

# Attitude of medical functionaries towards the need of nutritional knowledge of nurses in selected hospitals of Assam, India

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■ **ABSTRACT** : Nutritional knowledge and attitudes of medical functionaries from government and private hospitals in selected district of Assam, India was studied. About 90 per cent of practicing nurses had favorable attitudes toward nutrition. Age of the nurses exhibited positive influence towards the nutritional knowledge, while general educational qualification and mass media exposure had no significant correlation with the attitudes. Relationship between the nutritional knowledge of respondents with their opinion towards the need of their nutritional knowledge revealed that there was highly and positive significant correlation between nutritional knowledge of the respondents with their opinion towards the need of nutritional knowledge of nurses. Knowledgeable nurses had more positive attitudes toward their own role in nutrition education and toward the team approach to health care.

■ **KEY WORDS**: Nutritional knowledge

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**M**alnutrition is a crucial health problem that often occurs even in healthy societies, but it is revealed that malnutrition is a significant problem amongst hospitalized patients (Perry, 1997). This may be due to less involvement of nurses in patient's nutritional care. The most common cause for insufficient nutritional practice is lack of nutritional knowledge. Malnutrition is a long dated issue in the hospitals. In 1859, Florence Nightingale wrote that every careful observer of the sick will agree with this, that thousands of patients are annually starved in the midst of plenty. Many diseases like diabetes, CVD, gastric ulcer; uric acid etc. can be

controlled with balanced and routine diet. So considering nurse role as primary care providers, nurses are in the best position to ensure good nutrition for a patient. Appropriate knowledge and sincere concern about nutritional care by nurse is necessary to improve the hospitalized patient's nutritional status and to prevent malnutrition. Florence Nightingale suggested nurses to take special care about nutrition too. She said, "I would say to the nurse, have a rule of thought about your patient's diet. Consider and remember how much he has had and how much he ought to have today." The nursing and midwifery council (NMC) acknowledges that it is

the duty of the nurses to ensure hospitalized patients to eat a well nourished diet. But, study revealed that in Indian condition medical practitioners are lacking proper nutritional knowledge (Mahapatra *et al.*, 1987; Kapil *et al.*, 1990 and Talukdar and Sarmah, 2014). Mowe *et al.* (2008); Kim and Choue (2009) and Aishat *et al.* (2012) also reported that nurses had limited knowledge on nutrition. Inadequate knowledge on nutrition possesses obstacles in providing successful dietary care for patients (Morison *et al.*, 2010). Considering the importance of nutritional knowledge of practicing nurses, a study was undertaken with the aim to assess the nutritional knowledge of nurses in some selected hospitals of Assam.

### ■ RESEARCH METHODS

Three districts of Assam, namely Sivasagar, Jorhat and Golaghat were selected purposively for the study. From each district, one government hospital and one private hospital having multi disciplinary facilities were selected for the study. The baseline information on nutritional knowledge of practicing nurses from each hospital was obtained by using multiple choice questions of 20 randomly selected nurses. Five doctors from each selected hospitals were considered as respondents for finding out the opinion towards the need of nutritional knowledge of nurses.

Standard deviation was used to find out the respondents nutritional knowledge level and opinion of doctors and, respondents towards the need of nutritional knowledge. Mean  $\pm$  Standard Deviation criterion was used on the basis of their knowledge scores and opinion scores obtained from the questionnaire to classify the respondents according to their existing knowledge level on nutrition and their opinion (favourable and unfavourable) regarding the need of nutritional knowledge on nursing. Correlation co-efficient was also

computed to find out the relationship between the knowledge of nurses with their opinion towards the need of their nutritional knowledge. Fisher t-test was computed to test the significance of correlation co-efficient.

### ■ RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The overall opinion of doctors and nurses towards the need of nutritional knowledge of practicing nurses is presented in Table 1. It was revealed that majority of doctors and nurses had favourable opinion towards the nurses' need for nutritional knowledge. Doctors opined that as there were a very few dietician in the hospitals, a nurse with adequate nutritional knowledge would be helpful to them as well as to the hospitals to provide nutritional counselling to the patients. The respondents (nurses) felt the necessity of the nutritional knowledge for them to provide regular nutritional counselling to the patients more effectively. The present observation was in conformity with Christensson *et al.* (2003) and Kim and Choue (2009), while contradictory with Kobe (2006) and Bachrach *et al.* (2007).

While hospital wise (government hospital and private hospital) opinion was taken, all the doctors from both the government and private hospital had favourable opinion towards the need of nutritional knowledge for nurses while, 90 per cent respondents (nurses) from both government and private hospitals had favourable opinion towards the need of nutritional knowledge for them (Table 2). The opinion of the nurses towards the need of nutritional knowledge was encouraging and might show the positivity to improve the nurses existing nutritional knowledge, which in turn would help them to render effective counselling to the patients.

Relationship of opinion of respondents towards the need of nutritional knowledge of nurses with selected independent variables such as age, professional

**Table 1 : Doctors and nurses according to their opinion towards the need of nutritional knowledge of nurses**

Opinion	Doctors (n=30)		Respondents (n=120)	
	F	%	f	%
Favourable	30	100	97	81
Unfavourable	-	-	23	19

**Table 2 : Opinion towards the need of nutritional knowledge of nurses in the selected hospitals by the doctors and nurses**

Opinion	Doctors				Nurses (respondents)			
	Government hospitals (n=15)		Private hospitals (n=15)		Government hospitals (n=60)		Private hospitals (n=60)	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	f	%
Favourable	15	100	15	100	54	90	54	90
Unfavourable	-	-	-	-	6	10	6	10

**Table 3 : Relationship of opinion of respondents towards the need of their nutritional knowledge with selected independent variables**

Variables	Correlation co-efficient ('r')	t value
Age	0.31**	3.5**
Professional qualification	0.17	1.8NS
Professional experience	0.28 **	3.14**
Mass media exposure	0.07	0.76

\*\* indicates significance of value at P= 0.01 level, NS= Non-significant

**Table 4 : Relationships between nutritional knowledge of respondents with their opinion towards the need of their nutritional knowledge**

Variables	Correlation co-efficient ('r')	't' value
Knowledge	0.612	8.27**
Opinion		

\*\* indicates significance of value at P= 0.01 level

qualification, professional experience and mass media exposure is shown in Table 3. It was revealed that there were positive and highly significant correlation between the respondent's opinion towards the need of their nutritional knowledge with their age and professional experience. respondent's favouritism on opinion towards need of nutritional knowledge increased with the increase in their age and professional experience. Generally more aged nurses had more experience. The aged and experienced respondents had realized that they could provide effective nutritional counselling to the patients, if they would have sufficient nutritional knowledge. The respondents thought that they could monitor the nutritional intake of patients, quality and quantity of food with her sufficient nutritional knowledge and hence showed favourable opinion toward the need of their nutritional knowledge. Schaller (2000) and Schaller and James (2005) reported that older nurses with more years of experience, and nurses with general training (rather than a degree had a better knowledge on nutrition, which is in conformity with the present observation, however Endevelt *et al.* (2009) stated that as nurses grew older in their profession; their knowledge about nutrition got reduced if proper programme for skill development were not put in place.

However, there were no significant correlation between opinion of the respondents towards the need of their nutritional knowledge with professional qualification and mass media exposure (Table 3). Professional qualification and mass media exposure had no influence on opinion of the respondents towards the need of their

nutritional knowledge.

Relationship between the nutritional knowledge of respondents with their opinion towards the need of their nutritional knowledge revealed that there was highly and positive significant correlation between nutritional knowledge of the respondents with their opinion towards the need of nutritional knowledge of nurses (Table 4). It indicated that the respondent's favouritism towards the need of nutritional knowledge increased with the increase in their knowledge score on nutrition. More knowledgeable nurses might have felt more necessity of nutritional knowledge for nurses which might help to provide proper nutritional care to the patient, by giving proper counselling that might help the patients to get rid of different nutritional problems. More informative respondents might help the patients to increase their interest for food by changing menu with similar nutritional value and the respondents also might be able to monitor the menu to be adopted in the hospital, hence they might show more favouritism toward the need of nutritional knowledge for them.

#### Conclusion :

- All the doctors had favourable opinion towards the need for nurses' nutritional knowledge. A high majority (81 %) of respondents (nurses) also had favourable opinion towards their need for nutritional knowledge.
- The doctors from both government hospitals and private hospitals had favourable opinion towards the need of nutritional knowledge for nurses and 90 per cent respondents (nurses) from both government hospitals and private hospitals had favourable opinion towards the need of nutritional knowledge for them.
- There were highly positive significant correlation between the respondent's opinion towards the need of their nutritional knowledge with their age and professional experience.
- There was highly positive significant correlation between nutritional knowledge of the respondents with their opinion towards the need of nutritional knowledge of nurses.

Nurses play a vital role in the nutritional care, health promotion as well as education of patients. Dietary factors contribute for treating variety of illness, and therefore it is considered essential to have a proper nutritional knowledge of practicing nurses. Thus, from the present study it is recommended that :

- More emphasis should be given by organizing

training and intervention programme to those areas where the nurses had less knowledge

- Refresher course should be organised in both government and private hospitals on nutrition education to improve the existing knowledge of nurses.

- There must be a provision both in government and private hospitals for promoting knowledge of nurses on therapeutic diet at regular interval of time.

- Nurses should be encouraged to increase the reading habits of printed materials prepared for dissemination of nutritional information.

- More numbers of training programme on nutrition education should be organised at the regular interval of time for improving the knowledge of nurses.

- Similar study can be conducted in some other districts of Assam

- Another study on impact assessment of intervention programme on nutrition should be planned for future research work.

- A study on ‘nutritional knowledge on therapeutic diet’ of nurses can be conducted.

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