Improving Nurses' Awareness: Recognizing Signs of Human Trafficking and Implementing Intervention Strategies in the ER Setting

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Background

The prevalence of human trafficking today is fueled by the demand for cheap labor or commercial sexual exploitation of vulnerable populations. Of the vulnerable populations, such as those of low socioeconomic class and ethnic minorities, 88% of these interviewed human trafficking victims received health care at least once during their period of captivity.[1] In knowing this, education and screening tools have proven to be effective strategies on improving the recognition and rescuing of human trafficking victims. In implementing the Trafficking Victim Identification Tool at the initial assessment in the acute care setting, emergency room nurses will learn how to interview trafficked patients, identify the signs of trafficking, and provide appropriate interventions.[2] In comparison to the mere education the ER staff are taught about signs of victims currently, emergency room nurses will be able to easily recognize human trafficking indicators by implementing the Identification tool.

PICOT Question

Among ER nurses (Population), will the implementation of the Framework for a Human Trafficking Protocol in a Healthcare Setting (Intervention), increase the identification of patients who are being trafficked (Outcome) in comparison to the prior use of the assessment tool implementation (Comparison) over the span of six months (Time)?

Literature Search Criteria

Databases used: CINAHL, PubMed, Google Scholar, UH Library Databases
Key Terms: Human trafficking, Human trafficking awareness, Emergency Nurses, Healthcare Setting, Identification
Article Selection Criteria: Nursing peer journals, scholarly journals, published between 2017 – 2022

Synthesis of Findings

- With the implementation of education via courses and modules amongst ED personnel, there has been an increase of 75 - 96% in the competency level of understanding human trafficking and identifying it.[3-4]
- Using pre- and post- surveys amongst ED personnel reveals that about 40 - 47% felt unknowledgeable to somewhat confident about implementing assessment tool interventions prior to being provided screening tools in comparison to 75 - 80% of personnel who were provided with tools, such as provider screening questions, who stated they felt knowledgeable in how to implement the interventions.[4-5]
- The implementation of screening tools significantly increased the confidence and identification of human trafficking victims that were screened by healthcare professionals by 93 - 96%. These screening tools worked to increase knowledge amongst six domains, such as victim identification, treatment of victims, and referral to community resources.[3,6]
- With the implementation of a human trafficking screening tool, not only were victims of trafficking identified and treated, but victims of intimate partner violence and other forms of abuse were recognized as well.[4,7]
- Studies find screening tools, such as a questionnaire and Likert scale, asked similar questions regarding situation, job, and safety such as "Can you leave your job or situation if you want?" If these questions triggered a possible recognition the staff would implement a program to secure and further assess.[3-4, 8]
- Human trafficking victims' first incidence of receiving any kind of help usually occur in a medical setting, mostly in an emergency department, where 88% reported that they would receive medical care during their captivity.[3]

Decision to Change Practice

- The intervention chosen for the decision to change practice was to implement the Framework for a Human Trafficking Protocol in a Healthcare Setting in the emergency room setting to improve the confidence and detection of human trafficking victims that come into the hospital setting.[9]
- The Trafficking Victim Identification Tool will also be proposed to provide healthcare workers, particularly nurses, a guideline to screen human trafficking victims and to provide appropriate interventions.[2] This tool works to improve the identification of human trafficking patients by giving pointers on how to interview patients, how to ask 'probing' questions about abuse, and by understanding the relationship between trauma and victimization.
- Nurses are aware of how a victim of intimate partner violence may present to the ED, but frequently link the characteristics to be similar to human trafficking victims. Because victims of human trafficking can present in a variety of ways, it can be very challenging for the emergency nurse to screen for them. Implementing a new screening tool that is specific to identifying human trafficking victims alone will provide clarity and a clear distinction between the two.

Evaluation

- By the end of the sixth-month implementation period, Emergency Room nurses will have increased recognition of human trafficking victims by 10%.
- We will measure the outcomes through the implementation of The Trafficking Victim Identification Tool among the emergency room department.[2]
- We will provide emergency room personnel with a Likert scale survey post-implementation of the screening tool to improve confidence in identification of human trafficking victims.
- We will measure the results six months post the implementation of the screening tools (The Trafficking Victim Identification Tool and Likert scale survey) and will measure the efficacy of the human trafficking tool implementation by comparing data prior to and post-implementation.

Acknowledgments

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