



Nursing and Health Policy Perspectives

Nursing Now 2020: the Nightingale Challenge

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Abstract

Global healthcare expenditure is increasing, along with the numbers of older patients with multiple comorbidities, while the numbers of health workers are hugely decreasing, and many nursing and midwifery vacancies remain unfilled. With the World Health Organization declaring 2020 the Year of the Nurse and Midwife, and commencing the *Nursing Now* campaign with

partners including the International Council of Nurses and the International Confederation of Midwives, has allowed these professions to unite, encourage advocacy and the call for global investment in nursing and midwifery. These actions will permit these professions to address universal health coverage, global inconsistencies of professional practice, and recruitment and retention. The Nightingale Challenge seeks to place early career nurses and midwives at the forefront of transformation, calling on employers worldwide to invest and provide nursing leadership development, and to become a key part of the solution to address the issues of providing universal health coverage, promoting gender equality and supporting economic growth. This will help place them at the heart of tackling 21st century health challenges.

Keywords: Advocacy, Global health care, Midwives, Nightingale challenge, Nurses, Nursing leadership, Universal health coverage

Background

Global healthcare expenditure is projected to rise from \$9.21 trillion to a staggering \$24 trillion in just 20 years (Lancet 2018). By 2050, 16% of the global population will be over the age of 65, a cohort that has already outgrown the number of children under 5 in recent years (United Nations 2019), resulting in the need for increased social care. Management of multiple comorbidities such as diabetes and cancer will add to the existing burden of communicable diseases like malaria and HIV. Who will provide this care?

The world will be short of 18 million health workers by 2030 (Limb 2016). While low-and-middle-income countries are likely to feel this most acutely, richer countries like the United Kingdom will not be spared, with currently 100 000 vacancies in clinical staffing in the National Health Service. Leading think tanks estimate this figure could rise by 60% in just three to four years with a shortfall of 70 000 and 7000 of nurses and general practitioners, respectively (Charlesworth et al. 2019).

This statistical gloom is hard to dismiss and warrants decisive action from government and global organizations. Achieving universal health coverage (UHC) is not simply a question of spending more on services alone, but also about making smarter choices about investing in the very people we rely on to provide care. 2020 is the Year of the Nurse and the Midwife. It is now time to rise to this challenge, making the profession globally visible, equal and working together with other clinical professionals to care for citizens.

The current climate of nursing and midwifery

There are now 20.7 million nurses and midwives spread across the world, representing half of the global health workforce, yet an additional 9 million nurses and midwives are still required to achieve the World Health Organization's (WHO 2016) commitment to realize UHC before the end of the decade. This requires a concerted global effort by all, but especially governing authorities to make this a reality, by

providing legal and policy frameworks that will allow the two professions to practice to the top of their licence. However, there remains much inconsistency in the professional capabilities of the nurse and midwife between countries and regions (Gunn et al. 2019), highlighting the need to review nursing and midwifery scopes of practice and educational preparation at national level.

There also remains the question of gender and stereotype, where nursing can still be viewed as feminine, soft and unscientific work, far from the highly skilled and educated realities of the profession today. This has resulted in a low proportion of men in the profession, and a disproportionate representation in ethnicities and positions. And in turn, this has fuelled problems such as poor retention and recruitment (Casey et al. 2018). Low pay and poor working conditions may be seen to be a result of undervaluing nursing work if it is viewed as 'women's work' for which few skills are required.

At the same time, despondency in the professions is countered by exciting innovations. Service delivery innovations such as the Primary Care Network in the UK, (NHS England, 2020), integrated care models in North America (McDonald et al. 2019), or the Family Health Strategy in Brazil (Commonwealth Fund 2020), are just some of the many models that demonstrate how nurses and midwives are taking on a central role in multidisciplinary healthcare teams. These models show that the greater responsibility required is being taken to confront the current and future threats to the patient and public health. Scaling up and institutionalizing such models of practice globally requires greater investment in nursing and midwifery and recognition of the skills and value these professions bring to the challenges of achieving better health for all (All-Party Parliamentary Group on Global Health 2016).

Nurses and midwives are advocates of their own future

In order to become influential partners, nurses and midwives are needed to become the advocates of their own profession, by raising their profile and status worldwide, supporting

themselves to lead, learn and build a global movement. This is important to allow them to gain leadership positions that have a central role in health policy development, influencing policy, encouraging health leaders to invest in nursing, and introducing new models of care that maximize nurses' contributions to achieving UHC (All-Party Parliamentary Group on Global Health 2016).

The findings of the Triple Impact Report by the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Global Health concluded that as well as improving health globally, empowering nurses and midwives can contribute to improved gender equality and the building of stronger economies (Nursing Now 2020). And, investment in these professions would also allow the development of innovative healthcare models and lead new areas of research that can drive policy change to create optimal practice environments for quality outcomes (Nelson-Brantley et al. 2019).

However, this journey of transformation requires evidence in order to convince governments and employers to be effective. Such evidence should also be inclusive in reflecting the voices of those young and often under-represented practitioners, and those who work in a group nationally and across borders, under a collective campaign such as Nursing now 2020 (WHO 2020). The latter specifically focuses on ensuring that nurses and midwives have a more prominent voice in health policymaking, encouraging greater investment in the nursing workforce, increasing recruitment of nurses and midwives into leadership positions, conducting research that helps determine where the profession has the greatest impact, and sharing best practice (Nursing Now 2020).

Nursing Now 2020 and the Nightingale Challenge

The *Nursing Now* campaign, launched in June 2019, seeks to improve the influence of nurses and midwives on a global scale, by placing young nurses and midwives at the forefront of transformation, issuing the Nightingale Challenge as a call for the development of leadership. This is through the use of formal courses, mentoring, shadowing or learning from other professionals or sectors and is aimed at nurses and midwives aged 35 and under. To date, the Challenge has mobilized over 20,000 nurses and midwives, with 572 employers in 66 countries (Nursing Now 2020).

The aims of the Nightingale Challenge are to invest in young nurses and midwives, allowing them to become more active leaders in the workforce to improve patient care, find creative solutions and to lead, fulfilling their potential to become capable, efficient and working to the top of their licence. This global community has the ability to provide evidence and demonstrate how the professions are part of the solution to

achieving UHC, addressing the critical workforce crisis and efficiencies in health systems, and giving voice to the professions in making it an attractive career pathway for new entrants through greater support, recognition and investment.

Regardless of geography, care and discipline, the *Nursing Now's* Nightingale Challenge is a once in a generation opportunity to engage and invest in the future of the profession. The Challenge will allow nurses and midwives to become the best of their potential and to address the issues of providing UHC, promoting gender equality and supporting economic growth, placing them at the heart of tackling 21st century health challenges.

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