
Educating Nursing Students About Quality Care and Safe Practices in the AIDS Epidemic

JEANNETTE R. SPERO, RN, PhD

Dr. Spero is Dean of the University of Cincinnati School of Nursing and President of the American Association of Colleges of Nursing.

Tearsheet requests to American Association of Colleges of Nursing, One Dupont Circle, Suite 530, Washington, DC 20036.

Synopsis

Nursing students, as future health care providers, need comprehensive instruction about AIDS—the many manifestations of both the disease itself and the pandemic. As health educators and practitioners, nurses play a major role in safeguarding the health care setting and the community by their efforts in preventing transmission of the AIDS virus. Nurses are and will continue to be responsible for administering the major portion of the direct health care that AIDS patients require and

for teaching basic nursing skills to other care givers.

According to a 1987 survey of 461 nursing programs conducted by the American Association of Colleges of Nursing, AIDS content is being incorporated into the curriculums of the majority of programs that responded. Students require an in-depth knowledge of AIDS to enable them to address effectively the needs of AIDS patients and their families. Because of the complex psychosocial, ethical, and legal issues, careful attention must be given to the development of students' skills in making clinical decisions that will promote effective nursing intervention when addressing problems in nursing care. Curriculums should also include assessment of the special needs of members of minority groups that are disproportionately affected by AIDS.

Schools of nursing in colleges and universities can serve as key resources for developing curriculums, policies, and practice patterns that will assist the nursing community and the public in responding to the AIDS epidemic.

MAINTEINING AND ENHANCING THE QUALITY of care for patients with AIDS is a critical endeavor for the facilities of schools of nursing in the United States. Strategies are being explored and evaluated by deans and directors of baccalaureate nursing programs to prepare nursing students for future practice. Faculty of schools of nursing must educate students about the disease while they work collaboratively with nursing services of hospitals and other entities to develop effective models for AIDS education, patient care, and research.

Evidence that the process of educating is underway is apparent in the results of a soon-to-be released nationwide survey of 603 baccalaureate nursing programs conducted in 1987 by the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN). This undertaking was supported by a special project grant from the Division of Nursing, Health Resources and Services Administration, Public Health Service, to expand the national data base on RN baccalaureate nursing education. As part of the survey, deans and senior nursing students were

asked specific questions regarding AIDS education. Eighty-eight percent of the 461 deans who responded reported that specific AIDS content was part of their nursing curriculums. A special report, including the AIDS data, will be available from AACN in early summer of 1988 (1).

Nurses require certain skills and an in-depth knowledge of AIDS for three primary purposes: (a) to administer a large portion of the direct health care that these patients require; (b) to teach basic nursing skills to other AIDS care givers; and (c) to safeguard the school, work, and community environments by helping to prevent the transmission of the virus.

To fulfill these purposes nursing schools need to expand their efforts in the following areas:

1. developing AIDS policies and guidelines specific to the school of nursing;
2. incorporating specific emphasis on AIDS in the nursing curriculum;
3. identifying nursing strategies that effectively

meet the specific needs of minority groups that are disproportionately affected by the disease;

4. addressing and proposing resolutions of the economic, legal, and ethical issues raised during the delivery of care to patients with AIDS; and

5. contributing to the nursing research that underlies the care of patients with AIDS and to effective practices to prevent the spread of the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV).

AIDS Policies and Guidelines

Increasingly, universities and colleges are developing general policies and guidelines to respond to the complex issues related to the AIDS epidemic. Nursing schools, in particular, are confronted by two major issues: (a) protecting the rights and welfare of patients, employees, students, and other members of the public and (b) providing education regarding employment-related and infection control issues that arise when students, employees, or patients contract AIDS.

Acting as a resource and referral center to promote dissemination of AIDS materials to baccalaureate nursing programs, AACN in 1987 invited schools of nursing to send information regarding current AIDS policies or guidelines (or both) to AACN to be shared with other programs that are in the process of developing similar guidelines.

Emphasizing AIDS in the Curriculum

The deans of baccalaureate nursing programs are currently in the process of identifying and implementing essential components of the curriculum that can address the needs of patients with AIDS and their families, and they are promoting nursing strategies that meet these needs. Assessment of high-risk groups is specifically emphasized. Information and teaching about virus transmission focuses on protective measures to be taken by nurses when providing direct patient care to infected patients.

Nursing faculties need to be provided with current information about AIDS that can be incorporated into their curriculums. Important areas should include the epidemiology of AIDS, Centers for Disease Control AIDS Guidelines and, especially, information on the potent legal, ethical, and psychological issues surrounding AIDS.

To assist educators, in November 1987 New York University's School of Nursing was awarded a grant from the National Institute of Mental

Health, Public Health Service, and was chosen as one of nine centers across the nation to offer a 3-year program of educational workshops, training sessions, and conferences for health care professionals and paraprofessionals on the psychological problems associated with AIDS. These events will be held at the Washington Square campus of the university; they will present the latest information about the mental health needs of persons with AIDS and health care providers. The workshops will focus on the mental health needs of patients, their families and friends, persons with antibodies to the AIDS virus, persons with AIDS-related complex (ARC), persons in the so-called risk groups including gay men and IV drug users, and the worried well. An important component of the training is how to promote behavioral changes to reduce the risk of contracting AIDS. Additionally, support groups address the mental health needs of care providers serving AIDS patients. Emphasis throughout the university project will be on helping health care workers to learn the best ways in which to support persons with AIDS and their care givers while dealing with their own problems, such as fear, anxiety, negative attitudes, and burnout. (The NYU School of Nursing will be holding annual conferences to present the latest information on clinical, legal, ethical, and public policy issues. For additional information on the conferences, contact the AIDS Resources Center, telephone 212-998-5333.)

Nursing students and practitioners, so that they may effectively address this international epidemic, need to strengthen their knowledge base in immunology, virology, and the transmission of AIDS. They must learn new skills in taking histories about sensitive matters such as the details of sexual habits and drug use, receive advanced training in risk reduction counseling techniques, and deepen their knowledge of the ethical and legal considerations involved in caring for patients with AIDS.

Clinical objectives for students require them to focus on nursing care measures with in-depth emphasis on skin care, aseptic techniques, respiratory care, drug therapy, nutrition, and energy conservation. Because of the complex psychosocial, ethical, and legal issues that affect patients with AIDS, students' skills in making clinical decisions using appropriate values and principles in planning effective nursing strategies should be carefully developed. Nurses must offer ongoing support in order to provide AIDS patients, their families, significant others, and other care givers with

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education, effective counseling, and awareness of community resources, including the availability of financial and legal aid.

Nurses are becoming increasingly aware of their need to deal with the accumulated grief of caring for patients with AIDS. Nurses are learning to develop emotional and professional strategies to improve their ability to care for these patients.

In the 1987 AACN survey regarding AIDS content in nursing courses, 50 deans reported having specific clinical objectives for AIDS, and 26 deans offered designated classes. Clinical conferences were offered in 158 programs, and more than 230 respondents included aseptic principles and techniques in their skills laboratory curriculums. More than 60 percent of the deans reported that students had experienced the opportunity to care for AIDS patients in a clinical agency. Deans from 40 institutions had developed criteria for assigning AIDS patients to students in the clinical area while 87 deans were in the process of developing related criteria.

Strategies to Assist Minorities with AIDS

AIDS is spreading more rapidly among Hispanic and black populations, especially among the women and children, than in the general population. Members of these communities struggle not only with problems of drug abuse, but with poverty and limited educational opportunities. These obstacles present special challenges to nursing and health care providers; educating and working with minorities must be accomplished through methods that are culturally sensitive if they are to be effective. Nurses must continue to work collaboratively with other health care providers to explore innovative and effective approaches

to providing the quality health care that members of minority groups require.

In addition, schools of nursing can emphasize the prevention of AIDS as a community health objective and work with minority organizations to identify the specific nursing needs of minority patients with AIDS. Input from community groups is basic to developing effective strategies to prevent the spread of the epidemic.

Infants and children with AIDS are probably the most disadvantaged group in our society (2). Three-fourths of the approximately 800 children with AIDS are black or Hispanic (3). By 1991, it is expected that 10,000 children will have AIDS. Eighty percent of the children with AIDS have parents who also have AIDS. Mary Boland, Director of the AIDS Program at Children's Hospital in Newark, NJ, stated that nurses caring for such children are confronted by a dying family in crisis (4). Many parents become immobilized after learning of their child's diagnosis. Nurses must work to develop a caring, trustful relationship with the parent, stressing that while there is life, there is hope. Creative nursing strategies to enhance the quality of life for these families are continually being explored.

Economic, Legal, and Ethical Issues

Scitovsky and Rice have predicted a rise in direct personal health care costs from AIDS treatment from \$630 million in 1985 to \$8.5 billion in 1991 (5). If health care systems are to contain these costs while maintaining the quality of care, the involvement of nurses is critical. Deans of schools of nursing need to work closely with the administrators of nursing services to design and implement such systems.

As AIDS continues to afflict more Americans, nurses and health care providers must confront the ethical dilemmas that are associated with this disease and arrive at reasonable solutions. Three major ethical issues have been identified: supportive care versus life-sustaining treatments, the allocation of resources, and maintaining the confidentiality of information, particularly positive test results.

The legal and legislative issues surrounding AIDS are many; most involve a conflict between the rights of the individual and the interest of society at large. Common concerns for nursing educators include how to develop school admissions policies for students and teachers with AIDS, ARC, or seropositive test results and whether or

not blood tests for HIV exposure should be mandatory.

In health care settings, an additional set of legal issues arises. For example, is there a duty to warn persons likely to be at risk of infection from a particular person? Does the individual's right of privacy prevail? Can nurses refuse to care for patients with AIDS? Should students be assigned as primary care givers for patients with AIDS? As courts and legislators take up these issues, schools of nursing are just beginning to develop general guidelines to address these issues.

Nursing Research on AIDS

Nursing researchers must work to find teaching modalities to help prevent the spread of AIDS, effective nursing strategies to meet the needs of minority patients with AIDS and their families, accurate assessments of various treatment regimens, and models of cost-effective interdisciplinary collaboration that provide quality care and proper resource allocation.

The Federal nursing profession agencies are actively involved in a variety of AIDS-related, information-gathering, activities. Both the Division of Nursing of the Health Resources and Services Administration and the National Center for Nursing Research at the National Institutes of Health have scheduled a number of meetings to set priorities and develop an organized response to the many nursing needs evoked by the AIDS crisis. The agencies have issued calls for proposals dealing with nursing aspects of AIDS.

Deans of nursing schools have expressed strong interest in knowing about the development, progress, and effectiveness of models of collaboration that may help them to plan AIDS curriculums and clinical experiences in their own programs. Model programs such as the one developed at the New York University School of Nursing can provide direction to nursing programs and health care agencies nationwide. Most importantly, as other nursing programs and health care providers develop models for care of AIDS patients, there is a need to centralize the reporting of effective outcome strategies.

Work is already under way at schools of nursing on a number of projects. In responding to the AACN survey, approximately 50 deans indicated that they were actively planning some AIDS-related undertaking. Some deans reported being in the process of developing grant proposals that would promote multi-disciplinary AIDS education

for students and health care practitioners. One proposal developed at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst Division of Nursing is a plan to evaluate educational strategies specifically for Hispanic patients through nurse-run focus groups. Some projects under way in nursing programs were assessments of the level of nurses' knowledge about AIDS and their attitudes toward AIDS patients. At Rhode Island College, the students from the Department of Nursing, in cooperation with the Department's Health Education Office, are teaching peer groups on campus about AIDS. The School of Nursing at the Medical College of Ohio received a grant to administer an HIV antibody testing clinic at a local hospital for the northwest Ohio area. Clinical opportunities were being provided for undergraduate and graduate nursing students at the clinic, particularly in learning techniques for counseling AIDS patients.

Schools of nursing in colleges and universities serve as key resources for research in developing curriculum and practice patterns to assist the nursing community and the public in responding to AIDS.

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