Training Pain Resource Nurses: Changes in Their Knowledge and Attitudes

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Purpose/Objectives: To determine the changes in knowledge and attitudes of pain resource nurses (PRNs) as a result of an intensive pain management course.

Design: Pre- and post-test design.

Setting: A Veterans Administration hospital in the southeastern United States.

Sample: 18 RNs from multiple units who are provided for veterans with cancer.

Methods: The PRNs were tested before and after a 32-hour intensive pain management course.

Main Research Variables: Knowledge about pain management, attitudes toward pain management, and attitudes toward patients in pain.

Findings: Significant improvements were found in pain knowledge and attitudes toward patients in pain. Improvements in attitudes toward pain management approached significance.

Conclusions: The improvements in scores not only supported the effectiveness of the course but also provided additional evidence of the validity of the assessment instruments.

Implications for Nursing: Courses such as this should be offered in other settings to encourage practicing nurses to provide better care to patients in pain and to serve as role models for their peers.

Key Points . . .

➤ The 32-hour training program improved pain knowledge and attitudes in nurses.
➤ The results supported validity of the assessment tools.
➤ Continuing education in pain management should be offered in other settings.


Research on the effectiveness of educational programs on pain management has been mixed. Camp-Sorrell and O’Sullivan (1991) found that education about pain management did not result in changes in nurses’ behavior. McCaffery and Ferrell (1995, 1997) and Dahlman, Dykes, and Elander (1999) found that pain management education did have a positive impact on behavior. McCaffery and Ferrell (1999) found that although nurses have become more informed about pain assessment, they still lack the basic knowledge to manage pain appropriately.

Gunnarsdottir, Donovan, and Ward (2003) called for research to determine which components of educational interventions are needed to improve pain management by nurses.

Research Objectives

The objective of the current study was to determine the effect of an intensive, weeklong pain management course on the knowledge and attitudes of unit-based nurses who were