

Nurses as a New Stakeholder in Genetics and The Place of Genetics in Educational Processes: A Study From Turkey

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ABSTRACT

Nurses having post graduate degree are ready to take responsibility in health care systems and should also be well-prepared to involved in genetic/genomic health care services. The purpose of this study was to assess the undergraduate students' awareness, perception and understanding of several human genetic topics, tests and disorders.

Methods: This is a descriptive and cross-sectional study. A self-report questionnaire which was designed to evaluate undergraduate nursing students' theoretically knowledge of genetic concepts, disease and the perception of students about medical biology and genetic lesson. Two hundred and twenty two pre-licensured nursing students compromised the sample. A 54-item questionnaire prepared by literature-based researchers was used as a data collection tool. Descriptive statistics and Fisher's Exact Test or Pearson Chi-square test were used to analyze the relations between categorical variables.

The majority of nursing students in this study (70,1%) took Medical Biology and Genetics lesson. But, more than half of nursing students (58,1%) reported "No" to adequate level of knowledge about genetic. Competence about genetic were not changed level of class. However, students who taking medical biology and genetic lesson had more genetic disease knowledge than no taking group. The evaluation of responses to the section on basic genetic information showed that the lowest levels of description were prenatal diagnosis (31,5%) and locus (36,9%). Also, 82,4% of the nursing students agreed that nurses' role in genetic diseases diagnosis.

With the advances in the field of genetics, there was a need for nursing students to integrate genetic information into nursing practice. It is thought that the results of this study may help to reorganize and improve new educational strategy related to medical biology and genetics in nursing education.

Key Words: Genetics, Nursing students, Nursing education, Genetic education

Introduction

The Human Genome Project is groundbreaking development in healthcare field in recent years. Human genome project conducted between 1990 and 2003 was an international project aimed at sequencing of the human genome. New informations that have emerged after the completion of this project, it has acquired a new dimension on researches related to molecular techniques and diseases. The time period from after the completion of the Human Genome Project dominates diagnosis and treatment of human diseases, indicating that the post-genomic era was entered. Post-genomic era, it is an undeniable fact that new technologies have accelerated the transition from research to clinical applications (1). Ongoing research area of genetics and reflections on the clinic of acquired findings

have gone beyond single gene disorders and become genomics (2). Genomics define all the genes that encode the structural and functional properties of any organism and examines the control of the interactive relations of these genes with one another and with the environment (3).

Understanding the molecular and genetic basis of diseases, treatment modalities and evaluation of response to treatment is a necessity for quality nursing practice. Many genetic tests used in the clinic are important not only for the patient but also for family members at risk (4). Nowadays, health practices based on genomic science are becoming increasingly part of routine care. In recent years, developments in genetics have introduced new roles in nursing and also whole health care staff, along with new opportunities in health care (5). This process has led to the need

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for all nurses working in different areas to be trained in accordance with the developments in the field of genetics in order to ensure the best practices in the diagnosis, prevention and/or treatment of diseases (6-8).

However, there are inconsistencies in the provision of genetic training and evidence that nurses lack competence in the genetic field in many countries (9). In early 1962, Brantl and Esslinger called for the integration of medical genetics into the nursing curriculum so that nurses with core competencies could be trained (10). Following this, Kenen pointed out that the genetic counseling is essential interdisciplinary field for nurses (11). In 2006, the American Nurses Association (ANA) published *The Essentials of Genetic and Genomic Nursing: Competencies, Curricula Guidelines*, which includes strategies for genetically health professional education.

Scientific understanding in genetics and genomics fields are forced healthcare disciplines to swiftly redefining the understanding of health and disease and composing a significant change in practice. Nurses having post graduate degree are ready to take responsibility in health care systems and should also be well-prepared to be involved in genetic/genomic health care services (12).

This study is aimed at determining the nursing students awareness, perception and understanding of several human genetic topics, tests and disorders.

Materials and Methods

Design and Sample: The cross-sectional and descriptive study was conducted in the Nursing Department of Health School, Mehmet Akif Ersoy University. Participants were first and second year undergraduate students in the Bachelor of Nursing Science Degree (n:222). Written permission from Mehmet Akif Ersoy University Ethical Committee and the Mehmet Akif Ersoy University Bucak School of Health was also obtained.

Data collection: Data for the current study were collected by questionnaire. The items on the questionnaire were developed based on a comprehensive review of the literature by researchers (13-15). Questionnaire items were designed sample characteristic, the perception of nursing students about Medical Biology and Genetics, theoretical knowledge of genetic concepts and diseases. In this study, under the titles mentioned above, with the multiple-choice

questions were examined the students' awareness, perception and understanding of various human genetics topics, tests and disorders.

Seven items assessed sample characteristic, 2 items assessed that whether or not to take genetic courses and which course providing genetic knowledge to student, 7 items assessed the way students would like educational activities about genetics, 27 items assessed to define on genetic concepts, 11 items assessed level of knowledge about genetic disorders, students comfort level of conditions assessed in 4 items and last item gets a suggestion about medical biology and genetics lesson from nursing students. All students were informed they were not required to partake in this study, nor would their course grade be affected by not participating. The researcher was not present for any of the data collection process. The first education year in this school, Medical Biology and Genetics lesson is compulsory and second year its education was changed to optional lesson.

Data Analysis/Statistics: For data analysis, the SPSS 20.0 package program was used. P value of <0.05 was considered statistically significant. Descriptive statistics were used to determine students' characteristics. Descriptive statistics are presented with n (%) and mean \pm standard deviation. Fisher's Exact Test or Pearson Chi-square test was used to analyze the relations between categorical variables.

Results

Sample characteristics: Two hundred and twenty two surveys were distributed to undergraduate nursing students, including 119 (53,6 %) freshmen and 103 (46,4 %) sophomores. The majority of participants were women (66,7 %), and their mean age of 19,6. Greater part of the students (68,5%) were high school graduates from vocational high schools. Relationship of the students' family were scarce (16,7%). Also, rarely percentage of the students (14%) had a family history of genetic diseases which were visual disorders, thalassemia, multi-malformation, epilepsy and cardiac malformations. Table 1 gives additional demographic informations on the nursing students.

The Perception of Nursing Students About Medical Biology and Genetics Lesson/Education: The majority of nursing students in this study (70,1%) took Medical Biology and Genetics lesson. But, more than half of nursing students (58,1%) reported "No" to

Table 1. Sample characteristics of nursing students (n=222)

	n=222
Age, mean+ss	19.6±1.2
Gender, n(%)	
Male	74(33.3)
Female	148(66.7)
Graduated high school, n(%)	
Health Vocational High School	69(31.08)
High School	153(68.9)
School year, n(%)	
Freshmen	119(53.6)
Sophomores	103(46.4)
Relationship in family history, n(%)	
Yes	37(16.7)
No	185(83.3)
Genetic diseases in family, n(%)	
Yes	31(14)
No	191(86)

adequate level of knowledge about genetics. Moreover, nursing students were most wanted education on issues that were cancer genetics (68%) or communication techniques with individual/family has genetic diseases (36,5%). Also, 82,4% of the nursing students agreed that nurses' role in genetic diseases diagnosis.

Theoretically Knowledge Of Genetic Concepts and Diseases: The evaluation of responses to the section on basic genetic information showed that concepts of mitosis-meiosis were identified by the majority of nursing students (93,2%), and the lowest levels of description were prenatal diagnosis (31,5%) and locus (36,9%).

The responses about knowledge of some genetic abnormalities and diseases expressed that the highest was 60,8% who knew about trisomy 21 and the lowest was 8,1% who knew Huntington disease and Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy. Additionally, knowledge of genetic abnormalities and diseases were not changed level of class. Because of all sophomeres took lesson, statistically differences were formed Thalassemia, Turner Syndrome and Trisomies ($p=0,001$). Besides, graduated school of health compared the other groups Cyclic Fibrosis and Thalassemia diseases' were statistically significant results.

The survey also quested for the opinions of students' competence about genetics, including searches on the internet about genetic diseases, drawing pedigree, determining of genetic disorders type in pedigree or getting a family history. While

69,4% of students answered "No" to drawing a pedigree, only 58,1% of students felt competence getting a family history. Competences about genetics were not changed level of class. However, students who taking medical biology and genetics lesson had more genetic diseases knowledge than no taking this lesson group (see Table 2).

Table 3 indicated that comparison of the definition of genetic concepts according to taking medical biology and genetics lesson. DNA and RNA structures/functions, genotype, fenotype, karyotype, chromosome, allele, mutation and gene therapy were statistically different according to medical biology and genetic lesson. Table 3 gives additional informations on the students responded about genetic concepts.

Finally, survey also asked for students' opinions about medical biology and genetics lesson with open ended questions. Their replies included increase of lesson time and giving lesson in the years of advancing education.

Discussion

Nowadays, genetic and genomic investigations lead to a better understanding of common complex diseases such as cancer, diabetes, obesity and cardiovascular diseases, and the creation of novel, gene-based technologies for screening, prevention, diagnosis and treatment of these diseases. Nursing clinical practice, including all specialties has integrated into genetics and

Table 2. Comparison of the answers given by nursing students questions about genetic diseases

Genetic diseases	Taking lesson n(%)	No taking lesson n(%)	p
Trisomy 21/Down syndrome			
No information	12(7.7)	22(33.3)	<0.001
Need more information	33(21.2)	20(30.3)	
Knowledgeable	111(71.2)	24(36.4)	
Trisomy 18/Edwards syndrome			
No information	23(14.7)	37(56.1)	<0.001
Need more information	53(34)	26(39.4)	
Knowledgeable	80(51.3)	3(4.5)	
Trisomy 13/Patau syndrome			
No information	31(19.9)	40(60.6)	<0,001
Need more information	58(37.2)	25(37.9)	
Knowledgeable	67(42.9)	1(1.5)b	
Turner syndrome			
No information	24(15.4)	21(31.8)	0.001
Need more information	41(26.3)	24(36.4)	
Knowledgeable	91(58.3)	21(31.8)	
Klinefelter syndrome			
No information	34(21.8)	25(37.9)	0.013
Need more information	36(23.1)	18(27.3)	
Knowledgeable	86(55.1)	23(34.8)	
Thalassemia			
No information	36(23.1)	20(30.3)	0.385
Need more information	44(28.2)	20(30.3)	
Knowledgeable	76(48.7)	26(39.4)	
Cystic fibrosis			
No information	65(41.7)	32(48.5)	0.602
Need more information	49(31.4)	17(25.8)	
Knowledgeable	42(26.9)	17(25.8)	
Sickle cell anemia			
No information	26(16.7)	19(28.8)	0.120
Need more information	49(31.4)	17(25.8)	
Knowledgeable	81(51.9)	30(45.5)	
Fragile X syndrome			
No information	88(56.4)	45(68.2)	0.139
Need more information	42(26.9)	16(24.2)	
Knowledgeable	26(16.7)	5(7.6)	
Huntington Disease			
No information	89(57.1)	49(74.2)	0.051
Need more information	52(33.3)	14(21.2)	
Knowledgeable	15(9.6)	3(4.5)	
Duschenne muscular dystrophy			
No information	108(69.2)	52(78.8)	0.169
Need more information	37(23.7)	13(19.7)	
Knowledgeable	11(7.1)	1(1.5)	

Table 3. Comparison of the definition of genetic concepts according to students' taking medical biology and genetic lesson

Genetic concepts	No taking lesson		Taking lesson		p
	Yes	No	Yes	No	
	n(%)	n(%)	n(%)	n(%)	
DNA structure/function	51(75)	17(25)	140(90,9)	14(9,1)	0,0021
RNA structure/function	44(64,7)	24(35,3)	134(87)	20(13)	<0,0011
DNA replication	50(73,5)	18(26,5)	133(86,4)	21(13,6)	0,0211
Transcription	37(54,4)	31(45,6)	115(74,7)	39(25,3)	0,0031
Translation	31(45,6)	37(54,4)	111(72,1)	43(27,9)	<0,0011
Mitosis	61(89,7)	7(10,3)	146(94,8)	8(5,2)	0,2442
Meiosis	60(88,2)	8(11,8)	147(95,5)	7(4,5)	0,0772
Chromosome	58(85,3)	10(14,7)	144(93,5)	10(6,5)	0,0491
Genome	42(61,8)	26(38,2)	121(78,6)	33(21,4)	0,0091
Gene	56(82,4)	12(17,6)	131(85,1)	23(14,9)	0,6091
Locus	20(29,4)	48(70,6)	62(40,3)	92(59,7)	0,1231
Allele	38(55,9)	30(44,1)	111(72,1)	43(27,9)	0,0181
Homozygous	57(83,8)	11(16,2)	142(92,2)	12(7,8)	0,0591
Heterozygous	57(83,8)	11(16,2)	146(94,8)	8(5,2)	0,0071
Hemizygous	34(50)	34(50)	126(81,8)	28(18,2)	<0,0011
Genotype	51(75)	17(25)	146(94,8)	8(5,2)	<0,0011
Fenotype	54(79,4)	14(20,6)	144(93,5)	10(6,5)	0,0021
Mutation	52(76,5)	16(23,5)	141(91,6)	13(8,4)	0,0021
Karyotype	37(54,4)	31(45,6)	110(71,4)	44(28,6)	0,0131
Dominant	49(72,1)	19(27,9)	141(91,6)	13(8,4)	<0,0011
Recessive	50(73,5)	18(26,5)	134(87)	20(13)	0,0141
Autosomal dominant inheritance pattern	38(55,9)	30(44,1)	119(77,3)	35(22,7)	0,0011
Autosomal recessive inheritance pattern	39(57,4)	29(42,6)	116(75,3)	38(24,7)	0,0071
X linked inheritance pattern	42(61,8)	26(38,2)	131(85,1)	23(14,9)	<0,0011
Mitochondrial inheritance pattern	31(45,6)	37(54,4)	96(62,3)	58(37,7)	0,0201
Prenatal Diagnosis	20(29,4)	48(70,6)	50(32,5)	104(67,5)	0,6511
Gene Therapy	31(45,6)	37(54,4)	94(61)	60(39)	0,0321

¹Pearson chi-square test. ²Fisher's Exact test

genomic developments (16). Nurses should be competent to determine patients' and families' educational needs, comprehend and communicate patterns of inheritance, describe risks for genetic health, identify genetic tests and treatments' beneficence and limitations. Thus, patients and families are learned and get to be privatized information for their needs (17). Also, nursing education goal is to ensure knowledgeable and competent nurse for profession. Lea et al. declare that genetics, genomics and convenient clinical environment are formed with genetic educated nurses (18). These developments related to genetic have highlighted needs within nursing education and course content.

Each nursing program designs their curriculum and the arrangement through which genetic course content is taught. A number of nursing education programs in Turkey infuse genetic content different course. Besides, some nursing programmes integrated genetic lesson with different content and name. This study revealed that significant differences knowledge of genetics concepts in taking medical biology and genetic lesson. And also, meaningful gap still be in nursing students' reported knowledge of genetic concepts, diseases and perception of medical biology and genetics lesson.

The majority of the participants said knowledgeable of basic genetic terms such as mitosis, meiosis, DNA and RNA. The ratio of students stated a high level of genetic concepts is found higher than similar studies in USA and Taiwan (15, 19). Also, asking with likert scale items students' evaluation of medical genetics concepts and disorders study in Turkey revealed similar knowledge about basic genetic concepts (14). The reason for this can be explained as the inclusion of genetic terms in the courses given at the primary and secondary school level in the Turkish education system.

The knowledge of Turner syndrome, trisomy 13, 18 and 21 which are genetic disorders was higher in the group receiving the lesson. This finding is also higher than similar study in Turkey (14). Also, over half of the students indicated "no knowledge" Huntington disease and Duchenne's muscular dystrophy as well as Hsiao et al. study (19).

In our study, nursing students' opinions about some genetic competence evaluated and reported drawing pedigree was not able to draw in participants. Maradigue et al. and Vural et al. were reported their studies being able to draw pedigree (14,15). Additionally, students signified that the most wanted education issues were cancer genetic and Individual/family communication techniques with genetic diseases.

In our study taking genetic lesson increased knowledge of genetic concepts and perception of genetic disease. In recent years, there have been many efforts to decrease gaps in genetic knowledge of the nursing profession. Many beginning was the organization of the NINR Summer Genetics Institute (SGI), which for has been supplying compacted studies in molecular genetics at the bench with application to clinical practice and train the next generation of nursing researchers. Also, another important development was determine of the essential nursing competencies in genetics and genomics (20-22). However, nursing program curriculum hasn't integrated into sufficiently genetic competencies in Turkey as many country (23-28).

Previous studies stressed that the majority of nurses agree in need of more training on genetics (29, 30). Also, during the period of nursing education, students in the last years of education have been informed that they want more education about genetics (14, 19). Similarly, studies inferred that nurses have more interest in learning genetic (31-34). These results show that today's genetic education need more

comprehensive about genetic concepts, disease and skills. More study should be conducted in order to get integration genetic education into the nursing curriculum.

In our study; nursing students preferred ongoing genetic education, irrespective of their taking medical biology and genetics lesson. But those who had medical biology and genetics lesson across nursing curriculum were more motivated to get more education in genetic topics.

This study has shown that nursing curriculum should contain genetic education to prepare student nurses for today and future healthcare needs. In Turkey limited researches have been fulfilled on the perception and knowledge about genetics of students for nursing programme. For qualified nurses, medical biology and genetic lesson might be an opportunity to minimize knowledge gap about genetic during nursing education. Also, a continuing educational programme regarding genetic might be enabled to integrate genetics into practice.

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