Psychiatric Nursing and Ethics in Japan

- Identification of the Ethical Challenges Faced by Nurses

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Objective:

To identify the **ethical challenges faced by psychiatric nurses** in clinical environments through focus group interviews.

Backgrounds:

With the various known ethical challenges related to psychiatry, the usefulness of conferences focusing on such challenges has been reported in Japan. On the other hand, care actually provided in psychiatric hospitals remains unethical.

In such a situation, identification of the ethical challenges faced by psychiatric nurses may have a marked significance.

Methods:

This study adopted a qualitative, descriptive design. A focus group interview was conducted with nursing managers (head nurses and chief nurses) with extensive experience in psychiatric nursing. During the interview, the nurses freely talked about psychiatric nursing and ethics, and their statements were recorded with their permission. The interview data were subsequently organized as narrative records, and the ethical challenges and mental conflicts described by the nurses were qualitatively analyzed. On analysis, member checking among the researchers was repeated to ensure sufficient validity. The study was approved by the ethics committee of the facility the researcher belonged to.

Results:

Seven head nurses and 7 chief nurses participated in the interview, consisting of 2 sessions that lasted for approximately 50 minutes each.

Through these sessions, the following **ethical challenges** were identified:

1. insufficient physical and end-stage care for persons with mental disorders,
2. punitive treatment for inpatients (dietary restrictions),
3. continuous deprivation of patient liberty (not changing patient gowns),
4. care based on the instructions of psychiatrists who administer placebos,
5. overbearing attitudes toward patients,
6. excessive restrictions on patients to avoid accidents (prevent suicide or leaving hospital),
7. insufficient approaches to reduce patients' anxiety during behavioral restrictions,
8. not telling patients the truth.

Additionally, the nurses described **their mental conflicts due to difficulty in sufficiently discussing these challenges among multiple professionals**.

Conclusion:

The nurses regarded the current situation as inevitable with a sense of resignation, while questioning some measures, such as placing severer restrictions on patients to prevent suicide, leaving hospital, or other serious events. Psychiatric nurses, who frequently face ethical challenges related to behavioral restrictions and involuntary inpatient treatment, need to continuously examine appropriate ethical nursing practice, and address these challenges.

As a future perspective for the realization of **multi-professional collaboration conferences**, it may be important to clarify the roles of psychiatric nurses.