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ADDRESSING SEXUALITY IN SPINAL CORD INJURY PATIENTS: THE NURSE'S PERSPECTIVE

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Introduction. Individuals with spinal cord injuries (SCI) remain sexual beings and require appropriate education, attention, and rehabilitation to maintain their sexual health. Sexuality remains underexplored and often neglected in clinical practice. In Italy no standardized guidelines or structured nurse training exist on this topic. This study explored Italian nurses' knowledge, attitudes, and relational approaches toward sexuality in adult SCI patients.

Materials and Methods. A qualitative descriptive phenomenological study was conducted in three specialized centres in Milan. 23 nurses participated in semi-structured face-to-face interviews between August and September 2024. Data were analyzed inductively to identify recurring themes.

Results. Three themes emerged: nurses' education strongly influenced their ability to recognize, discuss, and address sexual issues, often delegating to other professionals; facilitating factors included biological awareness, empathetic communication, and situational readiness; barriers were related to moral conflict, cultural bias, embarrassment, and the absence of private spaces or dedicated time. Nurses expressed uncertainty about their role, yet recognized the relevance of sexuality to holistic rehabilitation and patient well-being.

Conclusions. Nurses address multiple aspects of sexuality, acknowledging its role as an integral human need. Strengthening education, reflective practice, and interdisciplinary collaboration can enhance nurses' competence and confidence in discussing sexuality with SCI patients.