

Implications for Advancement of Egyptian Nursing: Input equals Output

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Input equals output. Nursing is the foundation in the health care delivery system. Nurses have a very broad and significant role in impacting the quality and effectiveness of health care delivery which is provided on a 24 hour basis each day of the year by a nurse. Nurses have the opportunity to assist with the achievement of positive outcomes in health care delivery. In order to achieve positive outcomes, there needs to be strategies developed to strengthen nursing practice in developing countries. Furthermore, the ability of health care delivery systems to respond to rapidly evolving health care will be dependent on the readiness and support of professional nurses. It behooves governmental agencies and governing bodies to bolster the professional nursing workforce to meet the Millennium Development Goals (United Nations, 2002) which are directly related to the health and well being of the population in which nursing can have a significant impact on assisting with the attainment of the goals.

Obstacles

Achievement of goals is important; however, there are many obstacles that impair the advancement of professional nursing in Egypt which in turn may inhibit goal acquisition. The obstacles which impair the advancement of nursing are similar to those faced in other countries which include: supply and demand for nurses, education level of nurses, long hours, working conditions and low wages.

Supply and Demand for Nurses

One of the obstacles affecting the nursing workforce is the supply of nurses. "Egypt suffers from a severe shortage in the number of nurses in hospitals and public clinics. There are 276 nurses for every 100,000 people" (United Nations Development Programme, and The Institute of National Planning, Egypt, 2005, p. 76). The distribution of nurses is not equally distributed throughout Egypt. Unfortunately, there is a severe shortage in the governorates of Upper Egypt (rural area). The World Health Organization (2006) estimates that approximately 2.36 million health care providers will be needed to deliver health care. Without action from countries addressing the supply and demand, the shortage of health care providers will worsen.

Education Level of Nurses

Within Egypt, there are three types of nurses: college graduate, technical institute graduate and diploma graduate. The majority of Egyptian nurses are diploma graduates comprising approximately 94% of the available nursing work force (El-Noshokaty, 2004). Moreover, the diploma nurse graduates are very young with ages ranging from mid- adolescence to young adult. As a result of the multiple levels of entry into practice and various ages associated with

admission to programs, there is a lack of role delineation for each graduate which creates the mentality of “a nurse is a nurse.” It may be beneficial to determine the minimal level of entry into practice. In order to accomplish this task, there needs to be open communication with all nursing education venues to ensure there is a sufficient number of nursing faculties who possess advanced degrees and who are willing to educate the professional nurse.

Long Working Hours

It is not uncommon for nurses to work more than 12 hours per day in order to care for the high volume of patients. It is clearly documented in the research about staff nurse fatigue and impact on patient safety (Balas, Scott & Rogers, 2004; Roger, Hwang, Scott, Aiken & Dinges, 2004). There are studies that link fatigue to slow reaction times, lapses of attention, errors of omission which compromise problem-solving ability (Nevada RNformation, 2004). In Egypt, nurse fatigue exists due to the shortage of nurses to handle the volume of patients and the working of long hours due to the lack of enforcement of labor laws.

Working Conditions

Not only do nurses endure long work hours often time there are challenges in rendering care due to working conditions. Working conditions that impact health care delivery are high work loads, staff turnover and access to basic supplies. Due to financial constraints within hospitals and clinics, basic supplies are sometimes unavailable; for example, gloves, personal protective equipment and hygiene supplies - soap, Sterilium or water supply readily accessible.

Low Wages

“In 1999 the minimum wage was set at 116 LE per month. The average wage during 2004/2005 was 928 LE per month. As a result of the low wage in Egypt many foreign companies frequently pay higher wages and attract workers” (American Chamber of Commerce in Egypt (2008). “In some government hospitals, nurses may get only 90 piasters for double shifts but in some area in Egypt, nurses may work for six months without payment because of shortage of funds” (EI- Noshokaty, 2004, p. 2). There is an anticipated increase in nursing salaries scheduled for July 1, 2008 (Egypt News, 2008).

A Call for Advancement

In order to meet the dynamic demands of Egypt’s booming population growth, there is a need to increase the number of competent professional nurses that are available to deliver health care. Emphasis should be to educate nurses to allow them to broaden the impact of nursing knowledge in a hospital or clinic similar to the way a pebble ripples across a body of water. Ways to advance nursing in Egypt are as follows:

Regulation of Practice:

Develop a Nursing Practice Act to define the scope of nursing practice which defines professional nursing. Development of a Nursing Practice Act will safeguard the public health, by shielding the public from unqualified and unsafe nurses. In creating a Nursing Practice Act it will define entry into nursing practice, define the scope of practice and establish disciplinary procedures.

Creation of Nursing Board:

Encourage the Egyptian Nursing Syndicate to adopt an agency mission that offers protection and promotion of the welfare for the citizens of Egypt by ensuring that each person practicing as a nurse in the country of Egypt is competent to practice safely. Encourage the Egyptian Nursing Syndicate to adopt and enforce rules that regulate the practice of professional nursing, establish standards of professional conduct for those nurses who practice nursing in Egypt and determine the health activities that constitute the practice of professional nursing. The nursing board should delineate the scope of practice for each level of professional nursing.

Continuing Education:

Upon successful completion of the Ministry of Health nursing exam in Egypt, nurses hold lifetime registration for practice (Brigadier Magda Ibrahim, personal communication, March 5, 2008). Consider a paradigm shift in the practice of nursing whereby continuing education is a requirement to maintain and continue practice as a nurse within Egypt. Continuing education should be required to assure the public that each nurse has current knowledge of the nursing science and skills to provide for the health and safety of persons receiving nursing care. Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world (Nelson Mandela).

Foster Curriculum Changes:

Nurses are trained as generalist with little time spent in specialty areas. Curriculum changes will be required. Education should transition to learner focused rather than teacher-centered. Curriculum changes need to incorporate the subspecialty areas; for example, oncology nursing, pediatric and neonatal intensive care nursing.

Nurse Education Programs:

It is important to perform an assessment of academic institutions to assess the number of graduates per year and their anticipated capacity of students. A needs assessment should be completed to analyze the greatest need for nurses and locale of learning institutions. Furthermore, professors need to change their methodology on how nurses are taught. Educational programs are not meant to teach everything to students but rather provide them with the skills to learn how to find the information with problem-solving learning which can be accomplished with simulation laboratories, clinical decision modules, critical thinking scenarios and integration of evidenced based practice.

Image of Nursing:

Continue to improve the image of nursing in Egypt through education of the public about the professional roles of nurses. Obtain media coverage of events through newspapers, magazine, television coverage or other forms of media. Nurses need to seize the opportunity to highlight through letters to the editors to discuss what nurses do and how important they are to the delivery of health care for the people of Egypt. Nurses must position themselves in strategic levels of policy decision making to assist in development of policy and legislation which should benefit the image of nursing and impacts the delivery of health care.

Gender:

Nursing in Egypt is primarily a female occupation and very few men are admitted to nursing programs in the university sector. In the military sector in 2007, the Egyptian military graduated its first class of male sub-officers with a graduating class of 60 nurses (Brigadier Magda Ibrahim, personal communication, March 5, 2008). The employment of male nurses represents a positive advance in gender roles for Egypt.

Conclusion:

In order for the advancement of nurses in Egypt, the profession must overcome many obstacles identified as supply and demand for nurses, education level of nurses, long working hours, working conditions and low wages. Egypt must continue to respond to changes in the rapidly evolving health care arena which directly impacts the readiness of professional nurses. Application of strategies such as implementation of the Nurse Practice Act, creation of a nursing board, mandating continuing education hours, fostering curriculum changes, improving the image of nursing and recruiting more males to the profession of nursing will assist in improving the quality and effectiveness of health care delivery systems within Egypt.

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