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Dialysis Nurses' Perceptions of Patient Autonomy and Advocacy

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Background: The nurses' role in patient advocacy among dialysis patients is important, as it allows the nurse to assist patients in gaining full understanding of their treatment plan, gain confidence and participate in decision making. An exploration of the nurse-patient relationship as it applies to compliance with treatment regimen and how that relationship affects nursing practice and education is needed.

Objective: To explore the perceptions of nurses on patient autonomy and decision-making, related to nursing education and treatment recommendations, among the dialysis population.

Method: The Attitude toward Patient Advocacy Scale (APAS) is a reliable and valid tool that was administered to a convenience sample of 200 dialysis nurses within a large academic dialysis program. The APAS is a multidimensional scale with 64 Likert-scale questions (1-6) measuring nurses' attitudes in advocating for patients comprised of three subscales, safeguarding patient's autonomy (SPA), acting on behalf of patients (ABP), and championing social justice (CSJ), to measure nurse's attitudes toward advocating for patients. The survey was emailed with a cover letter describing the study process.

Results: 53 dialysis nurses completed the survey (26% response rate); majority were female (97%). The survey demonstrated favorable responses in all categories with an overall APAS mean of 5.29 and subscale means of, SPA, 5.57, ABP, 5.67, and CSJ, 5.13. There was not a significant association of mean scores for SPA, ABP, or CSJ based on age ($p=0.99, 0.56, 0.91$), education ($p=0.92, 0.37, 0.41$), years of nursing ($p=0.96, 0.90, 0.37$) or dialysis experience ($p=0.55, 0.36, 0.29$).

Conclusion: The results demonstrated that this sample of dialysis nurses felt they effectively advocated for their patients and believed patient autonomy, advocacy and championing social justice were important. Nurses felt this way regardless of age, level of education, or experience in nursing or in dialysis. This understanding could lead to greater satisfaction among patients as nurses help them to identify and achieve their goals.

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