



## Nursing Education: Promoting Access, Quality and Research

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There are currently more than one lac doctors and 15,750 specialists registered with Pakistan Medical & Dental Council. The total number of nurses registered with Pakistan Nursing Council till 2002 is 40,144. The population per nurse is currently 3639 which is almost double than what is served by a doctor and not to mention that the quoted figure comprises mainly of diploma holders rather than graduates. It should also be kept in mind that these figures may not represent true picture because the number of doctors and nurses who are in active workforce is not known.

Concerns have been raised on various forums about the deteriorating state of medical and nursing education in Pakistan resulting in inadequately trained workforce. The shortage of nurses has attracted much discussion within the nursing profession and nursing literature with special reference to the stereotype image projection. Unfortunately the conventional image persists and it is this image that prospective nursing students and their families retain when seeing them as nurses.

In her book, published in recent past titled “ Women in Nursing in Islamic societies” editor Nancy H. Bryant reveals the dire state of nurses in our society. The females do not select nursing as a profession, or leave the profession if they get the opportunity. Various measures to encourage people to select the field of nursing as a profession and efforts of many organisations in this regard are also highlighted. The book reveals the prevalent image of nurses and the scarcity of skilled nurses, is not merely a problem in Pakistan and the Islamic world, but is a global issue. The shortage of nurses is a problem reaching crisis proportion due to various factors such as stress, low pay scale, physical violence, verbal abuse and sexual harassment. Cultural and traditional practices discourage young women in Islamic societies from entering the field of nursing. Another problem is lack of leadership within nursing professionals and weak nursing voice in government.

More options for career advancement and promotion are necessary to motivate and retain staff in this profession. The impact of physical violence, verbal abuse and sexual harassment is of great concern and must be taken into consideration with particular attention placed on elimination such crimes against nursing personnel as they represent a category of workers considered most vulnerable.

A strategy for nursing and midwifery which was published by World Health Organisation in EMRO region indicates the necessity for a joint effort involving government, educational institutions health service management and nursing leadership.

Aga Khan University School of Nursing (AKU-SON) is the only nursing school in Pakistan headed by a doctorate in Nursing that enjoys international reputation in excellence. This school has produced 1305 diploma graduates and 265 baccalaureate graduates and 16 generic B.Sc.N. graduates. An increasing number of B.Sc.N. graduates of AKU – SON are moving into leadership positions such as principals and directors of schools of nursing in Sindh, Pakistan.

Apart from AKU-SON there are about 83 nursing schools, 92 midwifery schools and 20 public health schools producing about 3,000 nurses for the public and private sectors. Currently, there are 13,307 sanctioned posts in public sector hospitals which cannot meet the requirement of the hospitals according to the standard procedure.

According to internationally recognized guidelines, the state-owned nursing schools in Sindh should have 80 tutors. However, only 48 positions have been sanctioned by the authorities and only 38 people actually work there as tutors. There are more than 2,000 students in the 14 institutions. This means that for every tutor there are 53 students. This, by any standard, is a very poor ratio.

Most of the schools of nursing in public hospitals had the post of principal (BS-19) but work is generally being looked after by the chief nursing superintendents (BS-18), who are supposed to pay full attention to hospital care and nursing supervision.

A recent newspaper report reveals that nursing schools are in such a bad shape that the 2,000-odd students had to invite donations to hire part-time teachers for subjects like English, Urdu, Pakistan studies, physics and chemistry.

One nurse reported most tutors in public schools were not interested in providing quality education to their students. "They approach their work just as any government employee would. There's no accountability. This allows them to take it easy at all times. But when the same nurses joined private-sector schools they started imparting quality education."

On the same note another report produced by a Commission, to specifically look into nursing schools in the area of Rawalpindi, revealed that the supervision of the nursing students was callous and careless and did not take into account the young tender ages of the students, particularly in view of their emotional immaturity and vulnerability.

The curriculum, training and evaluation system are yet other issues that need to be revised. The healthcare delivery system is presently undergoing a massive change. The earlier emphasis on hospital based care & treatment is now shifted to ambulatory care practices. This has major implication for nursing education because it directly impacts the knowledge and skills needed by current nursing workforce. A large proportion of existing nursing workforce is not adequately prepared to meet the needs of our healthcare system. This is mainly attributed to the declining standards of nursing education, outdated curriculum, lack of professional development opportunities, assessment and revalidation as well as lack of trained academic staff. This requires responsibility for a wide range of activities such as

enhancement of the composition of nursing workforce, expansion of the knowledge ,skills and capabilities of nurses.

It should also be kept in mind that there is a demand of about 0.4 million nurses in the US, 50,000 in Middle East and the European countries. Pakistan can avail this opportunity to export nurse workforce to these countries. Thus this can be an area that needs exploration for better utilization of our workforce globally.

Higher Education Commission (HEC) can thus play a significant role in planning and development of nursing workforce and ensure adequate supply and distribution of qualified nurses that meet the health needs of new millennium.

It was therefore in April 2004, a taskforce on nursing education was formed with the Director General, Learning Innovation as chair to advise HEC on current and projected issues affecting the nursing workforce and to

- a. review and reform regulations and accreditation process of nursing schools/institutes in Pakistan
- b. refine the process and outcomes of under graduate and graduate nursing education
- c. establish and enforce standards of nursing education which are at par with international standards
- d. develop and promote the image of nursing and
- e. define steps for retention of nursing workforce

As a result of initial recommendations, an action plan has been proposed and HEC has already taken some major steps towards promoting excellence in Nursing Education.

One of the main issues highlighted by the taskforce was the outdated apprenticeship model currently prevalent in nursing education where on- job training is introduced from day one and nursing students are used as service providers. The Committee proposed that there is a need for paradigm shift where nursing schools are moved to universities rather than working within the domain of hospitals. As a result the HEC has now approved funding to establish Nursing Institutes at Liaquat University of Medical and Health Sciences, Jamshoro as well as University of Health Sciences, Lahore.

A career ladder will also be built within the service structure of these institutes which will be academically structured on the lines of medical profession i.e. assistant professor/ associate professor and Professorial level

Higher Education Commission and Pakistan Nursing Council will also meet to discuss the variations in the various degree programmes offered country wide and produce a consensus statement.

Foreign/expatriate hiring program is already implemented by HEC through which universities and public institutions can benefit and introduce nursing programs at Masters level. Similarly British Council linkage program can also be utilized for the exchange of faculty and students in Nursing.

Video conferencing facilities and networking among universities will also be utilised to provide professional development programs. Further opportunities for professional development of nurses may be provided through HEC by introducing short term/long term scholarships for nurses exclusively.

Finally the Higher Education Commission realizing the importance of nursing care has been instrumental along with Pakistan Nursing Council and Ministry of Health to promote excellence in nursing education which will directly affect the quality of care provided to masses in Pakistan.

Table I: Proposed Plan of Action for Excellence in Nursing Education

<b>Establishing two new institutes of Nursing</b>
<b>Strengthening existing units in higher degree institutions</b> ten units in all
<b>Enhancing Positive Image of Nursing as Profession</b>
<b>Curriculum development</b>
1.Generic Nursing Program
2.Transition Master's Program for current workforce
3.Accelerated bridging program for new entrants
4. Review and refine existing diploma programs
<b>Transition Master's Program</b> Thirty nurses in all ten per year
<b>Five fellowships each for in country Regular Master's program and overseas</b>
<b>Ten Specialty related program</b> 5 trainees in each per year
<b>Professional Development Activities</b>
<b>100 educational activities in three years targeting 5000 nurses</b>
<b>15 study grants for short courses offshore(i.e. distance learning) and onshore nationally and internationally</b>
<b>Developing Guidelines for Accreditation of higher degree institutes and programs in Nursing in collaboration with Pakistan Nursing Council</b>
<b>Development of National standardized Examination</b>
<b>Promotion of Research &amp; Publications</b>

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