Donna Cardillo, a renowned nursing professional, beautifully described her experience of nursing profession. She states, "When I think about all the patients and their loved ones, that I have worked with over the years, I know most of them don’t remember me nor I them, but I do know that I gave a little piece of myself to each of them and they to me and those threads make up the beautiful tapestry in my mind that is my career in nursing."

When it comes to the care giving profession, a nurse is the integral part of the system involved in care giving regardless of the specialty, and demographic discrimination. Nurses have the highest incidence of the occupational musculoskeletal symptoms in a healthcare department including lower backache, neck pain and shoulder pain followed by lower leg pain [1].

Lower backache is the most common problem among the musculoskeletal symptoms faced by nurse professionals around the globe but its etiology is never simple rather it is a multifactorial issue. The most common occupational etiological factors include improper posture, standing for long hours, lifting heavy equipment, patient transferring and repositioning [1,2]. Obesity and smoking are also a significant risk factor for backache among healthcare providers [2]. In past physical violence at work place in hospitals was also a main factor in causing spine injuries yet it is not a major contributor to the development of spinal issues in current era because health care facilities are advancing along with the effective management of the security concerns.

Lower back pain or lumbago is more common in female nurses working in healthcare department with significant impact on their efficacy. Lumbago has a significant impact on a healthcare department, as it is one of the reasons for early retirement, absenteeism, reduced efficiency and frequent job switching of the nursing staff [3]. Therefore, it is necessary to take into consideration the facts and pay attention to the employees working in health set up especially the nurses who are always providing holistic care for the patients keeping their own health at risk.

Most commonly muscular spasms are responsible for acute lumbago in nurses while chronic conditions include disc prolapse/herniation, annular tears and spinal stenosis. Moreover, improper dietary intake of calcium can result in osteoporosis hence leading to pathological fractures of vertebrae and backache among caregivers. It is important to seek medical advice if pain in back lasts for more than two weeks, radiates to lower half of body especially legs and/ or associated with neurological symptoms [4].

Considering the importance of the nursing staff globally, it is necessary to take adequate measures in order to reduce the symptoms of backache, which are customarily preventable, by effortless techniques and acquaintance about the spine care. It is therefore the accountability of the healthcare department to educate the nurses about the prevention of lumbago through seminars, workshops, training sessions, hands on experiences and practical demonstrations.

The most important step in prevention of lower back pain is knowledge about maintaining the posture while repositioning the patients, lifting heavy weight and avoiding forward bending for long duration or overloading one body part for extended period. Expert physiotherapists should regularly conduct proper sessions for training about posture and ensure adequate knowledge of paramedical staff regarding spine health.

It is necessary to provide the recommended knowledge about symptoms of spinal problems while stressing upon the severity of untreated issues so that the caregivers seek timely advice of doctor instead of neglecting their health for continuing the job. Training the staff for managing backache and maintaining the spinal flexibility and strength is achievable through proper warm up exercise sessions before work daily [5].
The best treatment model presented by Engel in 1980 in his article named as the “biopsychosocial model of patient care” is applicable for the management of backache among caregivers [6]. According to this model, medical, psychological as well as social support is necessary for any caregiver suffering from low backache [7]. This is achievable through teamwork and maintaining a conducive working atmosphere. Any staff member suffering from back pain should seek medical advice and get proper analgesics, muscle relaxants and other medication depending upon the condition [7]. They must not work beyond their capacity and should get adequate rest although bed rest is not advisable in early symptoms.

Hospital ergonomics is essential for preventing spine problems among nurses. Spine friendly furniture should be provided to every caregiver working for long hours especially the night duty staff. Moreover, transportation of heavy equipment and managing obese patients should be done through properly designed shifting trolleys and beds respectively [8].

An adequate routine checkup of nurses is worth considerable in such cases. Moreover, it is necessary to follow up with a dietician to maintain body weight and eat balanced spine friendly diet in order to prevent backache especially in staff with obesity, osteoporotic bones and unhealthy eating habits. Smoking leads to worsening of spinal issues due to vasoconstriction of small blood vessels due to the effect of caffeine and reduced uptake of nutrients by the disk [9].

The psychological impact of persistent low backache is more challenging as it can lead to early disability and reduced will power to continue a job. This should be managed timely and no more than two days off is recommended in literature in case of severe backache without and significant identifiable cause [7].

Currently, other than oral medication there are some other ways of managing the backache from alternative medicine although many of them are reliable and helpful in managing backache alone [10]. These include craniosacral therapy, reflexology, relaxation therapies and acupuncture etc. Craniosacral therapy is based on stimulating the areas along the back and cranium by applying gentle pressure that helps to relieve pain with relaxation of taught muscles [11]. Similarly, acupuncture is also based on pricking certain areas with thin needles to relieve pain [12]. Reflexology deals with the stimulation of the areas in foot and hand reflexely representing the areas of back pain, these are easy methods, which anyone can learn but are not yet considered as the only definite method of management [13,14].

The most important step in the management of the backache is the self-motivation and positive attitude and psychological strength. Through these qualities, one feels easy to manage the symptoms more effectively and help themselves in a better way instead of taking heavy doses of painkillers.

In conclusion, low backache is the most common spinal issues faced by nurses associated with multifactorial etiology and risk factors. It is preventable with simple training and education while prompt treatment and control of risk factors can help reduce the absenteeism ratio of nursing staff from work. Therefore, it is highly recommended to train and educate caregivers about the backache problems and the importance of seeking medical advice timely in the light of the biopsychosocial model of health care.

References


