

Review Article

Forensic Nursing

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Abstract

Forensic nursing is defined as the application of the nursing process to public or legal proceedings, and the application of forensic health care in the scientific investigation of trauma and/or death related to abuse, violence, criminal activity, liability, and accidents. The forensic nurse integrates forensic and nursing sciences in the assessment and care of populations affected by physical, psychological, or social violence or trauma. Privacy, respect, and dignity characterize the services that the forensic nurse provides to those affected by crime, trauma, and intentional harm. In addition, the forensic nurse strongly advocates for minimum standards of assessment, collection of specimens for forensic analysis, and reporting of crime. Forensic nurses provide specialized care for patients who are experiencing acute and long term health consequences associated with victimization or violence, and/or have unmet evidentiary needs relative to having been victimized or accused of victimization. In addition, forensic nurses provide consultation and testimony for civil and criminal proceedings relative to nursing practice, care given, and opinions rendered regarding findings. Forensic nursing care is not separate and distinct from other forms of medical care, but rather integrated into the overall care needs of individual patients.

Keywords: Forensic nursing; Legal proceedings and Forensic nurse.

Introduction

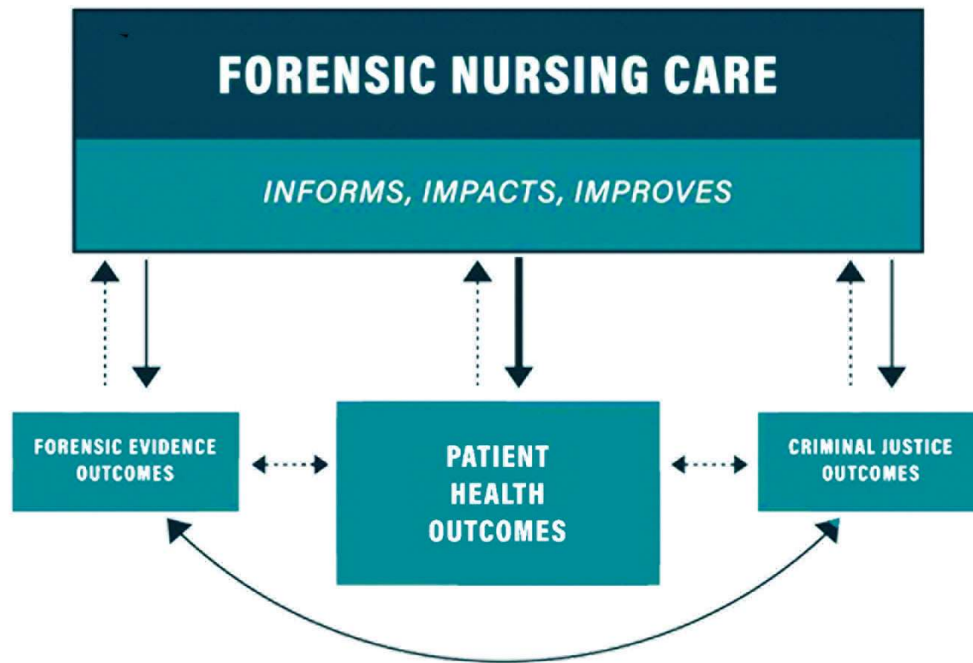
Forensic nursing practice is grounded in the rich bio-psycho-social-spiritual education of registered nurses and uses the nursing process to diagnose

and treat individuals, families, and communities affected by violence and trauma, and the systems that respond to them. Forensic nursing targets the identification, management, and prevention of intentional and unintentional injuries in a global

community. The forensic nurse collaborates with agents in the healthcare, social, and legal systems to investigate and interpret clinical presentations and pathologies by evaluating intentional or unintentional physical and psychological injury; describing the scientific relationships between

injury and evidence; and interpreting the associated or influencing factors. Promoting and ensuring gender equality, and empowering rural women through decent work and productive employment, not only contributes to inclusive and sustainable economic growth, but

THE CONSTRUCTED THEORY OF FORENSIC NURSING CARE



Forensic Nurse: Roles and Responsibilities

Forensic nursing is a multifaceted and complex specialty practice. Its responsibilities, functions, roles, and skills derive from general nursing practice, yet the specialty of forensic nursing has developed in accordance with its distinctive practice environments and populations. Forensic nursing practice, concerned primarily with individuals and populations affected by violence and trauma, their families, communities, and the systems that respond to them, may include but is not limited to:

1. Assessment, diagnosis, planning, implementation, evaluation of, and scientific inquiry about human, program, and system responses to injury and interventions following injury to individuals, families, communities, cultures, and environments.
2. Identification of the pathology of intentional or unintentional injury in persons who are living or deceased.
3. Episodic care for populations affected by trauma, including those legally defined as victims, suspects, and perpetrators.
4. Collection, preservation, transfer, and analysis of specimens/samples holding potential evidentiary value within the legal system.
5. Participation in the generation, dissemination, and use of evidence-based research in forensic nursing practice delivered to patients, communities, and systems.
6. Utilization of formative and summative evaluation processes in forensic nursing roles and environments internationally.
7. Administration, organization, and coordination of the forensic nursing role in programs, systems, and environments where forensic nurses practice.
8. Involvement and influence in both internal and external systems where professional and societal regulation of forensic nursing practice impacts public health and safety.
9. Development and support of local, regional, and global policy and public health as it

relates to injury and the prevention of injury in a variety of cultures and communities.

10. Promotion of and accountability to the ethical paradigms within forensic nursing.
11. Development and implementation of professional and community education programs of interest to forensic nurses that address prevention and interventions in primary, secondary, and tertiary settings.
12. Development and promotion of the multidisciplinary collaboration between the forensic nurse and others in all roles and practice environments, such as community and system advocates, forensic scientists, and legal professionals.

Forensic Nursing Practice Settings:

Forensic nurses provide care throughout the domains of nursing practice, administration, education, research, and consultation. Furthermore, forensic nurses practice independently and collaboratively as needed in various settings whenever and wherever health and legal issues intersect. Forensic nurses also interact with other systems in healthcare, community, and legal environments, including:

1. Hospital and pre-hospital settings and clinics.
2. Legal or investigative arenas.
3. Commercial, not for profit, and non-profit organizations.
4. Governmental organizations and programs.
5. Educational and industrial settings.
6. Residential and correctional institutions.

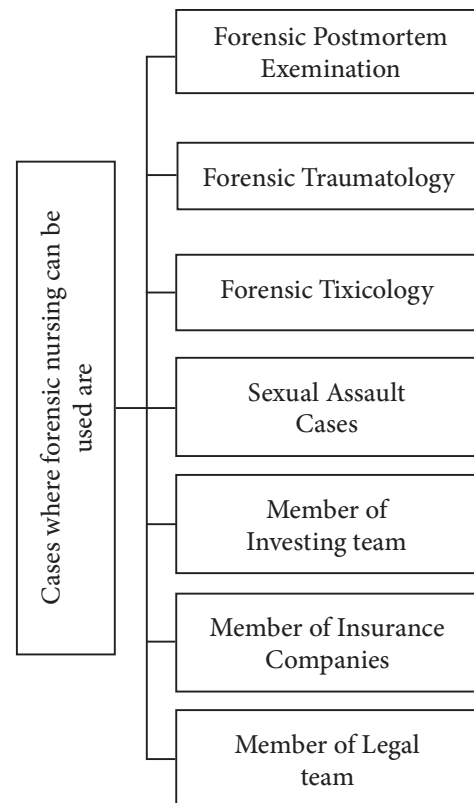
The systems in which forensic nurses practice vary, depending on location, funding sources, community standards, and legal influences, and include:

1. Healthcare (e.g., hospitals, surgery centers, community clinics).
2. Investigative (e.g., medical examiner, coroner, law enforcement agencies).
3. Criminal justice (e.g., district attorney, public defender offices).
4. Correctional (e.g., jails, prisons, and detention centers).
5. Public sector (e.g., military, local, state, provincial, and federal agencies).
6. Social services (e.g., child/adult protective services, advocacy centers).
7. Educational (e.g., K-12 schools, colleges, universities).
8. Private sector (e.g., industries, agencies,

firms).

9. International organizations (e.g., World Health Organization).

In addition, forensic nurse entrepreneurs establish businesses that center around their forensic nursing practice and consultation expertise. Forensic nurses also serve local, regional, national, and international advisory boards and working groups to establish best practices, build consensus, and enact change to better serve populations affected by violence and trauma.



Forensic Nursing Practice

Forensic nursing roles and practices vary across setting (as discussed above), populations served (e.g., pediatric, adult, older adult), and the type of violence or trauma experienced (e.g., sexual abuse, intimate partner violence, medicolegal death investigation). Thus, forensic nursing practices may be described based on setting, population, type of violence, or a combination thereof, in addition to the specific role of the nurse (e.g., clinician, researcher, and educator). For example, forensic nursing roles may include clinical practice, education, administration, research, and consultation in any one or more of the following focal areas of violence or injury:

1. Sexual violence

2. Intimate partner violence
3. Physical abuse, maltreatment, and neglect
4. Interpersonal violence
5. Violence resulting in death
6. Intentional and unintentional injury
7. Mass disaster (manmade and natural)

Violence is a global healthcare issue affecting individuals, families, groups, communities, and systems. Forensic nursing specifically responds to the specialized needs of populations affected by violence and trauma as can be seen in the following three examples.

Forensic Nursing and Sexual Assault: One well-known domain in forensic nursing practice is that of responding to the trauma of sexual assault and abuse, and intervening through actions in systems to mitigate the impact of sexual violence on individuals, families, communities, and society. Forensic nurses provide care for patients reporting sexual assault in a variety of settings, including emergency departments or clinics.

Forensic Nursing and Medicolegal Death Investigation: Forensic nurses involved in death investigation bring nursing skills of observation, data collection, and analysis to the determination of manner and cause of death. One objective of the forensic nurse in this setting is to advocate for the forensic patient (the deceased) through the application of nursing skills and knowledge. Forensic nurses have an obligation to consider health promotion beyond the present investigation, using the outcomes of death. The forensic nurse investigating death promotes health among colleagues, families, and communities of the deceased through the manner and tone of investigation. The forensic nursing role includes the preservation of dignity, caring, and protection of human rights even after death.

Forensic Nursing and Psychiatric Mental Health/Correctional Settings: Forensic nursing includes the psychiatric mental health nurse who applies knowledge of psychiatric principles and nursing theory to the care of persons in acute care, community based, or correctional settings who have psychological or mental disorders. The psychiatric nurse may encounter patients who, by virtue of their emotional or mental disorder, commit or are likely to commit crimes or trauma against themselves or others. The forensic nurse in a psychiatric mental health setting possesses particularized knowledge and competencies in the assessment, care, and evaluation of individuals with mental disorders as they relate to criminal

behavior. The forensic nurse applies principles of forensic psychiatry and nursing to clinically assess, evaluate, and treat individuals or populations with crime-related mental disorders. In addition, the forensic nurse possesses expertise in providing care for patients with mental disorders in secure settings and refining that care to minimize the patient's risk of victimization, self-injury, or injury to others (Mason & Mercer, 1996). The forensic nurse in this role has formal graduate nursing education with an emphasis on forensic nursing care and interpersonal skills in responding to psychological trauma and abuse, neuropathology and criminology, and role transitions in victims and aggressors.

Tenets of Forensic Nursing

Forensic nurses provide direct services to individuals, families, communities, and populations; they affect the systems in which they function. In addition, forensic nurses provide consultative services to nursing, medical, social, and other healthcare and legal professionals and entities. Moreover, forensic nurses provide factual and expert court testimony regarding both intentional and unintentional injury of the living or the deceased.

The forensic nurse develops and evaluates programs of care related to intentional and unintentional injury, crime, victimization, violence, abuse, and exploitation at the individual, community, state, provincial, district, regional, national, and international levels. For example, the registered nurse practicing in a risk management department in a hospital setting develops protocols for the collection of data and responses to indicators of patient or staff risk in the healthcare setting, including injuries and other issues related to safety. In contrast, the forensic nurse working in a healthcare setting uses forensic nursing expertise (e.g., knowledge of medical and scientific investigation, specimen collection/preservation, and intentional and unintentional injury) in the investigation of injury and trauma and criminality as related to specific populations, such as older adults, persons with disabilities (Humphreys & Campbell, 2011), or those who die unexpectedly.

Skill Application in Forensic Nursing

The following list conveys an example of the significant diversity of skills of the forensic nurse:

1. Application of public health and forensic principles to the registered nursing practice, including bio-psycho-social-spiritual aspects

- of forensic nursing care in the scientific investigation/evaluation, diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of trauma and/or death of victims, suspects, and perpetrators, including the measurement of outcomes and outputs of the practice.
2. Development and implementation of systems relevant to forensic nursing, including the development of systems that care for individuals, families, and communities in relation to injury, both intentional and unintentional; to the care of individuals, families, communities, or populations involved with criminal justice systems; and to the measure the quality and safety of outcomes
 3. Development of quality forensic nursing care strategies through evidence based practice and inquiry that target prevention of injury, both intentional and unintentional.
 4. Development, analysis, and implementation of health policy relevant to forensic nurses and patient populations in forensic settings
 5. Development and implementation of ethically sound, evidence based, and culturally relevant processes within forensic nursing settings and systems.
 6. Development, analysis, reporting, and dissemination of relevant forensic data, evidence based outcomes, and outputs.
 7. Identification, collection, and organization of data that is relevant to forensic nurses.
 8. Provision of testimony, both fact and expert, in judicial settings, competency hearings, and other venues.
 9. Design, evaluation, reporting, implementation, and dissemination of evidence based and peer-reviewed research that is relevant to forensic nurses.
 10. Analysis of outcomes and influence in justice systems and on legislation that pertains to forensic nursing practice and healthcare quality, safety, outcomes, and outputs.
 11. Consultation with nursing practice communities and the multidisciplinary communities of medicine, legal systems, advocacy agencies, governments, and their agents.
 12. Multidisciplinary and interprofessional collaboration with justice, political, and social systems, and the individuals who work within those systems.
 13. Quality education of various disciplines regarding forensic nursing practice.
 14. Leadership, administration, and management within forensic and healthcare settings.
 15. Evidence-based investigative and forensic interviewing.
 16. Forensic medical histories for the purpose of diagnosis, treatment, and/or referral.
 17. Evaluation of crime scenes and trauma within settings that is relevant to the forensic nurse.
 18. Analysis of forensic healthcare quality through continuous review processes.
 19. Provision of safe, evidence based, direct patient care related to injury, crime, victimization, violence, abuse, and exploitation.
 20. Provision of safe, evidence based forensic mental health care.
 21. Collection and preservation of specimens and items for forensic analysis.
 22. Integration of evidence based and evidence-informed forensic nursing practice to improve care of the forensic patient.
 23. Creation and implementation in forensic nursing systems and environments to improve the quality of forensic patient care, safety, and outcomes.

Educational Preparation for Forensic Nursing

Historically, registered nurses have refined and developed their forensic nursing skills through clinical practice and continuing education. Today, five primary routes exist for preparation in forensic nursing (Burgess, Berger, & Boersma, 2004):

1. **Continuing education coursework:** Nurses can gain additional skills and knowledge about topics of interest to forensic nurses through continuing education courses.
2. **Certificate programs:** These provide content that is relevant to the forensic nurse, establish entrance requirements, and often include clinical internships that result in a certificate detailing the completion of coursework.
3. **Undergraduate nursing education:** Undergraduate academic programs in accredited schools of nursing offer electives, minors, or concentrations in forensic nursing that can contribute to a degree in nursing.
4. **Graduate nursing education:** The knowledge and skills acquired in baccalaureate and prelicensure nursing programs are enhanced in formal graduate study. Following matriculation and completion of the forensic

core content and prescribed forensic clinical experiences, the forensic nurse receives a master's or doctorate degree in the specialty of nursing.

5. **Post-doctoral education or fellowships:** The specific content and skills acquired in the terminal nursing degree programs are enhanced by formal forensic nursing core content and prescribed forensic clinical experiences. The programs may award diplomas.

Specialty Certification in Forensic Nursing

1. Forensic nurses demonstrate competency to the public through recognition and pursuit of excellence in practice. Certification in forensic nursing is considered a priority for the specialty and is based on the identification of practice competencies and skills reflective of evidence based practice. The forensic nurse demonstrates expertise in a forensic nursing role through credentialing designed to recognize clinical experience, knowledge, and heuristic practice wisdom. The forensic nurse acquires and maintains the credentials made available through certifying bodies of the forensic specialty and contributes to the evidence based/research-informed knowledge, standards, and criteria for specialty certification.

Trends and Issues in Forensic Nursing

1. **Technology and forensic health care:** Technology affects forensic nursing across all domains of practice, patient care, coordination of care, and services. Technology may be used in the abuse, control, and harassment of the patient/victim. It can affect the timing of forensic nursing services (e.g., extending the time frame for sexual assault examinations). Technology such as telehealth, telemedicine, wireless transmission of secured data, and digital transmission of patient data across tablets or mobile phones has forever changed the delivery and coordination of healthcare services. These same technologies that affect all nursing practice and patient care also affect forensic nursing. Forensic nurses will be expected to evaluate and integrate new technologies for delivering forensic healthcare services. At times, this evaluation may be a critical appraisal of whether a new technology enhances or impedes patient/victim centered care. Forensic nurses

must remain diligent in reviewing and critically assessing the literature related to new technologies (or new applications for existing technologies) so as to understand the limitations of use or interpretation of results.

2. **Forensic Nursing Care for All Victims of Violence:** Forensic nurses are continuing to serve a more diverse population of patients affected by violence. Due to the recognized need for forensic health care for populations that have experienced specific forms of violence involving unique dynamics, forensic nurses are providing care to special populations, such as older adults, persons who are victims of human trafficking, persons who have been tortured in their country of origin and are seeking political asylum, persons affected by gang related violence, persons who are stalked, persons who are affected by systematic violence, or children who have been victimized through the use of technology (e.g., child pornography). These nurses are serving as change agents and engaging in specialized education and cross-sector training to meet the unique needs of these specific forensic patients.
3. **Forensic Nursing: A Global Population Focus:** Forensic nursing and public health nursing are inextricably linked, particularly in the primary, secondary, and tertiary care regarding intentional and unintentional injury involving individuals, families, communities, and populations. The forensic nursing specialist will influence policy, practice, and trends when addressing issues of population focused care related to intentional and unintentional injury prevention and intervention. As a well-educated and respected professional, the graduate forensic nurse will link public health principles and forensic science to forensic nursing practice to create a foundation for the evaluation and treatment of injury in populations worldwide.
4. **Collaboration:** Collaborating individuals, communities, organizations, and governments that support the development of the forensic nursing role will bring the forensic nurse specialist international recognition. The specialty knowledge, with acceptance and understanding of the scope and standards of practice, will continue to improve the response to patients across the globe who require forensic health care in multidisciplinary systems.

5. **Research:** Forming the foundation for evidence based practice, research supports the forensic nurse's role. Forensic nursing research is expected to accelerate; clinical, educational, and administrative Forensic Advanced Practice Registered Nurses will require and produce scientific evidence in support of their growing practices. Forensic nursing research will influence government policy, legislation, and action as the scientific base increases and the forensic nursing community expands its graduate education, experience, and credentialing processes. It is also projected that the international multidisciplinary community will increasingly acknowledge the forensic nurse as a valuable multidisciplinary team member where healthcare and legal systems intersect.
6. **Education:** Forensic nursing educational programs will continue to grow as an increasing number of accredited universities and colleges worldwide develop masters and doctoral curricula in the specialty of forensic nursing. The master's and doctoral education will reflect the expansion of the scientific evidence base of forensic nursing. Forensic nursing education will follow the trends for specialties using distance learning based on advanced technology, electronically supported simulations, and telemedicine. This trend will support access to education for and by forensic nursing graduate students in remote locations worldwide and will improve access to quality forensic nursing care to the patient populations residing in remote communities. Future forensic nurses will assume leadership positions and create new venues for forensic nurse practice, such as entrepreneurial endeavors and legislative representation. Future forensic nurses will widely influence nursing practice; elements of forensic nursing content will continue to be woven throughout nursing coursework at all levels of nursing education.

CONCLUSION

Forensic nurses remain one of the most diverse groups of clinicians in the nursing profession with respect to patient populations served, practice settings, and forensic and healthcare services provided. The forensic nurse continually seeks educational opportunities that enhance his or her ability to better serve the ever growing forensic healthcare needs of patients and populations. In addition, the forensic nurse must maintain and foster strong multidisciplinary and interprofessional relationships to meet the comprehensive forensic healthcare needs of patients and to ensure patient/victim centered care is provided throughout the continuum of care.

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