Conclusion:- It was concluded that nurses commonly encounter patient rights issues in their workplace. However, the majority of the nurses who participated in the study had a very good level of knowledge about privacy and confidentiality. Age, educational level or length of working experience was insignificantly associated with the level of knowledge of privacy and confidentiality.

Keywords: *patient privacy, Confidentiality, Nurses' awareness, cross-sectional study.*

Corresponding author:

Fatma Abdalla: Lecturer, Faculty of of Public Health, University of Benghazi, Libya

E.mail: fatma.omar@uob.edu.ly

INTRODUCTION:-

The concept of patient rights has been considered a component of the human rights concept since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted.^{1,2} Respect for the privacy of patients and the confidentiality of their information, personal data and medical records (diagnosis, examinations, tests, x-rays and reports) is a fundamental principle of patient

rights. All healthcare providers, especially physicians and nurses play a crucial role as guardians of patient safety and rights.^{3,4} One of the most significant issues to consider in nursing is the secrecy of the patient's data to maintain the patient's rights, because those nurses are responsible for patient care 24 hours a day, and they have a greater role in observing patient care.⁵

In a healthcare setting, privacy means the need for patients to keep their emotions, thoughts, and physical interactions private and to limit intrusion into matters that only affect their physical and psychological well-being.⁶ While confidentiality is defined as information or data about patients that is not disclosed, consent is

required for disclosure.⁷ Confidentiality of personal information and privacy is vital for establishing and maintaining an effective and respectful clinical relationship. The right to these concepts constitutes a social merit as it encourages the explicit discussion of health-related problems between health staff and patients.⁸ The results of some studies showed the patient's rights charter differs from one country to another^{8, 9} but there are main principles agreed upon the patient has the right to privacy and secrecy of information and socio-medical data. However, the majority of the patients state that their rights are not respected in practice.¹⁰ Furthermore, previous qualitative research has shown that many patients are unwilling to give away some of the personal information needed for their treatment. They may even provide inaccurate or incomplete information about their medical history because they believe healthcare providers may disclose this information to unauthorized third parties.¹¹ In recent years, the nursing literature reflects a growing concern for patient rights, with particular emphasis on privacy, the protection of patient data and the nurse's role as an advocate for patients.¹² Besides, it was observed that studies were mostly concentrated on the level of knowledge of medical staff members and hospital patients regarding patient rights.^{13,14} However, the principles of confidentiality and privacy are often neglected during patient care in developing countries. According to the literature reviewed, few studies regarding patient privacy and confidentiality were conducted in Libya and there was less attention on health professionals' attitudes towards patients' rights. Therefore, the present study aimed to identify the awareness and the knowledge of nurses towards patient privacy and confidentiality at the Benghazi Medical Centre (BMC). Furthermore, to determine whether there is a relationship between nurses' knowledge of privacy and confidentiality and nurses' socio-demographic characteristics (age, education level and years of experience)

MATERIAL AND METHODS:

Research Design and Study Setting: This was a descriptive cross-sectional study. It was conducted in the department of the Gynecology and Obstetric in a tertiary care teaching hospital (the Medical Benghazi Center, BMC) to determine nurses' awareness and knowledge towards the right to privacy and confidentiality of patients. The BMC is one of the largest general hospitals offering free services to the community in Benghazi city, and it is the biggest hospital with multi-specialty departments in this district.

Study Population: All the Nursing staff working in the Gynaecology and obstetrics department at the time of this study were included, nurses in other departments were excluded. Specific areas of the district were selected for the research due to time constraints and convenient accessibility.

Sample size: A total of (184) nurses were purposively selected for this study. Nursing staff were selected for inclusion in this study based on involvement with patients and who frequently handle patients' health records. Exclusion criteria were nurses who worked in the hospital for less than 3 months, and radiologists, pathologists and other non-direct patient care specialists. Besides nurses who did not give consent to participate in the study.

Data Collection: Data was collected from January 2022 to the end of February 2022

using a self-administered questionnaire designed by the researchers based on the previously published study.¹⁵ The questionnaire was divided into three different parts. The first part included the descriptive characteristics of the participants. The second part includes questions about the patient's rights experience with "yes" and "no" answer options for the first and second questions and source of hearing about patients' bill of rights, the third part includes a privacy and confidentiality related clause consisting of 33 Likert-type style items with options "strongly agree & agree", "strongly disagree & disagree" and "I do not know".

Pilot study:- To determine the effectiveness of the research tool, a pilot study was carried out on approximately ten nurses to assess the clarity of the statements in the questionnaire and to estimate the time required for completing it. The results of this pilot study helped to set the study in its final application form.

Validity and reliability:- The questionnaire was used previously study and proved that it was valid and reliable. However, a pilot study was carried out and the questionnaire was given to ten Public Health Faculty members of the University of Benghazi after collecting the comments, slight comments were applied. The reliability of the tool was tested using Cronbach's alpha to calculate the overall internal consistency for the item scale of the knowledge of nurses on privacy and confidentiality, and the coefficient was 0.73 for the privacy scale 0.82 for the confidentiality scale.

Statistical Analysis: Statistical analysis was carried out using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations) were

used to describe the awareness of patients' rights among nurses.

RESULTS:

Results from table 1 above show the demographic information of the study sample. The majority of participants 57.1% (n=105) graduated from nursing school. Approximately half of the participants were married and 28.3. % (n=52) were from the age group

Table (1): Socio-demographic and professional details of the nurses participated in the study (n=184)

	Variable	Frequency	%
Graduated from	Professional health high school (2 years)	49	26.6%
	Nursing school (4 years)	105	57.1%
	Post graduate and above	30	16.3%
Marital status	Married	91	49.5%
	Single	83	45.1%
	Divorced	4	2.2%
	Widowed	6	3.2%
Number of children	None	107	58.2%
	1	12	6.5%
	2	21	11.4%
	2 and more	44	23.9%
Age group	20-26	50	27.2%
	27-33	52	28.3%
	34-40	39	21.2%
	41 or more	43	23.4%
Length of experience	3-9 m	17	9.2%
	1-5y	50	27.2%
	6-10y	33	17.9%
	11-15y	30	16.3%
	16 and over	54	29.3%
How many night shifts do you have in a week	None	105	57.1%
	1	10	5.4%
	2	25	13.6%
	3	19	10.3%
	4 four	25	13.6%
	Total	184	100.0%

(27 – 33), and 58.2% (n = 107) of them did not have a child. About 29.3% (n=54) of participants had experience of more than sixteen years while only 27.2% (n=50) had experience from 1 to 5 years. 13.6% (n=25) of participants had from 2 to 4 shifts in a week, however, more than half of nurses 57.1% (n=105) had no shifts in their work.

Inquiries about the experience with patients' rights:-

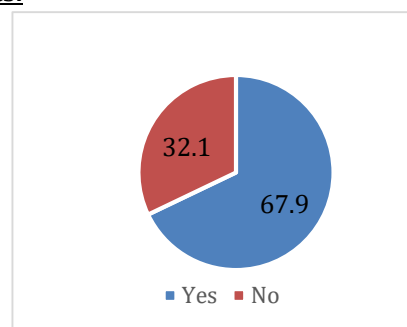


Figure (1) shows the distribution of the sample based on experience with patient rights. It was detected that most of the nurses 67.9% had received an education concerning patient rights while 32.1% of participants didn't have any type of education related to patient rights

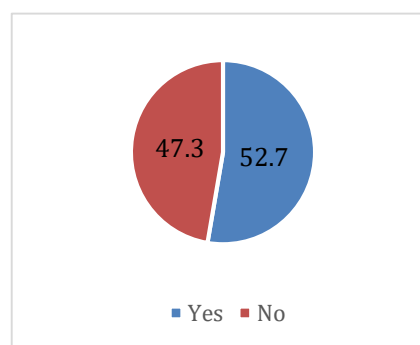
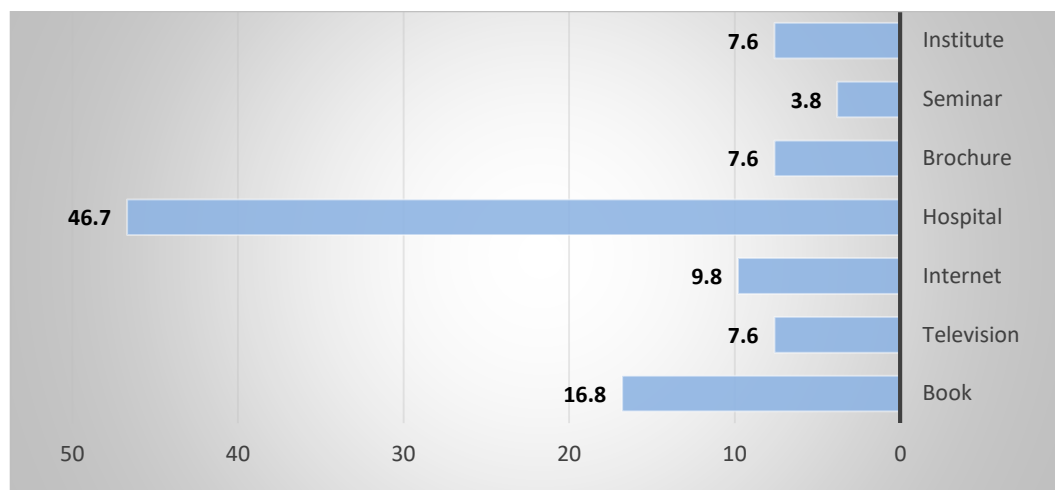


Figure (2) nurses faced problems concerning patients' rights. Approximately 52.7% mentioned that they had experienced a problem regarding patient rights however, around 47.3% of nurses did not face any problems

Source of hearing about patients' rights among the participants

Figure 3 shows that among those who have heard about patient rights, 46.7% gained their information from the hospital and 16% of participants had

information from the book, whereas 9.8% gained the information from the Internet and 7.6% of nurses heard about patient's right from TV, Brochure and Institute.



Figure(3) Source of hearing about patients' rights among the participants (n =184)

Table (2): The knowledge and awareness of patient privacy among nurses(n= 184)

Item	Mean (SD)
Protecting privacy and observing this in the work environment are important for me	4.429±.820
I approach with due care to protect privacy in the work environment	4.331±.749
I pay attention that in the work environment, patients' personal data are not overheard by people other than healthcare professionals.	4.190±1.014
I pay attention that in the work environment, patients' personal data are not overheard by people other than healthcare professionals.	4.190±1.014
I feel uncomfortable when I hear a conversation related to patient's status	3.880 ±1.079
Patient's trust in the doctor/nurse is harmed when they share information about the patient's private life, with other people	3.777±1.288
it is important that the patient's body is not seen by other patients and professionals during the treatment	4.157±1.146
I feel uncomfortable when patient's body or certain parts of his/her body are seen	3.831 ±1.267
During the physical treatment, parts of the body other than the treated part should be covered or concealed with proper clothes.	4.402±0.906
During the examination, treatment and care, all healthcare professionals should be careful about the protection of patient privacy	4.478±.809
Mortality does not legitimize breach of privacy	3.956±1.249
Right to privacy is a right with a legal aspect	4.135±0.922
Privacy is related to the human rights	4.326 ±0.850
Protection of privacy ensures balance in the interpersonal relation	4.331±0.877
During the transfer of patients within the hospital, his/her privacy should not be breached	4.385±0.815

Those not directly related with the patient's treatment should not accompany the patient during the medical intervention	4.391±0.861
Paying attention to patient privacy enhances patient's satisfaction.	4.271±0.970
Relation between the healthcare personnel and the patient is based on trust.	4.489±0.809
Treatment and care can never be a justification for the breach of privacy.	4.184±0.985
Health care professional should not be disturbed when the patient cared is of different gender.	4.076±1.032
Protection of patient privacy is so important that it cannot be left to sensitivity of the healthcare professional about the issue	4.201±0.951
Healthcare personnel is obliged to protect patient privacy M=4.2092 SD=5.1898 STD error Mean=0.382	4.407±0.824

Table(3): the knowledge and awareness of patient confidentiality among nurses

Item	Mean (SD)
The patient should be informed of any attempt related to him/her.	4.217±.927
Patients may demand all kind of information related to their health status, verbally or in writing.	4.168±.910
Patients must get all kind of health service in an environment that is suitable for confidentiality	4.407±.7768
In any medical intervention, patient's consent must be obtained and he/she should benefit from services within the frame of the consent.	4.380±.751
Every relative has right to the health records of his dying patient	3.222± 1.43
Patient's request for his/her medical history can be obliged	4.005± 1.02
Patient's consent is necessary before his health information is released to third party (ies)	4.179 ± .98
Staff can reveal the next of kin of a dead patient to his relatives for processing death certificate	4.157±.99
Application for patient's folder for impersonal uses should be in writing to the director of health information services	3.793± 1.27
Patient's condition may be discussed with other people than for treatment, learning and research purposes	3.981±.09
Services of an untrained interpreter is dangerous to confidentiality M=4.0410, SD =6051 , STD. Error Mean= .04461	3.929 ±1.14

It was ascertained that most of nurses marked "agree" to most items. Nurses have the highest mean score with 4.489 ± 0.809 for the item "Relation between the healthcare personnel and the patient is based on trust". Also, participants had a high score mean of 4.42 ± 0.820 for the item "during the examination, treatment and care, all healthcare professionals should be careful about the protection of patient privacy". while nurses had a lower score mean of 3.77 ± 1.288 for the item "Patient's trust in the nurse is harmed when they share information about the patient's private life, with other people". The lowest mean score for nurses was for the item "I feel uncomfortable when I hear a conversation related to patient's status" (3.880 ± 1.079).

Table (3) showed that The nurses have the highest mean score with 4.40 ± 0.77 for the item "Patients must get all kinds of health service in an environment that is suitable for confidentiality", Additionally participants had a higher score mean about 4.38 ± 0.751 for the item in "any medical intervention, patient's consent must be obtained and he/she should benefit from services within the frame of the consent". While the lowest mean score 3.222 ± 1.433 for nurses was for the item "every relative has right to the health records of his dying patient".

Relationship between nurses' knowledge of patient privacy , confidentiality and demographic variables:-

The results from this study showed that there was no relation between knowledge of privacy and

demographic variables (age, education level, length of experience, age ($p=0.181$), education level ($p=0.655$), and length of experience ($P=0.725$). Also, the finding indicated that there was not statistically significant relationship between variables (age, education level, length of experience) and knowledge of nurses toward patient confidentiality.

DISCUSSION:

Patient's rights are one of the fundamental aspects of human rights and an essential component for attaining quality health care and optimal healthcare outcomes. Observing patients' rights is the most important ethical issue in a hospital which should be considered. Since nurses are the majority of employees in hospitals and are responsible for providing direct patient care, they should pay more attention to their rights to maintain the quality of clinical services and ensure patient satisfaction with health services. Therefore, this study aimed to assess the knowledge and awareness of patients' rights in terms of privacy and confidentiality among nurses working at the Benghazi Medical Center.

The results of the current study indicated that more than two-thirds of nurses in the target hospital had acquired knowledge of patient rights from multiple sources. Most nurses learned about patient rights during their occupational lives then from books. Other sources of prior knowledge were the internet, TV, brochures, and institutes, and the least common source was seminars. This means that nurses did not receive sufficient education on patient rights during their study, which accounted for only 7.6% of hearing about patient rights at their institution. These results were consistent with a study conducted in Turkey, which found that most nurses did not receive education about important topics of patient rights and were aware of patient rights through sources outside of school.¹⁶ However, another study showed that the majority of healthcare professionals acquired knowledge of confidentiality while in school.¹⁷ According to the present study findings, around half of nurses had problems related to patient rights. In a study by Utkualp et al. reported that around a third of nurses encountered a problem related to patient rights.¹⁸ Similarly, another study in Turkey, nurses faced challenges concerning patient rights in their practice.¹⁶

This study demonstrated that the majority of nurses had a high level of knowledge about privacy. This result could be attributed to the fact that hospital administration paid attention to patients and their rights, and nurses had information on matters related to patient rights and privacy. A study by Öztürk et al. (2020) showed that nurses working in the public hospitals in Trabzon respected patient privacy highly.¹⁹ This study's finding was congruent with a study conducted in Colombo, Sri Lanka which reported that, level of nurses' knowledge regarding the right to maintain privacy was remarkably high.²⁰ On the same line, a study in Egypt reported that nurses recognized privacy as a human right and had the responsibility to protect patients' privacy.²¹

Higher levels of nurses' knowledge about privacy were observed in all statements. The majority of the target nurses had a sufficient level of knowledge and paid attention to patient privacy during the examination, treatment and care which all healthcare professionals should be careful about protecting privacy, and the relationship between healthcare personnel and the patient is based on trust. Furthermore, nurses approach it with due care to protect privacy in the work environment, and it was important to protect privacy and observe in the workplace for nurses. Nurses were aware that privacy is a human right, and privacy must be maintained during physical treatment or transfer of patients within the hospital. However, around two third of participants know that patients' trust in the doctor or nurse is harmed when they share information about the patient's private life with other people. Concerning confidentiality, it was obvious that nurses in the targeted hospital had a high level of knowledge and awareness about it in general. This was supported by findings of previous studies that reported that health professionals had relatively good knowledge related to patient confidentiality.²² Also, a study conducted in Saudi Arabia supported the findings of the current study.²³ In congruence with this study findings, a high awareness level of confidentiality was revealed among nurses, this could be because the nurses knowing their important role in protecting patient records and do not disclose their information.²¹ In addition, most of the nurses' were aware of items such as getting patients all kind of health services in a suitable environment for confidentiality and knowing that patient consent must

be obtained and they should benefit from services within the frame of the consent, which had the highest awareness level regarding confidentiality. Nurses were aware that patient consent is essential before giving any information to third parties. This finding may be attributed to nurses who believed that consent is a legal requirement and that patients have the right to consent or refuse to share their information. A study in Korea indicated that patients legal rights are infringed on clinical practices, where around 20% of nurses provided information about a diagnosis or information about a patient to a third party without permission from the patient.²⁴ Another previous study mentioned that it is essential for nurses to be careful when keeping patient information, as some of it can be sensitive and cause harm to patients if disclosed.²⁵ Conversely, the nurses' answers in the current study were varied as to whether relatives had the right to see and request health records of their dying patients. The present study highlights that no significant association was found between nurses' knowledge of privacy and confidentiality with age, education level and years of experience. However, a study by Nejad et al. (2011) found that there was a direct and significant association between the level of knowledge and work experience.²⁶ Another study conducted in Saudi Arabia to measure patient rights among nurses showed a significant relationship between older age, years of experience, and being a specialist nurse which could be attributed to gaining more experience will lead to increase knowledge, more respect and improve the nurse and patient interaction.²⁷ A study by Tegegne et al. (2022) revealed that the sex of health professionals, training in medical ethics, and the number of ethical dilemmas faced was all significantly related factors of health professional knowledge towards patients' confidentiality.²²

Ethical considerations: Ethical approval was sought from the gynaecology and obstetrics department at the Medical Benghazi Center, BMC. Verbal Consent was obtained from each respondent after researchers explained to them the purpose of the study and their freedom to choose to participate in the study. The secrecy of the information is ensured by excluding any names, addresses or other personal data from the participants.

The limitation: There are some limitations to this study, firstly, The findings of this study may not be

generalizable because of the use of the convenience sampling method. Secondly, time and financial constraints, which could impact the representativeness of the sample. Finally, there was a possibility of information bias as the nurses might answer acceptably to the researchers, rather than the truth.

Recommendation: This study recommended providing education for medical students during their graduate studies. Maintaining the confidentiality of patient information and not sharing the patient information with other healthcare workers in public places and regular training for health care professionals in all patients' rights aspects. Further study was recommended to measure patient rights for all healthcare professionals and patients.

CONCLUSION:

It was concluded that nurses commonly encounter patient rights issues in their workplace. However, the majority of the nurses who participated in the study had a very good level of knowledge about privacy and confidentiality. Age, educational level or length of working experience was insignificantly associated with the level of knowledge of privacy and confidentiality.

Financial support and sponsorship Nil.

Conflicts of interest There are no conflicts of interest.

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