

Career Based Education – A Conceptual Approach for the Design and Development of a Nursing University

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In lieu of the global shift in the healthcare system, the Ministry of Health of Malaysia calls for an impetus in the nursing education to produce the next generation of nurses that readily heeds the call of challenge, that is, to provide healthcare that is “equitable, affordable, efficient, technologically appropriate, environmentally adapt-able and consumer friendly, with emphasis on quality, innovation, health promotion and respect for human dignity and which promotes individual responsibility and community participation towards an enhanced quality of life,”¹ The call is imperative and responding to it is crucial as well as immediate.

Introduction

Malaysia is gaining a status of being a developed country, and congruous to this are the various challenges it has to venture – the healthcare sector included. It is imperative that the healthcare provided be at a higher standard than it is today. Nurses, who hold a key role in providing healthcare, must be accorded due privileges, in particular, an upgraded system of education, as most of them only have either certificates or diploma in nursing.

To date, Malaysia has approximately only 15% of its population has tertiary education

(U.S. has 63%, U.K. 24%, and Japan 31%). To increase the current percentage to 40% by the year 2020 is one of the challenges being undertaken.

Nursing in Malaysia has remained almost in status quo since the country's independence in 1963, and has not made a significant impact, as far as the healthcare delivery system is concerned. As such, improvement in this area of healthcare delivery system is immediately called for.

It is important that the nursing profession becomes proactive to meet the challenge of the times.

The Vision: A client-centred health care delivery

Nurses, as members of the healthcare team, play an essential role in the realization of the vision of the health ministry.² The nursing service provided by nurses must meet the expectations and needs of the people of a fully developed Malaysia – which is beyond the traditional doctor-dependent health care.

Today's nurses are expected to provide nursing care beyond the traditional practice we are all accustomed to doing and seeing. They are responsible for effecting the transition from doctor dependent healthcare to client-centred practice that is vital for the advancement of nursing in Malaysia. Nurses of the future are expected to know more, accomplish more, and do better. Being equipped with a broad spectrum of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that will assist them in fulfilling their roles as effective healthcare providers become more imperative.

There are factors that have implications to the nursing practice. Among those are the spiraling cost of hospitalization, which result in healthcare being delivered more and more in the community; and

emphasis on current healthcare management: prevention, early detection of disease, wellness, and client empowerment.

Moreover, the concept of holistic care, meaning, the patient is seen with respect to his or her person, family, and community, not just the disease. Today's nurses must be competent to provide nursing care in the hospitals as well as in the clients' home and anywhere (e.g. workplaces, factories, schools) in the community.

A Background: Nursing in Malaysia

Nursing has changed from a profession recognized essentially as an appendage to the medical profession to a full-fledged profession in its own right. This journey is now being embarked upon by nurses in Malaysia. This is evident from the response we have got from the students looking towards a career path upon completion of the SPM and STPM examinations, and also from the emergence of many colleges providing Nursing education at diploma level.

Nurses in Malaysia were educated to certificate level in hospital-based programmes until 1990 when the qualification was upgraded to diploma level. At the same time, University Malaya introduced an undergraduate programme for nurses. This was a conversion programme to upgrade the diploma to a degree. At present, there are only five public and five private universities offering undergraduate programmes, in

either conversion and/or generic programmes, for nurses. As evidenced, progress in Nursing in Malaysia - from hospital-based training to higher education - has been relatively slow compared to other countries.

While we are beginning to recognize that one way of upgrading the status of nurses is by providing them opportunities for a baccalaureate degree, certain factors such as finances, family commitments, and more demand at work due to a shortage of nurses put constrain on registered nurses to enroll in full time on-campus programmes.

Based on the 2005 MOH fact sheet, Malaysia has about 32,580³ registered nurses (RN), while a record of the Malaysian Nursing Board shows that there were 52,000 RNs. Comprising 80 percent of the total healthcare personnel in the country, and out of this number, 70 percent are working in the government sector (*Chua, 2002*), Nursing practice must be modified - from task orientation to role orientation. Hence, there is an urgent need for nurses to be upgraded in line with the changes surrounding their profession and in tandem with the requirements of the nation and society.

Moving Forward

It is inevitable that nursing education in Malaysia will be heading to a direction, which ensures that the new graduates as well as in-service nurses are prepared to work in the reformed healthcare system. Thus, the nursing curriculum needs to be

dynamic and proactively responsive to changes.

A key point of such a nursing curriculum may include focus on important outcomes. These outcomes can include skills in critical thinking, life-long learning, technology, communication, primary care, management, collaborative aspects, and leadership.

The Ministry of Health has mandated that 10% of the nursing population, that is, 3,250 nurses will be provided with tertiary education (*Chua, 2002*). At present, less than 2% of nurses have first degrees. Among the factors that hinder nurses from pursuing degree programmes is staff shortage, which restrains employers from granting their nurse-staff study leave.

Currently, there are four public universities in Malaysia that conduct conversion degree programmes (diploma to bachelor) for RNs. These are full-time, on-campus programmes. Nonetheless, only a few nurses are able to enroll in these programmes. Given this scenario, solutions to address this problem are constantly being explored.

Higher education for nurses is not a luxury, but a necessity. Nurses need to be educated at a higher level in order to equip themselves with the knowledge and skills that will empower them to practice innovatively, creatively and autonomously. Establishing an institution of higher learning can address these issues and further:

To establish and develop a national capacity for retraining and upgrading registered nurses,

medical assistants and student nurses through a system of blended learning, combining self-instruction and face-to-face instruction delivered in university based learning environment with the support of Remote Learning Centres (RLC). Essentially consisting of establishing a new, distance education based mode for training and retraining of registered nurses and medical assistants. Apart from conventional teaching and training methodology, the varied modes of distance education technology will be explored to ensure that the right match is found.

Moreover, an effective approach is to bring the education/training to the clients rather than expecting the clients to come and be on campus. The vehicle to ensure success of the same will be the integration of conventional teaching learning methodology with state of the art ICT integration without negotiating on the quality of education/training provided.

The enhancement of technology driven delivery method by the use of various approaches in learning, namely, constructive learning, project-based learning, as well as problem solving learning methods can be helpful.

Nursing Shortage: A Global Scenario

The Nursing Shortage and its effects on healthcare worldwide are a major concern to politicians, healthcare workers, economists, and consumers alike. Where jobs may be scarce in some fields, healthcare jobs are growing exponentially.

How this challenge is being met every day across the globe is major news.

The findings of a two-year study addressing the worldwide nursing workforce crisis were released in Geneva on 29th March 2006 by the International Council of Nurses (ICN)⁴ and the Florence Nightingale International Foundation (FNIF)⁵. "We are seeing serious adverse impacts on the health and well-being of populations in both developed and developing countries due to

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the nursing shortage. The health-related Millennium Development Goals and development initiatives in general, are jeopardised by inadequate investments in human resources and ineffective actions to develop and sustain a strong health workforce," according to Dr. Hiroko Minami, President of ICN and FNIF.

"The political will to address the critical issues contributing to nurse shortages remains weak in most countries, despite a growing recognition of the critical issues" stressed ICN and FNIF's Chief Executive Officer Judith Oulton.

The report also highlights the need for greater national self-sufficiency in managing domestic supply and demand, and for enabling fiscal environments supportive of nursing workforce

development and improved public infrastructures (e.g. roads, clean water, electricity, information and communication technologies).

Alan Gibbs, Chair of the Burdett Trust for Nursing⁶ and the major project sponsor, clarified that the issues are complex and the solutions must be multi-faceted. "Addressing the magnitude of issues is not something any one organisation can do alone. Overcoming this crisis will require exceptional advocacy, leadership and a deep and sustained

political and financial commitment on the part of individual nations and the international community", he stated.

In the most basic sense, the current global nursing shortage is simply a widespread albeit dangerous lack of skilled nurses who are needed to care for individual patients and the population as a whole. All over the world, the work of nurses (who are approximately 12 million-strong) are relatively undermined by the public they serve. Failure to recognize that Nursing is a distinct scientific field and an autonomous profession whose skilled practitioners save lives and improve patient outcomes daily and in a wide variety of settings apparently becomes a fundamental cause of the nursing shortage.

Moreover, the public perception of what nursing work is against the actual work scenario of skilled nurses aggravates the situation. Further perpetuating the plight of nurses are short staffing and poor work conditions; unavailability of adequate resources for Nursing research and education; aging nursing workforce; expanded career options for women; nurses' predominantly female nature; increasing complexity of health care system and technology; and rapidly aging populations in developed nations. Relevant studies revealed that shortage of skilled nurses in clinical settings has significantly negative impact on patient outcomes, including mortality. This shortage of nurses is a critical phenomenon that is literally taking lives and impairing the health and well-being of millions of people worldwide. It is a global public health crisis.⁷

Understanding Demand and Supply

As of 2007 there are 68,349 RN in Malaysia (with 52,466 and 15,883 in the public private sectors, respectively). The ratio of nurse to population has improved from 1:2000 in the year 2000 to 1:600 in 2007 (The WHO pegged the ratio at 1:200⁸). This improvement in nurse-to-population ratio must be sustained in order for us to realize our vision of an upgraded healthcare.

To assist nurses obtain their degrees and at the same time maintaining full time employment, we intend to offer

nursing programmes at diploma, undergraduate, and postgraduate levels. Some of the programmes will be offered either as traditional or online distance learning programmes. The latter will provide more opportunities for nurses to undertake degree programmes.

In *table 1* clearly shows that there is a lack in institutions providing degree and postgraduate programmes in Nursing. There is a demand for degree programmes as the Malaysian Government has recently upgraded the Nursing profession from a support group

to a professional group and as such, the Diploma holders will be accelerated to the Degree category. This is inline with the international standards in Nursing , and as practiced by many developed countries such as United Kingdom, United States of America, Australia, and Canada.

Malaysia needs to train on an average 10,000 nurses a year for the next 13 years in order to meet the developed nations' nurses-to-population ratio of 1:200 by the year 2020. It is estimated that we need 170,000 nurses in the year

Table 1:
Number of Public and Private Institutions of Higher Learning offering Nursing programmes .

Institution	Cert.	Dip.	Degree	Masters	PhD	Gov. College	Uni.	Total
Public	-	-	4	1	1	17	9	26
Private	6	34	8	-	-	42	2	42
Total	6	34	12	1	1	59	11	58

Source – PHEI Management Sector, IHL Management Department.

Nursing Supply & Demand in 2020

Year	Population (mm)	Supply		Stock	Rotian Nurse: Population
		MOH	PHEI		
2007	27.14	1865	1800	51,307	1: 529
2014	30.64	2500	6500	108,091	1: 283
2020	33.64	2500	6500	162,091	1: 208

Source : MOH (2006)

- Population growth estimated at 1.78%, 500,000 per year
- Stock – stok 2007 + supply prejection 2008
- Attrition assumed constant (retirement, resignation, migration, population growth, increase in demand etc.)

2020. This demand for general nurses and those with Degrees and postgraduate qualifications will be due to increased healthcare requirements from the affluent sector of the society and health awareness of the general public. The post graduate nurses are needed as nursing educators and managers. However this does not take into account the migration of about 400 nurses every year and of the approximately 600 nurses leaving the service. The growth in population and the number of retirees also factor in.. Based on these assumptions, we estimate that our nation needs about 300,000 nurses come 2020 (the assumption is that the population

is about 60 million in 2020). This early, and given the direction to aim for advancement, we need to prepare nurses and nurse leaders who are able to meet the various new challenges effectively, at the same time maintaining and sustaining the essential nursing contribution to high quality healthcare. As nursing education in most parts of the globe has progressed to higher education, it is appropriate and high time that the nursing education in Malaysia also heads toward the same direction to ensure that Nursing graduates are prepared to work in the fast-changing healthcare system where expectations in terms of quality and productivity are in focus. ■

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¹ Ministry of Health Malaysia. 2000

² Ministry of Health Malaysia. 2000

³ Private sector with 11,540 nurses, total 44,120, a ratio of 1:820 in public sector and 1:2,264 in private sector. Total Midwives 15,408 with a ration of 1:1,696 in public sector and 1:124,417 in the private sector. Total Medical Assistants 6,113 with a ratio of 1: 4,274

⁴ The **International Council of Nurses (ICN)** is a federation of 129 national nurses' associations representing the millions of nurses worldwide. Operated by nurses for nurses since 1899, ICN is the international voice of nursing and works to ensure quality care for all and sound health policies globally.

⁵ The **Florence Nightingale International Foundation** is a registered Charity in the United Kingdom, formed for the purposes of supporting the advancement of nursing education, research and services for the public good. It is the successor to the original Florence Nightingale International Foundation, established in 1932 as a permanent memorial to Florence Nightingale with a mandate to develop and promote nursing education worldwide. **The Global Nursing Shortage: Priority Areas for Intervention** identifies top priorities for action in addressing the shortage of nurses worldwide.

⁶ The **Burdett Trust for Nursing** is an independent charitable Trust named after Sir Henry Burdett KCB, the founder of the Royal National Pension Fund for Nurses (RNPFN). The Trust was set up in recognition of the foundation, philosophy and structure of the RNPFN

⁷ (See *The Global Shortage of Registered Nurses: An Overview of Issues and Actions*, International Council of Nurses (2004) ("ICN Report".)

⁸ 1st International Nursing Congress, 28th June – 1st July 2007, K.L.

⁹ 1st International Nursing Congress, 28th June – 1st July 2007, K.L.