

THE ATTITUDE OF NURSES TOWARDS THE CARE OF ELDERLY PEOPLE

JN Gwala, BM Zungu and BB Ntombela

INTRODUCTION

The number of nurses entering the nursing profession is decreasing, but demands placed upon the Health Services are increasing primarily due to the increasing number of people in our society. People are living longer and it is apparent that some extra provision must be made to care effectively for the elderly members of our society. Various studies have shown that care of the elderly is an unpopular clinical field for nurses. (Shape, 1986. Notter, 1992. Vickels 1982).

The attitudes of nursing staff affect not only their own expectations about their working lives but also the way in which they approach patients. The research conducted by Shape on attitudes of the caregivers toward the care of the elderly people, using a Likert-type scale indicated that the attitude of trained staff was unfavourable towards the care of the elderly (Shape 1986:406).

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of this study were:-

- to assess the attitudes of student nurses and trained nurses, towards the care of elderly patients.
- to identify causes of such attitudes towards the elderly patient care.
- to make relevant recommendations.

METHOD

A convenience sample of 20 nurses working in the hospital filled in a self-administered questionnaire, the aim of which was to explore their attitudes towards the care of the elderly patient. The sample was made up of 5 professional nurses, 5 enrolled nurses, 5 nursing assistants and 5 student nurses who were guaranteed confidentiality.

Permission to conduct the study was received from both the Superintendent and the Senior Nursing Service Manager of the institution.

FINDINGS

Of 20 respondents 70% felt that the elderly people are too particular about their health and that they criticize the care given to them by nurses. Furthermore the respondents were asked to indicate whether or not old people demanded excessive love and reassurance. Sixty percent of 20 responded by agreeing to this fact.

TABLE 1 Shows that most of the respondents believed that elderly people do not comply with their treatment. They stated that if they (elderly people) are given treatment, they do not swallow it but take it out or if it is time to take medication, those who can walk just disappear.

In this study it also came up that the nurses believed elderly people cannot learn new things. This was expressed by 70% of the respondents. Some of the respondents mentioned that when they educated the elderly people, they only could remember very few things and had to start again. Respondents further on said that it is even more demoralising to nurse elderly patients who are insane. They verbalized and said

"They have a bizarre behaviour"
"They become hyperactive"
"They give false and unexisting information".

DISCUSSION

The findings of the study conducted suggested that the attitude of the nurses towards the care of the elderly is negative. This is demonstrated by the following:-

- Out of 20 respondents, 70% felt that the elderly people criticize the health care given to them.

- Sixty percent out of 20 had a strong feeling that most of old people make excessive demands for love and reassurance.
- Sixty percent of the subjects stated that elderly people do not comply with their treatment.
- Ninety percent of the subjects maintained that elderly people get upset easily.
- Seventy percent felt that elderly people cannot learn new things.
- Eighty five percent of the respondents stated that elderly people become insane and helpless.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Ideally the elderly should be nursed by staff trained in geriatric care who would understand the aging process and how it affects health, disease and rehabilitation.

Nursing staff who prefer to care for elderly people and who have a positive attitude should be allocated to geriatric units.

Continuing education on the care of elderly people should be encouraged for all nurses in the form of in-service education.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Burnside, I M (1990): ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE CARE OF ELDERLY PEOPLE *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 15.(1) P 777-781
- Notter, L E (1991): NURSES ATTITUDES TO CARE OF ELDERLY *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 15.(2) P 569
- Shape, J (1986): NURSES ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE CARE OF THE ELDERLY *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 12.(1) P 406
- Vickels, S (1982): EXPLORATORY STUDY TO EVALUATE STAFF ATTITUDES TOWARDS GERIATRIC CARE *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 15.(2) P 678

Table 1 - Elderly people do not comply with treatment

Response	P/N	ESN	ENA	S/N	TOTAL	%
Strongly disagree	0	0	0	0	0	0%
Disagree	0	0	0	0	0	0%
Neutral	0	0	5	3	8	40%
Agree	1	3	0	2	6	30%
Strongly agree	4	2	0	0	6	30%
Total	5	5	5	5	20	100%

JN Gwala B.Cur
BM Zungu M.Soc.Sc.
BB Ntombela
Department of Nursing
University of Zululand