

Book Review

Forensic Nursing: A Handbook for Practice

Edited by Rita M. Hammer,
Barbara Moynihan, and Elaine M. Pagliaro
Mississauga, Ontario: Jones & Bartlett, 2006
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Reviewed by Janet Ericksen

This is a well-written and informative resource book. The editors are well qualified. Hammer and Moynihan are professors of forensic nursing and Pagliaro is Assistant Director of a forensic science laboratory. They have brought together the latest information about the field of forensic nursing and the range of situations encountered by forensic nurses. The editors define forensic nursing as an evolving field focused on collaboration to meet the needs of those affected by violence as well as those in non-violent forensic-related situations such as natural disasters and Internet safety. Chapters written by experts in the fields of nursing, law, criminology, social work, and public policy provide a comprehensive overview of the scope and theoretical foundations of forensic nursing.

The book is divided into five parts, each with several chapters. Each chapter has a concise introduction, a list of key terms, an extensive reference list, and a list of questions for discussion. Four appendices to the book detail guidelines regarding search and seizure of evidence, evidence-collection guidelines, selected assessment tools, and Internet resources.

Part 1 thoroughly lays out the foundations of forensic nursing science. The first chapter provides an extensive overview of forensic nursing, including roles, history, and challenges. Other chapters describe the nature of forensic science theory and focus on concepts essential to forensic nursing such as the epidemiology of violence, sociocultural diversity, and multidisciplinary collaboration. The chapter on law deals solely with the American justice system, so Canadian and other non-American nurses would need to augment the book with resources on their respective justice systems.

Part 2 concentrates on the populations served by forensic nurses. Included here are chapters on both survivors and perpetrators of violence, including children and adolescents, and populations at risk. As well, there is a detailed chapter on posttraumatic stress disorder. The unique challenges of providing care to these populations are clearly elucidated.

Part 3 contains specific information on the practical aspects of forensic nursing such as evidence collection and documentation. Entire chapters are devoted to the processes of sexual assault intervention and death investigation. Additionally, the nature of biological evidence, including DNA, is clearly described. Especially noteworthy are the many practical tips provided throughout these chapters.

Part 4 provides details on specialized forensic nursing roles, including correctional nursing and disaster and emergency management. One chapter is devoted to expert witness testimony.

Part 5 discusses “concepts for the 21st century.” Included here are chapters on media management, leadership, public policy, and education. Again, the authors provide both theoretical and practical information for the reader.

In the preface, the editors state that “this handbook was developed in recognition of the need for a resource that could enhance the ability of the forensic nurse to function effectively in this new and evolving role” (p. xvii). While at over 800 pages this volume is too big to be a handbook, the editors have succeeded in developing a valuable resource for forensic nurses, students, and educators.

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