

# Forensic Nursing Science: An Evolution of the Global Forensic Sciences

## Adli Hemşirelik Bilimi: Küresel Adli Bilimlerin Gelişimi

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As the science of nursing has merged with the forensic sciences and criminal justice systems, a distinctive discipline has evolved: Forensic nursing science. This emergent science has evolved in response to the consequences of global human violence. Forensic nursing is a dynamic discipline that recognizes human violence and its associated trauma through a contemporary domain of scientific knowledge, health care, human rights, social justice, public health, and evidence-based practice. Due to the global need for expanded health care services worldwide and the evolution of forensic nursing science has created a previously unrecognized resource for victims of domestic and international terrorism that often starts within the socio-cultural, political, and religious traditions of the past.

Historically, the forensic foundations of nursing have long existed. Accordingly, in the 17<sup>th</sup> century prior to the French Revolution nursing had not yet become a science until Florence Nightingale brought the forensic aspects of nursing to the Crimean War while caring for the wounded and the dead. A more recent example are the Bosnian forensic nurses who struggled to provide sexual assault examinations during the Bosnian-Serb War while the same time providing identification of the unknown dead. This was the first endeavor to establish forensic nursing in the Balkan region.

### Forensic Nurse Examiners

Forensic nursing is a science broadly defined as nursing applied to the law; following the long tradition of the forensic medical sciences. Forensic Nurse Examiners (FNE) are health care providers qualified in the examination and evaluation of patients presenting

with forensic biomarkers of crime-related trauma and the clinical investigation of questioned deaths in the clinical and community environs.

Recent strategies to improve global standards of care for victims of crime, the falsely accused, and those wrongly convicted require specialized knowledge in nursing education: e.g., wound classification, recovery of best specimens for laboratory analysis, forensic imaging of physical findings, and pertinent knowledge of law. These strategies require specialized nursing roles in the application of the forensic sciences to health and justice. Forensic studies in nursing science includes issues not previously available in traditional nursing education including, sexual assault examination, non-fatal strangulation, concepts in the investigation of trauma and death, and to maintain an index of suspicion when alerted to potential violations of legal and human rights. Forensic nurses collaborate with other health care, criminal justice, and forensic science professionals.

### Scientific Foundations

Any science applied to the just resolution of questioned issues in courts of law is a forensic science. Forensic nursing science is objective and unbiased. It applies equally to either side of civil and criminal law, or other legal matters. Forensic nurses work with other forensic scientist to help determine the truth through the proper documentation, recovery of clinical forensic evidence, and testify in court as required. In order to understand the evolution of a forensic specialist in nursing science, consider that science is defined as an accumulated body of knowledge dealing with the systematic study of the structure and behavior of the physical and natural world



through observation and experiment, especially one active in some particular field of investigation. A forensic nurse scientist is one learned in nursing and the forensic sciences, which applies the scientific method to the investigation of trauma and death.

This movement was initiated by establishing the first Master of Nursing Science degree in the clinical forensic nursing and the scientific investigation of death (1990). With this evolution of advanced scientific learning it has become a moving force in the health and justice sciences. It has continually progressed throughout the 50 U.S. states and continues to expand worldwide in developed and developing nations. Forensic nursing is well established in North America and our clinical and forensic physicians, law enforcement agencies, and judicial systems are grateful.

### **The American Academy of Forensic Sciences**

The history of forensic nursing within this distinguished body of multidisciplinary experts in the forensic sciences was the first to recognize forensic nursing as a scientific discipline in 1991 at the 43<sup>rd</sup> annual meeting of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences. The General Section declared the discipline of forensic nursing science eligible for AAFS membership. Their pronouncement stated (in part) "it is proposed that the body of knowledge recognized as the science of forensic nursing consists of a synthesis, reorganization, and or extension of concepts drawn from the basic or other applied sciences that in their reformulation, tend to become new concepts (AAFS). This pronouncement has brought the science of forensic nursing into prominence in developed and developing countries as a previously unrecognized resource to the forensic medical sciences to increase availability of forensic health services. The following year the International Association of Forensic Nurses was founded and currently holds a membership of 6,500 members. The American Academy of Nurses (ANA) Congress of Nursing Practice pronounced forensic nursing an official nursing specialty with unique knowledge not found in any other nursing or forensic discipline (1995). The AAFS has now elevated this emergent discipline to the status of a section of its own: The Forensic Nursing Science Section (2020).

### **Scientific Foundations**

Forensic nursing is a science broadly defined as nursing applied to the law; following the long-established exemplar of forensic medical science, public health, and evidence-based practice. Forensic Nurse Examiners (FNE) are health care providers qualified in the examination and evaluation of patients presenting with forensic biomarkers of crime-related trauma and the clinical investigation of questioned deaths in the clinical and community environs. Any science applied to the just resolution of questioned issues in courts of law is a forensic science. Forensic nursing science is objective and unbiased. It applies equally to either side of civil and criminal law, or other legal matters. Forensic nurses work with other forensic scientist to help determine the truth through the proper documentation, recovery of clinical forensic evidence, and testify in court as required. In order to understand the evolution of a forensic specialist in nursing science, consider that science is defined as an accumulated body of knowledge dealing with the systematic study of the structure and behavior of the physical and natural world through observation and experiment, especially one active in some particular field of investigation. A forensic nurse scientist is one learned in nursing and the forensic sciences, which applies the scientific method to the investigation of trauma and death.

Recent strategies to improve global standards of care for victims of crime, the falsely accused, and those wrongly convicted require specialized knowledge in nursing education: e.g., wound classification, recovery of best specimens for laboratory analysis, forensic imaging of physical findings, and pertinent knowledge of law. These strategies require forensic nurse specialist roles to practice in the application of the forensic sciences to health and justice positions. Forensic studies in nursing science includes issues not previously available in traditional nursing education including, sexual assault examination, non-fatal strangulation, concepts in the investigation of trauma and death, and to maintain an index of suspicion when alerted to potential violations of legal and human rights. Forensic nurses collaborate with other health care, criminal justice, and the forensic sciences professionals. Forensic nursing care helps to provide improved health and justice outcomes.

**Professional Advancements** The history of forensic nursing within the American Academy Forensic Sciences (AAFS) was distinguished as a scientific discipline in 1991 at the 43<sup>rd</sup> annual meeting of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences. The General Section declared the discipline of forensic nursing science eligible for AAFS membership. Their pronouncement stated (in part) “it is proposed that the body of knowledge recognized as the science of forensic nursing consists of a synthesis, reorganization, and or extension of concepts drawn from the basic or other applied sciences that in their reformulation, tend to become new concepts (AAFS). This pronouncement has brought the science of forensic nursing into prominence in developed and developing countries as a previously unrecognized resource to the forensic medical sciences to increased availability of forensic services.

### **Forensic Nursing Services**

The need to keep pace with the rapid changes in health care, legislation, and the forensic sciences has initiated new roles and new responsibilities in the science of forensic nursing. Clinical responsibilities that center on life saving interventions are the responsibility of the emergency physician and nurses who may not be aware of the medicolegal requirements of forensic cases. It is ideal to have a separate forensic nurse specialist to managed evidentiary materials during traumatic interventions as opposed to the clinician who’s focus is the patient’s survival. Forensic nurses play a pivotal role in both hospital and community settings by assisting people of all ages who are victims of crime-related trauma, abuse or maltreatment, catastrophic disasters, questioned and natural deaths, intentional and unintentional harm. Forensic nurses provide a crucial role in the examination and evaluation of patients who have experienced violence: abuse of children and the elderly, intimate partner and sexual violence, domestic homicides, liability-related issues, persecution, torture, and all violations of human rights. Problematic social and cultural situations corresponding to the escalation of reported violence reinforces the need to define the guidelines for forensic nursing practice as it evolves and endures change.

### **Contemporary Perspectives**

This emergent nursing specialty provides a framework for health promotion, violence prevention, in an effective through collaboration with the disciplines of health care, criminal justice, and the forensic sciences. The issue of violence is central to the role of the forensic specialist in nursing science. Violence poses a global threat to public health and safety that demand solutions. Nurses have historically cared for victims of violence while facing the extremes of human behavior - both the living and the dead. Within a collaborative practice model, forensic nurses use specialized knowledge and clinical skills to provide forensic holistic care, which now includes body, mind, spirit, and the law. The primary role of the forensic nurse beyond critical care is the investigation of trauma and medical death, the recovery, preservation, and security of clinical forensic evidence, to liaison with legal agencies, and both clinical and forensic physicians. The forensic nurse testifies in court as required. The FNE is not a criminal investigator but rather a clinical investigator with crime and liability-related injury at the core.

An identified shortage of clinical forensic physicians and forensic pathologists has brought attention to the need for additional healthcare resource worldwide. Although these countries have highly qualified physicians, they are extensively outnumbered by patients affected with fatal and on-fatal violent events. The forensic nurse represents a previously unrecognized resource for expanding forensic services and is poised to fill a crucial role in the examination of forensic patients. Within a collaborative practice model, forensic nurses use specialized knowledge and clinical skills to provide holistic care for patients who have experienced trauma and abuse. As an emergent discipline, forensic nursing assumes a mutual responsibility with the forensic medical sciences and legal authorities in the concern for loss of life and function due to human violence: including victims or suspects of child and elderly abuse, intimate partner and sexual violence, domestic homicide, liability issues, persecution, and torture, and violations of human rights.

### **Response to Humanitarian and Human Rights**

The current world situation is such that a nurse may become involved in innumerable circumstances requiring action on her/his part to safeguard human rights. The



need for nursing actions to safeguard human rights is not restricted to times of political upheaval, and war. It pertains to the abuse or maltreatment of patients or others whether witnessed or suspected. Forensic nurses are expected to perform examinations on victims or suspects before they are subjected to forms of interrogation, which may include torture. To ensure that the nurse is prepared and knowledgeable to provide or prevent the predictable treatment involved meets the standards of International Law (IL) requires

competence through a formidable forensic and nursing education including the Istanbul protocol. The global shortage of clinical forensic physicians and forensic pathologists has alerted a need for additional healthcare resources worldwide. Problematic social and cultural situations corresponding to the escalation of reported violence reinforces the need to define the guidelines for forensic nursing practice as it evolves and endures change.