

Should nurses be
allowed to diagnose
patients?



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Nowadays, the more controversial is the question as whether nurses should be allowed to diagnose patients? This issue is highly significant because nurses are equally responsible for patient care as do doctors and their knowledge can contribute towards appropriate diagnosis. However, Croasdale (2008) claimed that “ nurses have limited diagnosing skills”. Here the essential point on which I differ is that, today nurses are more knowledgeable and competent health care professionals. That’s why they have potentials to diagnose patients. Thus, I propose that as nurses possess great potentials so they should be allowed to diagnose patients.

Opponents of my view argued that nurses are considered subordinate to doctors. Sullivan & Decker (2008) stated that “ Relationship of physician and nurse has been that of superior and subordinate.” This in turn means that, nurses are supposed to adhere to doctor’s order. This prestige comes from the point that only doctors are allowed to diagnose. Godlee (2008) contends that, “ diagnosis is almost the only skill that defines doctor.” Additionally, history taking and assessment in logical fashion is the key principle to make pertinent diagnosis. For which doctors are trained and knowledgeable. Furthermore, their education is more advanced than nurses, which help them to achieve this task. Thus, it can be affirm that nurses are responsible for caring patients while doctors cure them. Whereas, I strongly believe that, nurses are not subordinate to doctor. In fact, both are independent professionals who collaborate to achieve similar goals. As Murphy (2004) clearly pointed out that “ nursing is an independent profession with a unique body of knowledge and not simply a subcategory of medicine.” In reality, nurses in their everyday practice also implement a logical process for history

taking and assessment which ultimately guides diagnosis. For example, since the day nurses step in this profession, they are practicing history taking, interviewing and assessment skills. Moreover, nursing education has also expanded now and advance concepts are part of their curriculum. Today, nurses are also actively participating in researches to make their practice evidence based. Furthermore, the circle of nursing education does not complete at diploma or baccalaureate level while, career in nursing is flourishing day by day and nurses are moving ahead towards specialization. Therefore, on one hand, care is the core component of nursing. While on the other hand, it provides them the means to cure as well. Fox (2010) is the supporter of my opinion who asserted that “ Nurses can handle much of the strain that healthcare reform will place on doctors and should be given the authority to take on more medical duties”

It is generally accepted that, people are more satisfied with doctors. This is because of the worldwide recognition associated with this profession. Doctors are the fundamental provider of health care. Moreover, it has been observed that in our society people consider doctors as superior to them. And in case of illness they immediately rush to doctor. Likewise, during my experience at emergency department, I have seen that as soon as patients reach, they want doctor to see them first. And many of them seemed satisfied after that. This was the reason, allowing nurses to triage patients was questionable. Hence, it is true to say that patients trust doctors and reveal more history to them comparatively to nurses. However, relating to these arguments is the critique that patients are more satisfied with nurses. Yet, there is no denying that doctors are recognized worldwide but, the point

that profession of nursing is also globally renowned cannot be overlooked. People consider nurses as core member of health care team. As Laurence (2004) supported that “ Nurses are more popular than doctors as frontline providers of medical care.” Besides that, nurses stay with patients for a longer period of time. Hence, patients trust and build rapport with them. Payne (2009) explains that “ Nursing was one of the few professions to gain an increase in public trust... Doctors saw a drop of 4% in public confidence in the last two years. “ This clearly shows that, patients trust nurses more than doctors. This allows patients to disclose even those details to nurses which they hesitate to communicate to doctors in short meeting. Thus, it provides nurses an opportunity to identify patient’s concerns and make appropriate diagnosis. As far as triage nursing is concerned, initially it was questionable but once implemented, it became successful than the former. This example clearly illustrates that nurses with their capabilities can satisfy patients. Hence, nurses can become successful if they are allowed to diagnose.

Cernik & Ferns (2006) claimed that doctors are the ultimate decision makers and patients are their legal responsibility. According to this argument, the responsibility to diagnose comes under doctors’ mandate because they are licensure for that. Therefore, they are held legally responsible as any error or an act of negligence can lead to legal implications for them. Nurses, so this argument goes, are also legally responsible and answerable for their actions in court of law. For instance, if the patient dies due to wrong diagnose, so it is not only a doctor but the organization is sued and in such circumstances, doctors and nurses both are liable. Moreover, doctors are licensure to diagnose but the same is true for nurses in particular that, in UK and USA,

there are nurse practitioners who are allowed to diagnose independently and treat patients.

Considering the above arguments, is the point that competent nurses by virtue of an essential member of health care team should be allowed to diagnose patients. As, they are regarded as the backbone of health care industry their knowledge can benefit patient to a greater extent. Nurses, being good decision maker based on their knowledge and experience as well as legally responsible health care professionals can bring positive outcome in health care. In my opinion, if nurses are prohibited to diagnose, then their capabilities would get suppressed. As well as, this can predispose to increase chances of misdiagnoses and eventually errors will arise. Hence, society at large can benefit if the nurses are empowered for that.

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