

## Forensic Nursing: A Comprehensive Review of Scope, Practice, and Future Directions

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### Abstract

Forensic nursing is a profession that integrates nursing science with forensic ideas to provide comprehensive healthcare for victims and offenders of violence, abuse, trauma, and criminal activity while ensuring the appropriate collection and preservation of forensic evidence. Over the past thirty years, the specialty has seen significant transformation as a result of increased awareness of interpersonal violence, sexual assault, child abuse, elder abuse, domestic violence, human trafficking, disaster management, and medico-legal investigations. Forensic nurses serve as vital bridges between the criminal justice and healthcare systems through evidence-based examination, documentation, injury interpretation, expert testimony, and victim advocacy.

**Keywords:** Sexual assault, forensic evidence, child abuse, domestic violence, trauma care, victim advocacy, forensic nursing, medico-legal nursing, and criminal justice.

### Introduction

A distinctive nursing specialty, forensic nursing integrates the judicial system, forensic science, and healthcare delivery. It ensures careful documentation and storage of forensic evidence while concentrating on the treatment of people impacted by violence, abuse, trauma, neglect, disasters, and criminal activities.<sup>1</sup> Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE), forensic psychiatric nursing, correctional nursing, forensic pediatric nursing, death investigation, disaster response, and legal nurse consulting are just a few of the subspecialties that forensic nursing has grown into since it was officially recognized by the

International Association of Forensic Nurses (IAFN) in the early 1990s.<sup>2</sup>

The significance of specialized forensic nursing services has been brought to light by rising incidence of interpersonal violence, child abuse, intimate partner violence, elder abuse, human trafficking, and major disasters worldwide.<sup>3</sup> Apart from providing empathetic clinical treatment, forensic nurses play an important role in criminal investigations, court cases, and public health campaigns. Both patient outcomes and legal responsibility are improved by their proficiency in injury evaluation, evidence gathering, recordkeeping, and expert testimony.<sup>4</sup>

The historical development, contemporary procedures, new trends, difficulties, and prospects for forensic nursing are all examined in this review.<sup>5</sup>

## Background

The realization that medical personnel frequently come into contact with victims and perpetrators of violence prior to the involvement of law enforcement organizations gave rise to the idea of forensic nursing. In the past, nurses recorded injuries and administered emergency care, but they were mainly lacking in systematic forensic evaluation and evidence preservation.

Forensic nursing was officially recognized as a specialty in 1992 by the International Association of Forensic Nurses (IAFN). Since then, the field has made great strides because to specialized training programs, certification pathways, and evidence-based therapeutic guidelines.

Emergency rooms, trauma centres, prisons, mental health facilities, child advocacy centres, community health settings, disaster response teams, and medico-legal services all around the world now employ forensic nurses.

## Objectives of the Review

- To describe the evolution of forensic nursing.
- To discuss the scope and roles of forensic nurses.
- To review current clinical practice and forensic responsibilities.
- To identify ethical and legal issues in forensic nursing.
- To summarize recent technological advances.
- To explore challenges and future directions.

## Historical Evolution of Forensic Nursing

The specialty has developed through several milestones:

- Recognition of sexual assault examination programs.
- Development of Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) services.
- Establishment of the International Association of Forensic Nurses.
- Growth of forensic education programs.

- Integration of forensic nursing into criminal justice systems.
- Expansion into disaster response and humanitarian crises.
- Adoption of digital forensic documentation technologies.

## Scope of Forensic Nursing

Forensic nursing encompasses diverse practice settings including:

- Emergency departments
- Sexual assault examination centres
- Child protection units
- Domestic violence programs
- Correctional healthcare
- Psychiatric forensic units
- Disaster response teams
- Death investigation services
- Community forensic nursing
- Legal consultation

## Roles and Responsibilities

### Major responsibilities include:

- Comprehensive physical assessment
- Injury documentation
- Collection and preservation of forensic evidence
- Chain of custody maintenance
- Photography of injuries
- Sexual assault examination
- Crisis intervention
- Victim advocacy
- Court testimony
- Collaboration with law enforcement
- Risk assessment
- Safeguarding vulnerable population

## Types of Forensic Nursing Practice

Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE): Provides preventative therapy, gathers forensic evidence, offers psychological support, and provides specialized care for victims of sexual assault.<sup>6</sup>

Forensic Psychiatric Nurse: Oversees violence prevention, risk assessments, competency examinations, and mentally ill offenders.<sup>7</sup>

Correctional Nurse: Addresses security, ethical, and legal issues while providing medical care in jails and detention facilities.<sup>8</sup>

Pediatric Forensic Nurse: Evaluates non-accidental injuries, suspected child abuse, neglect, and maltreatment.<sup>9</sup>

Elder Abuse Nurse: Identifies financial, emotional, physical, and neglect-related abuse in senior citizens.<sup>10</sup>

Death Investigation Nurse: Helps medical examiners and coroners with postmortem paperwork and death site investigations.<sup>10</sup>

Legal Nurse Consultant: Examines medical records, evaluates clinical data, and supports lawyers in medico-legal matters.<sup>11</sup>

Evidence Collection and Documentation: Proper forensic documentation is essential for legal proceedings.<sup>12</sup>

#### **Best practices include:**

- A precise description of the injury
- Mapping the body
- Excellent photography
- Gathering DNA samples
- Managing biological specimens
- Preservation of clothing
- Maintaining the chain of custody
- Documentation that is objective
- On-time reporting

#### **Ethical and Legal Considerations**

##### **Important ethical issues include:**

- Autonomy of the patient
- Consent that is informed
- Secrecy
- Required reporting
- Protection of privacy
- Accountability in the workplace
- Cultural awareness

- Victim rights and justice

#### **Emerging Trends**

##### **Recent developments include:**

- Tele-forensic nursing
- Forensic digital photography
- Injury analysis aided by artificial intelligence
- Electronic medical-legal records
- Developments in DNA technology
- Training with virtual simulations
- Mobile forensic units
- Care that is informed by trauma
- Interprofessional cooperation

#### **Challenges**

##### **Current barriers include:**

- Insufficient specialized training
- A lack of qualified forensic nurses
- Complicated legal issues
- Stress at work
- Secondary traumatic stress
- Moral conundrums
- Insufficient institutional assistance
- Limitations on resources
- Insufficient public awareness
- Differences in forensic procedures

#### **Future Directions**

##### **Future priorities include:**

- Increasing postgraduate training in forensic nursing
- International standards for certification
- Including primary healthcare
- Improved tools for digital forensics
- Applications of artificial intelligence
- The growth of telehealth
- Enhanced interdisciplinary cooperation
- National guidelines for forensic nursing
- Studies on results and optimal methods
- Leadership and workforce development

## CONCLUSION

Through thorough clinical treatment, evidence preservation, victim advocacy, and legal collaboration, forensic nursing has emerged as a crucial specialty that connects the criminal justice system with healthcare. Forensic nurses are essential to securing justice and improving patient outcomes as violence, abuse, disasters, and complicated medico-legal cases continue to rise globally. Forensic nursing services will be strengthened and their contribution to healthcare and society will be increased with sustained investment in education, policy development, technological innovation, and interdisciplinary collaboration.

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