



Global Update

The First Forensic Nursing Forum in Switzerland: the Fundamental Milestone in the Establishment of Forensic Nursing.

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Forensic Nursing is a relatively new nursing specialization in Switzerland, which is not yet very well-known across the country. There are currently only a few nurses who are employed as forensic nurses itself in institutions like hospitals or care centres.

But also in Switzerland, as in the rest of the world, there is violence in the society and the need of finding new ways to protect victims of violence is constantly growing. It can be assumed, that there is, like in many other countries, a high number of unreported cases when it comes to domestic or sexual violence.

In 2011, the Council of Europe resolved the so-called Istanbul Convention. A concept on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence in Europe. The Implementation of the concept is mandatory for all the member states. Therefore it is mandatory for Switzerland to plan the implementation and get over the books of the actual structures and systems in prevention and treatment of victims of violence.

In 2015 The Institute of Forensic Medicine in Zürich started their first educational program in Forensic Nursing. Taking the "Forensic Nurse" in the United States and Canada as a role model. 16 participants started the "Certificate of Advanced studies (CAS) in Forensic Nursing" at the Institute of Forensic Medicine, in collaboration with the University of Zurich. As for today in 2022, we already have approximately 95 trained Forensic Nurses who did the CAS

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in Forensic Nursing in Zürich and around 13 Forensic Nurses from the postgraduate course of Forensic Nursing in Chur.

The Swiss Association of Forensic Nursing was founded in 2017 and is counting on around sixty members today. So we already have resources in Forensic Nursing but there is still a lot more to do.

To optimize the implementation of Forensic Nursing in Switzerland, the Institute of Forensic Medicine in cooperation with the Swiss Association Forensic Nursing had decided to host the first Forensic Nursing Forum in Switzerland this year.

On May 6 and 7, 2022, on the Pilatus, Lucerne's beautiful house mountain, around 60 participants came together with the motto of the forum "Vision, Mission, Strategy and Action". Due to the bad weather conditions, the magnificent panoramic view from the Bernese Jura over the Eiger, Moench and Jungfrau to the Pfannenstiel was out of sight. Good for the forum as there was no distraction from the outside to the forum attendees and it was easy to focus on the main goals (Figure 1).

Figure 1:

The official announcement of the First Forensic Nursing Forum in Switzerland



The main topics of the forum were the presentation of numerous areas of application of Forensic Nursing and the discussion of the current challenges we face. A big interest was to promote and strengthen the interdisciplinary cooperation and to develop perspectives for an implementation in the Swiss health care system.

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Among the participants were representatives of forensic medicine, law enforcement agencies, nursing management, nursing services, politicians, lawyers, and aspiring and trained forensic nurses. This constellation allowed the desired interdisciplinary exchange to take place at the highest level.

The opening ceremony was hosted by Prof. Dr. Michael Thali, Director of the Institute of Forensic Medicine of the University of Zurich and Director of the CAS in Forensic Nursing at the University of Zurich and Valeria Kägi, President of the Swiss Association of Forensic Nursing. The main focus was put on the developing field of Forensic Nursing in Switzerland and the urgent need in society for high quality forensic competence and the opportunities to optimize the process for Forensic Nurses as interface managers.

The opening of the forum was concluded with virtual greetings from two pioneers of Forensic Nursing. Catherine Carter-Snell (Mount Royal University, CA, Faculty of Health, Community & Education – School of Nursing and Midwifery), and Virginia Lynch (MSN, RN, FAAFS, FAAN, once University of Texas at Arlington's School of Nursing) demonstrated in their speeches the journey that Forensic Nursing has taken for more than 20 years. They vividly conveyed that Forensic Nursing has been a success story in Canada as well as in the United States of America. It came from a niche existence to a broad and indispensable role in the health care system.

The first day of the forum was dedicated to already successful implementations in Switzerland and gave space for speakers to give ideas on different ways to go in the future. A forensic consultation center in Chur, provided practical examples from gynecological emergencies and psychiatry wards showing that forensic nurses are already successfully assuming important functions and tasks in parts of the Swiss health care system. The model of Flying Forensic Nursing was introduced, as well as the possibility of a Forensic Nursing App to provide a simple access to high forensic competence. The last presentation of the day by a prosecutor again emphasized the relevance of clean documentation of injuries and good preservation of evidence at an early stage.

The second day was devoted to perspectives for Forensic Nursing in Switzerland. The adoption of physician associates in the Swiss Health Care system was showed as an example way to go when it comes to the implementation of new nursing specialties in an existing system. Dr. Julian Mausbach, a lawyer at the Institute of Forensic Medicine gave an overview of forensic nursing from a legal perspective and showed the participants what the possibilities in Switzerland are when it comes to competences, rights and obligations. This was followed by Valeria Kägi, Forensic Nurse at the institute of forensic medicine who introduced the Swiss Association Forensic Nursing, their main goals and their national and international cooperation partners. Once again, she emphasized the importance of networking together between all of the disciplines with forensic relevance.

The Lucerne cantonal councilor Stefan Schärli, not only moderated the forum, he also gave a contribution to the political dimension of the integration of Forensic Nursing in Switzerland. We heard an informative presentation on human trafficking in Switzerland from a representative of ACT 212, an anti-trafficking organization. And at the of the day various exciting presentations by the members of the police force about topics such as senior citizen protection as well as possibilities for the collaboration between forensic nurses and the police rounded up the very informative two-day event.

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All presentations were accompanied by numerous comments and discussions from the plenum. It was possible to achieve a holistic overview of Forensic Nursing in Switzerland. What we already achieved and what we need to aim for in the future. A concluding panel discussion once again demonstrated the great need and the great potential of Forensic Nursing in Switzerland and in general. With all the participants coming together from different points of view we came to the main conclusion, that we need to put the victim of violence into the center of attention when we are working together, and we need to stabilize our network to professionalize their support in the care system.

Overall, the many discussions during and around the event led to the establishment of a variety of new friendly and professional contacts. The first Swiss Forensic Nurse Forum was such a great success for all of us that we are already planning the second Forensic Nursing Forum in 2023.

The second Swiss Forum will be held on **May 5th and 6th 2023** in the beautiful Swiss canton of Glarus, and we would be very pleased to welcome you there.

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