

CONTEMPORARY ISSUE IN NURSING

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It is an absolute pleasure to be writing again for the *Malaysian Journal of Nursing*. Since I last wrote a piece for the *MJN* I have managed to create a dialogue with a small group of nurse educators here in Malaysia and begun to negotiate with them with reference to our future writing and how they might become involved. For now their preference is that I continue to put the piece together after discussing with them contemporary issues that are pertinent to you all. Such issues relate to the education of nurses here in South East Asia and are the business of every nurse within our profession whether they are practitioners, administrators, educators or students still trying to figure out which of these trajectories or alternative trajectories they might follow. It is important that every nurse discusses such issues and has a view and that these opinions are then shared, as appropriate, with decision makers and those that set the policy that governs nursing practice in Malaysia.

So, I packed my briefcase and set out to visit a well established College of Nursing where I met two contemporary nurse teachers and spent a couple of hours in collegiate discussion exploring the challenges that face nurse education in Malaysia in 2010. Our discussion explored the advantages that would be enjoyed if there were to be one consolidated system for nurse education. In the UK all nurses are educated in public universities with their tuition fees paid directly by the National Health Service (NHS). Every student is treated equitably.

What they are taught is prescribed by the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) via the Standards for Nurse Education, with this same body maintaining the Nursing Register – both actions that promote the NMC's principal function which is the protection of the public. The NMC acts as the regulator and is independent of the government and the NHS. It is funded by the annual subscriptions of registrants, an action that ensures that British nurses enjoy self regulation. This confirms the autonomy of the Nursing Profession, confirming that it is separate from the profession of medicine and not managed by it.

In Malaysia life is a little more complicated with both public universities and private colleges responsible for nurse education. Students, I am told, may be funded by the government or be independent and if funded by the government may undertake their programme of study in a public or private educational

institution. In some private colleges independently funded students study alongside those funded by the government. Sponsored students studying in public and private institutions are ultimately relied upon to staff the public hospitals and are indentured for a period of time following their course. Similarly some of the independent students may be sponsored by a private hospital chain and have similar contractual obligations on qualification.

Our discussion informed me that the Prime Minister, a visionary leader, had encouraged the private sector to be involved in such initiatives and by so doing made society more vibrant and competitive. Many private companies ventured into the health market and have enjoyed huge success. This has not only provided a good return for shareholders but has also ensured that individual Malaysians have had healthcare choices in state of the art hospitals and clinics. However there are some tensions as private colleges providing nurse education feel that they have to satisfy both the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education, assuring both that appropriate standards are being maintained with reference to care and education.

So what is the problem, I hear you ask? Does this system leave the private colleges vulnerable? Would an independent body be better, or just different? Is the present system geared toward and more favourable to the public universities? And finally, is this system sustainable into the future? There is no doubt that there is some excellent work going on as nursing moves forward as a profession. However, if it wants to be seen as equal to other professions in healthcare these questions must be articulated and answered. Equally nurses on the ground must enter into these discussions, decide what they think and feel, and then influence future debate. The topic is contentious, but gone are the days when nurses should not question. Contemporary nurses should always have a considered opinion and then seek to influence those who can make appropriate changes to the system.

If you are frustrated by a particular issue that effects nurse education do not hesitate to get in touch with me (via the editor) and together we can then explore the issue and invite our peers to discuss it. In this way the *Malaysian Journal of Nursing* will create a forum and dialogue for nurses to discuss issues pertinent to our profession. 