

A Survey of the Role of Practice Nurses During

Clinical Encounters with Patients

Requesting First Time Contraception in the

Western Health Board

By

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Abstract

Introduction and Background

Primary care within Ireland has experienced a renaissance over the past ten years; it has been endorsed by government as fundamental to the delivery of health care services. Practice nurses form an integral part of this service. There is however, very little research into the role of the practice nurse in Ireland. Studies that have been done demonstrate that nurses are fulfilling functions beyond treatment room tasks into extended roles. Women's health and family planning services have been shown to be a specific area of higher practice which practice nurses have become increasingly involved in. This study set out to address the lack of research into the area of practice nursing, in particular it aimed to focus on first time hormonal contraception and the role of the practice nurse in it's provision. The study also sought to identify post basic training relevant to women's health undertaken by the nurses.

Sample Population and Methodology

The study was carried out among the total population of practice nurses within the Western Health Board region during 2004. A quantitative methodology was used during this descriptive study. Information was gathered using a confidential pre piloted postal questionnaire. The response rate was 76%.

Results

The main findings included that the majority of practices provide all the contraceptive methods surveyed i.e.(combined oral contraceptive and progesterone only pill, Depo-Provera and emergency contraception). An average of 67% of practice nurses were found to be involved in the provision of this service. Emergency contraception was the area of least involvement for practice nurses (46%). Fifty four percent of respondents had additional training in women's health/family planning, this was found to impact positively on nurses service provision. Family planning certificate was the course undertaken by most nurses. The mean time per week spent in the provision of this service was 2.89 hours.

The majority of nurses surveyed were satisfied with their level of expertise however considerable percentages were not. There was a high level of expressed need for further training. Assessment of core tasks, which the nurse undertook during consultations, found that the majority of nurses applied evidence based criteria always or most of the time. Nevertheless a sizeable proportion of those surveyed applied these criteria only sometimes, rarely or never.

Conclusion

The study identified practice nurses as growing in number and responding to the changing face of primary care. They were found to be willing to take on extended roles and anxious to access the training necessary to undertake these roles. They need to have access to up-to-date evidence based information and use this to develop guiding protocols. Further research is required, particularly qualitative research to explore the perspective of the nurses experiences and also those of the population they serve.

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