

## **ABSTRACT**

Nurses are one of the important categories of health care workers. Knowledge and skills in oral health are extremely useful for nurses in their professional and personal lives. In most parts of the world including Sri Lanka dental diseases are common. Treatments available for those are costly. Available evidence suggests that primary prevention is the best approach to address this problem. Scarcities of the dental manpower make it necessary to look for alternative manpower sources. Nurses, being available in large number can be a good option.

The main objective of this study is to describe the knowledge, practices and associated factors on provision of oral health care to patients among final year nursing students in Western Province.

A cross sectional descriptive study was conducted among final year student nurses in nurses training schools (NTS) at Colombo, Sri Jayewardenepura, Kandana and Kalutara. Although the calculated sample size was 422, all 486 final year students in all four NTS were included in the study. A pre tested self administered questionnaire with both open and closed ended questions was used to collect data specially about oral health content of their curriculum, knowledge on common oral diseases, knowledge on oral hygiene maintenance of patients. More over practices, in the community setting; in a general ward; in a dental ward and in a dental clinic were assessed. Entire data processing was done using a Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 15.

The results showed that most of the student nurses had a satisfactory knowledge in related to oral health. Sufficient knowledge was assessed regarding oral hygiene maintenance of patients 80% (n=387) and oral diseases 86.9% (n=86.9). However, there were incorrect beliefs such as vitamin deficiency and cold food can cause dental caries, spicy food cause oral cancer, which need to be addressed.

When think about their practices in related to four common settings where nurses have to attend on oral health of the patients, they had unsatisfactory practices. Considering the oral health practices 50.6% of them had followed satisfactory oral health practices in related to community setting. While 13.5% in general ward; in 10.2% dental ward and 35.9% in dental clinic had followed satisfactory oral health practices.

Practical experience on oral health during training ( $P= 0.048$ ) and their own practices ( $P=0.006$ ) were significantly associated with knowledge on oral hygiene maintenance of patients. Visited a dental clinic or a dental ward during their training ( $P=0.017$ ), practical experience on oral health during training ( $P=0.018$ ) and previous visits to dental treatments ( $P=0.025$ ) were significantly associated with the knowledge on oral diseases.

In addition the oral health practices in a general ward were significantly associated with visited dental Clinic or dental ward during training ( $P=0.01$ ) and practical experience on oral health during training ( $P=0.01$ ).The oral health practices of nursing students in a dental clinic were significantly associated with, Visited a dental Clinic or ward during training ( $P=0.005$ ) and their previous visits for dental treatments ( $P=0.027$ ). Their practices in the community setting and in dental ward were not associated with their knowledge or practical exposure.

According to the results it is necessary to include oral health component to the nursing curriculum to give the students a thorough knowledge on oral health. Practical training should provide to every student and compulsory visits to dental clinics and dental wards should arrange to improve their practices in oral health.

## **Key wards**

- oral health practices
- oral health knowledge
- student nurses
- nurses
- nurses training schools