



Nursing Protocols in Evidence-Based Practice

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Abstract

Nursing today is globally recognized as central to the process of implementing evidence-based practice (EBP). Nursing protocols aim to provide sufficient effective, qualitative, and quantitative care, ensuring efficiency for clinical practice and causing more benefit than harm. A nursing protocol can describe how to implement the nursing process – emphasizing the assessment of the needs of (healthy and ill) individuals and the evaluation of interventions applied, the methods of administering specific drugs, how to provide special care for patients with specific symptoms and individuals who experience difficult or special situations, but it can also concern the way of exercising the administration and management of the nursing staff, the ways of communication between the members of the nursing staff team under specific conditions as well as the lines of authority that exist between the members.

Keywords: Nursing; Evidence-based practice; Clinical protocols

Introduction

Evidence-based practice- EBP in medicine and nursing has become a global interdisciplinary trend and approach to decision-making in clinical practice, aimed at identifying knowledge gaps and best available practices for making decisions about the individual care of each patient [1]. Nursing, in this context, works to integrate new elements, both technical and theoretical, which evolve from simple empirical work to quality care [2]. Florence Nightingale was considered by many authors to be the pioneer of evidence-based nursing since her available observations were based on her studies at the time and her experiments on the epidemiological data of patients [3].

Nursing is now universally recognized as central to the process of EBP implementation, considering that it comprises the largest

workforce in health [2]. Currently, nursing research has sought ways to enable the integration of evidence into practice, mainly through techniques that facilitate the work of nurses and other support staff. Nursing protocols are examples of such means. These are constructed and structured according to the best available scientific evidence, based on the current hospital reality, the technical experience of the professionals and of course the preferences of the patients [4]. Protocols aim to provide sufficient effective, qualitative, and quantitative care, ensuring efficiency for clinical practice and causing more benefit than harm [5].

In addition, nursing intervention protocols aim to facilitate decision-making by describing a specific care situation with details and functional specifications. In this way they bring greater safety and efficiency to the team and a reduction in inventory variability,

facilitating the integration of new technologies and rational use of health resources. Moreover, they enable the monitoring of process and outcome indicators and contribute to the maintenance of high-quality services by assessing and measuring the quality and safety of care [6].

It is worth noting that during World Nurses Day on May 12, the International Council of Nurses-ICN underlined the necessity of bridging the gap from documentation to practice, highlighting the importance of the existence of Clinical Nursing Protocols, with the aim of the continuous improvement of every healthcare professional, of each process and overall of each service, in order to cope effectively with the modern and demanding environment of health service provision [7].

Discussion

Existing knowledge and experience

A Therapeutic Protocol is defined as the set of instructions for diagnosis and treatment of a disease, based on the findings and clinical application of medical science. In the same context, a Clinical Nursing Protocol is defined as that specific written procedure, which defines the nursing/midwifery actions in each situation [8].

Modern Greek university hospitals are adopting more and more nursing protocols and accredited procedures, such as that of the General University Hospital AHEPA of Thessaloniki, which describes how the protocols of nursing operations are integrated-structured plans that describe with pacing, details, and all precision the route that follows the nurse in a specific nursing act. The creation of protocols stems from the need for the continuous improvement of the provided nursing care, the reduction of costs and results from the problems that appear during the control of the quality of the provided nursing care. The problems may be related to the method of sterilization, disinfection, or the sequence of actions during the process of a specific nursing procedure. They are also related to complications or the frequency of complications with the cost of hospitalization and the quality of services provided to citizens [9].

In order to solve the problems within the hospital, we refer to documented nursing procedures and international clinical guidelines. Based on the current conditions of the hospital, the clinical practice changes. If we achieve our goal, we adopt the changes in our protocol process. This is how simple, everyday in-hospital problems are solved rationally. The protocols are constantly updated and modified considering the current valid and reliable scientific information that is published. The simultaneous application of medical and nursing control is a way of evaluating the protocol, so that it is not a rigid bureaucratic tool [10].

Clinical nursing protocols are developed with the consensus of the nursing, medical and administrative staff to be utilized in an organized health care system. Recording the planning stage in a written or electronic plan of care provides continuity of care, enhances communication, helps determine service or unit staffing needs, documents the nursing process, serves as an educational tool, and coordinates care delivery among of various health professionals and depicts individualized care of the individual,

reflecting the concerns of the individual and significant others [11], as well as their physical, psychosocial and cultural needs and capabilities [12]. The implementation of electronic care plans leads to a gain in time, efficiency, and effectiveness [13], because in this way more patient problems are recognized, more interventions are implemented [14] and the implementation of guidelines during the provision of health care is promoted [15] after from the required training [16].

Reviewing the international literature, it is easy to see that there is confusion about the use of the relevant terms. There are many terms (clinical guidelines, clinical practice guidelines, clinical protocols, care plans, critical pathways, clinical pathways, integrated care pathways, care pathways, care maps, etc.) [17-18] which are deemed necessary to be clarified, listing them corresponding definitions:

- Clinical Practice Guidelines are systematically developed statements that assist health scientists and patients in making decisions regarding the choice of appropriate health care in specific clinical cases [19]. They concern all health professionals.
- Clinical Protocols provide a comprehensive set of strict criteria, describing the management steps for a single clinical situation [20]. They concern a specific category of health professionals (nurses, doctors, midwives, etc.).
- Care Plans are protocols that have been adapted to the respective workplace (Hospital, Health Center, home nursing, etc.) and concern a specific group of health professionals [20].

Conclusion

The necessity of the distinct development of nursing clinical protocols and their medical counterparts is due to the distinction between nursing diagnosis versus medical diagnosis. While medical diagnosis defines the clinical judgment of the physician, which recognizes or defines a specific disease or pathological condition, nursing diagnosis defines the clinical judgment of the nurse for individual, family or community reactions to existing, possible or potential health problems or life situations. In the modern era, with the eye on the holistic care of the patient, with a focus on humanity and the goal of quality, safe and quantitative health care provision, the development of clinical nursing protocols based on evidence-based nursing is the only way to achieve the above.

Acknowledgment

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Conflicts of Interest

No conflict of interest.

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