Case study: Haiti

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Nurses for Haiti (NHH) have introduced the concept of "holistic nursing" with an emphasis on assessment, planning, implementation and evaluation for patients with SCI sustained in the earthquake. This has been written and is awaiting government approval.

The complex field of SCI nursing and rehabilitation is a new concept for Haitian nurses. "Holistic nursing" was introduced with an emphasis on assessment, planning, implementation and evaluation (Yura and Walsh, 1987). The concept of "holistic nursing" was historically poorly understood in Haiti. The remit of Haitian nurses' care was to take patients' vital signs, carry out wound care and give out medication. Historically, their education for nurses was "hands-on" holistic care and family members were the main caregivers. The recent introduction of nurse degree programmes the level of nursing care is being raised, but it will take time to implement in all hospitals in Haiti.

The complex field of SCI nursing and rehabilitation is a new concept for Haitian nurses and the HHA SCI rehabilitation unit was able to introduce the concept of "holistic nursing" with an emphasis on assessment, planning, implementation and evaluation (Yura and Walsh, 1987). Over 10 months HHA, with help from Team Canada Healing Hands (www.tchh.org) and HHHT, provided mentoring and group training sessions, including three six-week courses in SCI nursing care for 46 local staff and students. A 10-week post-licensure rehabilitation nursing curriculum has been written and is awaiting government approval.

Education for staff or patients/family carers in the local languages (Creole and French) on bladder care has become a main focus of work for the Haiti SCI Working Group (an international group of professionals with an interest in SCI care in Haiti).

Conclusion

"Best practice" is "doing the best you can" given the circumstances (Stephenson, 2010). Before the earthquake, there appears to be no known "best practice" for patients with SCI, especially in bladder care. It was (and still is in many cases) believed that if a person sustained an SCI, they went home to die. It was rare for people with tetraplegia to survive. The morbidity and mortality rate for this group remains extremely high.

Personal observation shows patients are living longer. The Haiti SCI database was created in March 2010 by HHA and most patients with SCI sustained in the earthquake (especially with complete/incomplete paraplegia) are still alive after two years post trauma. I believe this apparent increase in health status is directly related to specific bladder care education and the introduction of intermittent self-catheterisation for patients with SCI.

*The patient’s name has been changed.

References


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