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Touching patients: Orthodox Jewish nursing students experience

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Background: Touching patients is a common practice included in nurses' daily work: Either assisting ADL activities, giving a hand to help a patient out of bed, or even therapeutic touch. Orthodox Jews culture does not allow any kind of touch between man and woman who are not married to each other. During their nursing studies, orthodox Jews women nursing students have no choice – they have to touch patients. A lot of data exists at the subject of therapeutic touch, but this aspect of nursing students cultural coping was not explored yet.

Method: A semi-structured in depth interviews were done with 40 female nursing religious orthodox Jews nursing students, years 3-4 of nursing studies. The interviews were analyzed according to themes, text analyzing was also done.

Results: Few themes were prominent at the interviews and were also remarkable during text analysis: lack of understanding from the clinical supervisors, a gap between the intellectual understanding [“It is necessary and Jewish rules allow me to do so”] and the emotional feelings [“I recoil touching male patients”]. Another prominent theme was a concern about losing soul sensitivity, concern of becoming dull about touching men. Lack of dialog\ talking about the subject, feeling of loneliness, embarrassment and helplessness were also noticed.

Students coping found to be unique and contrasts previous studies results.

Conclusion: Orthodox Jewish female nursing students have certain challenges due to their specific cultural background when it comes to treating male patients. These challenges have no practical answer at the clinical practice area. Further research and supervisor education is needed.

Biography

14 years of experience as a surgery department nurse at Hadassah Mount Scopus, Jerusalem. PhD researcher at the subject of cultural competence of nurses in Israel. Clinical instructor for nursing students and lecturer at Tal institution nursing school, Jerusalem.

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