

Guest Editorial

The Versatile but Undermined Role of the Nursing Profession Needs the Attention of Health Planners and other Stakeholders

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In our society, nursing up till now could earn its role as a vocation instead of being a profession. By definition, a profession is the set of activities that persons perform to earn money, and the rules are prescribed by a society based on knowledge and skills attained by training¹. Actually, the nurses have been struggling hard for many years to achieve professional status. The existence of a body of knowledge distinct from other disciplines is a distinguishing feature of a profession. Several sources of knowledge laid down the foundation of nursing and their practice for better quality of care including tradition, authority, borrowed knowledge, trial, and error. However, recently they directed their efforts to establish an overt body of knowledge so that nursing can be undoubtedly recognized as a diverse profession.

Nurses have certainly established such awareness in public at large, that the health status of people must alter if nurses play their role. In fact, health care is incomplete without nurses even in the smallest of hospitals or indoor facilities, the treatment offered by physicians and surgeons is dependent on the delivery and quality of care through nurses. Despite their significant role, unfortunately, there is a wide gap in the availability of nurses not only in our country but also globally as per the World Health Organization 2011 report². We need 9 million nurses and midwives across the globe to reach universal health coverage by 2030³. The ratio of nurses to population is at the lowest level in Pakistan in comparison with that of other countries in the region. Good healthcare depends on the availability of required

nursing human resources to the population. Analyzing the factors causing this dearth of nursing human resources, perhaps it may be due to the lack of interest of students to choose nursing as their profession^{2,4}. This is the need of the hour to recognize the standing of nursing professionals for they are not only playing a crucial role in the healthcare system by providing frontline care but also establishing multiple roles in the health sector.

The nursing curriculum is updated and includes other subjects, which help in the training of the nurses to perform as managers in the healthcare team. They include Professional English Writing, Leadership & Management in Nursing, Culture, Health & Society, Behavioral Psychology, and Nursing Research (including qualitative research component). As evident from empirical research done by Chinese researchers, there has been identified a steady increase in the number of publications related to nursing research globally over the past two decades⁵. In parallel to medical research in clinical practice, Nursing research assesses “patient symptom management and involves behavior intervention. It also has a very large focus on prevention and health promotion as opposed to the medical model, which is the treatment/testing research model”. In the current curriculum, they are taught and assessed “Research” as a subject in the final year during their course of studies. The content of the subject includes both Quantitative & Qualitative research as well as research ethics, whereas it is lacking in the medical undergraduate curriculum as a separate subject. However, in developed countries, evidence-based nursing practice has sprung up during

the last few decades showing continuous development of nursing research. Evidence-based practice has its origin in medicine. Evidence-based nursing practice is broad-based with a goal to turn their research into action, improving health care and patient outcomes in the community. The nurse researcher has the obligation to safeguard confidentiality and give respectability to the people who are involved in the research and ensure their safety too. If study participants give consent to be part of it despite knowing the fact that it involves undue psychological & physical risk, the nurse researcher has an ethical duty to avoid conducting such a study. These days nurses can respond to research-related questions asked by patients and these studies include clinical trials that are meant for the evaluation of improved medical equipment, new drugs, or new treatments.

This is a bitter reality that people don't give due respect to nurses in our society. This has been observed that the majority of students joining this profession belong to either low socioeconomic groups or Christian families. The Muslim community only facilitates nursing according to the teaching of Islam i.e. Female nurses should give care to the female population and male nurses to the male population. But due to less financial benefits, male students don't prefer this profession over others. Moreover, 'Pakistan Nursing Council' and provincial nursing directorates also disregard male seats at most of the public sector nursing schools and colleges. However, nursing colleges in the private sector have identified this gap and therefore offer admission to male students to adopt this profession as a career. The situation will improve further only if the nursing profession is given its due recognition & respect by other professions, and thus they'll find due status in society. Acknowledgment of the vital role of nursing trainees amongst doctors will improve teamwork and boost their efficiency. Protecting their self-efficacy is as important as

that of other health care providers⁶.

There are numerous issues related to the nursing profession which need to be addressed so that not only girls from the poor socioeconomic group but also educated, affluent sections of society should be attracted to opt for it as a profession. The health planners must pay attention to address the issues related to their remuneration and other privileges like career promotion benefits, if enjoyed by the nurses this may go a long way to not only ensure patient safety but also bring improvement in the healthcare of the country.

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