

ABSTRACT

AIDS has become the most devastating disease humankind has ever faced. A review of the literature has revealed several attitudinal and psychological issues which have the greatest impact on health care professionals including nurses in their care of people with HIV/AIDS.

This study sought to determine the fears and concerns of nurses, as well as to investigate the support systems available to them as they care for HIV/AIDS patients. One hundred and sixteen (116) nurses representing 50% were randomly selected from the University Hospital of the West Indies as well as 38 nurses representing full compliment of nurses at the National Chest Hospital comprised the population studied. One hundred and twenty (120) nurses completed questionnaires giving a response rate of 78%. In addition a focus group discussion was held with nurses at the NCH.

Results showed that the ward on which nurses worked was significantly associated with whether or not they received training about HIV/AIDS ($p < 0.005$). A statistically significant association was also found between the hospital at which the nurses work and the availability of personal protective equipment ($p < 0.001$).

Approximately 81% of nurses described their risk of contracting HIV as high/very high and 7% reported being stuck by sharps while administering care to HIV/AIDS patients. Approximately 57% of nurses had done the HIV test at least once. 98.3% felt that the management of the hospital should

provide life-long care for nurses who become infected with HIV as a result of performing official duties. Over 88% of nurses have not considered changing their chosen vocation because they may be required to work with HIV/AIDS patients but 31% felt that health care workers should have the right to refuse to care for patients with HIV/AIDS.

The attitudes and concerns of the nurses are similar to those described in the studies cited in this study. The nurses have identified the need for additional training on HIV/AIDS and counselling; support systems for nurses and patients and the introduction of a compensation scheme for nurses who might be infected on the job. There is need for the nurses to be made aware of a clear policy in the hospitals on HIV/AIDS.