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Training nurses on empathy: Following skills assessment study at Kenyatta National Hospital

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Introduction: Empathy is a skill trainable for competence which is one of the caring characteristics for nurses.

Methodology: The study involved needs assessment, an intervention to promote development and sustainability of empathy among nurses in Kenyatta National Hospital. A mixed method study design was used: Explanatory sequential approach (needs assessment) where a pre/post intervention was used. A stratified sample of 189 nurses and a purposive sample of 16 nurses for two focus group discussions were obtained. A training intervention was implemented and pre/post scores compared.

Results: Knowledge related to empathy was low during baseline (20%), however, an increase to high (90%) was reported after the training intervention. Scores on development of empathy improved significantly following training ($Mb=0.50$, $Me=0.87$), $t(385)=-12.80$, $p<0.05$. Similar improvements that hinder development ($Mb=0.48$, $Me=0.88$), $t(385)=-14.13$, $p<0.05$; factors favoring sustainability ($Mb=0.66$, $Me=0.83$), $t(385)=-6.23$, $p<0.05$ and factors hindering sustainability of empathy among nurses ($Mb=0.34$, $Me=0.66$), $t(385)=-9.75$, $p<0.05$. Knowledge on developing and sustaining empathy ranged between very low to average before interventional training.

Conclusion: Achievement suggests that empathy is learnable competence. Training empathy skills empower nurses to practice when offered training opportunities.

Recommendation: To integrate empathy as a core course in both pre and in service training for nurses.

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