

The International Year of the Nurse and the Midwife

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Nurses and midwives constitute up to half of the healthcare workforce and render services to prevent illness, promote wellness, and restore health. The year 2020 marks the 200th birth anniversary of Florence Nightingale, the founder of modern nursing. To recognize the critical role nurses play to enhance global health, the World Health Organization along with the International Council of Nurses, the International Council of Midwives, and the United Nations Population Fund designated 2020 as "The international year of the nurse and the midwife." The overall purpose is to acknowledge the contributions of nurses and midwives in achieving universal health coverage. Strengthening nursing services will strengthen the entire health care system. We need to be cognizant of the unique role nurses and midwives play in the health system and ensure that nurses are involved in decision making. Investment in nursing and midwifery is invariably an investment in health for all. However, the alarming global and regional shortage of nurses calls for the strengthening of nursing education.

Keywords: Nurse, Nursing, Midwife, Midwifery, Nursing workforce, Year 2020, Bahrain

INTRODUCTION

Nurses and midwives constitute up to half of the health care workforce and render services to prevent illness, promote wellness, and restore health. As a profession, nursing has been consistently ranked as the most trusted profession, and this is a testimony to the honesty, and ethical practices nurses render¹. Nurses are critical to the delivery of care in all settings, including hospitals, elderly care homes, palliative care units, schools, communities, and primary care facilities. Hence nurses are invariably considered as the backbone of the entire health care system. Despite being a highly rewarding career, nursing is highly challenging and can incur mental, physical, intellectual, and emotional demands². The year 2020 has been designated as the International Year of the Nurse and Midwife by the World Health Organization (WHO) to commemorate the 200th birth anniversary of Florence Nightingale³. A series of recommendations have been set forth by WHO and other agencies to strengthen nursing and midwifery.

On this occasion, it becomes timely to reflect on the development of nursing and midwifery in Bahrain, considering the global developments. This paper summarizes the evolution of nursing and midwifery in Bahrain and the international efforts to enhance nursing and midwifery in relation to the International Year of the Nurse and Midwife.

THE EVOLUTION OF NURSING AND NURSING EDUCATION IN BAHRAIN

During the early 20th century, health services in Bahrain were mostly provided by non-Bahraini health professionals, and it was not until 1931 that the first qualified nurse recruited from India was appointed to work in Bahrain. The period between 1941 and 1961 witnessed the qualification of the first Bahraini medical and nursing personnel. The first native Bahraini nurse and midwife, Fatima Al Zayani was appointed in 1941 to become the first local nurse in Bahrain and the Arab Gulf countries⁴. Also, Mr. Habib Mohammed was sent to London in the early 40s to be trained as the first male Bahraini nurse.

In response to the demand for more trained Bahraini nurses, the formal development of nurse education started in Bahrain in 1959⁴. This gave rise to the establishment of the first Nursing School in the Arabian Gulf region. In 1973, this was replaced by the Kanoo Nursing School, which trained both male and female candidates⁵. As the demands continued to grow, the College of Health Sciences replaced

Kanoo Nursing School in 1976. The College was instrumental in providing training to Bahraini citizens, not only in nursing but also in other health sciences. In 1984, a two-year Bachelor of Science (BSc.) nursing completion program was launched, and in 2007, the College introduced an undergraduate Bachelor of Science degree program in nursing⁶. In the process of meeting the quantitative demands for nurses in Bahrain, private institutions of higher education were granted permission to offer health-related programs. As a result, the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland-Bahrain (RCSI Bahrain) established the School of Nursing and Midwifery in 2006. RCSI Bahrain offers undergraduate and postgraduate programs in Nursing. Currently, the College of Health Sciences and RCSI Bahrain are the two premier institutes offering higher education programs in nursing, and almost 200 nurses are graduated from both institutions every year.

Nursing in Bahrain has undergone a seismic revolution, and today, we have Bahraini nurses with postgraduate and doctoral degrees and hold diverse roles in health care such as nurse managers, educators, practitioners, researchers, and health entrepreneurs. The current health care system of Bahrain could boast of the right mix of national and internationally trained registered nurses and midwives, rendering high-quality care in a multidisciplinary, multicultural environment.

INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF THE NURSE AND THE MIDWIFE

To recognize the critical role nurses play to enhance the global health, WHO joined with the International Council of Nurses (ICN), the International Council of Midwives (ICM), and the United Nations Population Fund (UNPF) to designate 2020 as "The International year of the nurse and the midwife." The year 2020 marks the 200th birth anniversary of Florence Nightingale, the founder of modern nursing³.

Florence Nightingale was a pioneer, not only in nursing but in the entire healthcare system. She was a nurse, a social reformer, a researcher, a statistician, and an academician. In 1860, she led the foundation for professional nursing education by establishing the first formal school for nurses at the St Thomas' Hospital, London. Nightingale strongly believed that systematic observation and data could provide strong evidence to base clinical practice⁷. Through the pioneering use of biostatistics, she discovered that the primary cause of fatality among wounded Crimean war soldiers was infection due to unsanitary environmental conditions. This led to national and global attention

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to the importance of public health, hygiene, and infection control. According to the world economic forum, "She was a tough pioneer, whose principles on hygiene underpin modern-day medicine - and are relevant in the fight against today's coronavirus epidemic⁷."

The overall purpose of the International year of the nurse and the midwife is to acknowledge the contributions of nurses and midwives in achieving universal health coverage. The three primary goals of the yearlong celebrations are: 1. Celebrate the work of nurses and midwives, 2. Highlight the challenges nurses and midwives face and 3. Advocate for increased investments in the nurse and midwife workforce³. We review the goals of the International year of the nurse and the midwife and global efforts to achieve them.

1. Celebrating the Work of Nurses and Midwives: Historically, nurses have made significant contributions to global health. Nurses were critical in assuaging all global health crises, including catastrophes of floods, droughts, hurricanes, war, for that matter, epidemics, and pandemics. Nurses were credited for the mass immunization campaign, which led to the eradication of smallpox in 1980. In 1918, when the Spanish flu ravaged the globe, nurses played a vital role in controlling the illness and taking care of the sick. Nurses were in the vanguard for managing similar epidemics such as polio (1916-1954), Influenza A (1957-1958), swine flu (2009-2010), Ebola (2014-2016), and zika virus disease (2015-2020)⁸.

Today, along with other health professionals, Nurses are at the forefront of the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) crusade, working day and night diligently to save and protect lives. Apart from providing care to those who are critically ill, nurses are involved in screening, quarantining, monitoring, educating, and quelling public fears. However, long working hours, fatigue, and workplace safety issues make pose a risk to their own lives can result in distress and burnout. Staying away from family for prolonged periods, fear of putting the families at risk of getting infected results in distress and burnout among nurses⁹.

The world health day (WHD) 2020 spotlighted the vital role nurses and midwives play to ensure quality health and social care. The theme of WHD 2020 is "Support nurses and midwives." The campaign highlighted the need to reinforce the nursing and midwifery workforce. At large, WHO aim to assure that all nurses and midwives work in an enabling environment, with adequate access to supplies and resources, are protected from occupational harms, receive a fair payment and are provided with resources and opportunities for continuous professional development¹⁰. On the occasion of world health day 2020 celebrations, WHO published its first ever "State of the world's nursing report" which provides the current evidence and strategic options to enhance global nursing workforce. The report highlights that in voyage towards universal health coverage, it is essential to invest in nursing, to achieve sustainable development goals (SDGs), improve health for all, and consolidate primary care workforce^{10,11}. Like many other countries of the world, Bahrain reflected its continuous support to nursing by joining this initiative. The Minister of Health in Bahrain called for the establishment of a national committee to organise the celebrations and plans were put in place. Unfortunately, with arising of the COVID-19 crises many activities did not happen, and it was wise to redirect all the national nursing efforts to manage the crisis.

2. Challenges Faced by Nurses and Midwives: Despite the continuing global efforts to strengthen nursing and midwifery workforce, countries are facing severe shortage of nurses and midwives. According to WHO, to achieve the universal health coverage by the year 2030 the world will need an additional nine million nurses and midwives^{3,11}. Data from 191 countries indicate a global density of 36.9 nurses per 10,000 population, with higher densities in the American (83.4) and European (79.3) regions. The density of nurses for the Eastern Mediterranean

Region (including Bahrain) is only 15.6 per 10,000 population (Table 1). Currently, there is a global shortage of 5.9 million nurses and 17% of this shortage is from the Eastern Mediterranean Region, and this highlights the need to educate and employ more local nurses. Even though the education facilities for nurses have improved in the region, there is a need to strengthen the nursing and midwifery education further. To address the shortage of nurses by 2030, there is a need to increase the number of nursing graduates by 10 percent every year¹¹.

Table 1: Number of nursing personnel globally and density per 10,000 population, by WHO regions, 2018

WHO Region	Number of nursing personnel in millions (%)	Density per 10,000 population
Africa	0.9 (3%)	8.7
Americas	8.4 (30%)	83.4
South-East Asia	3.3 (12%)	16.5
Europe	7.3 (26%)	79.3
Eastern Mediterranean	1.1 (4%)	15.6
Western Pacific	6.9 (25%)	36.0
Global	27.9 (100%)	36.9

Strengthening nursing and midwifery is identified as the most essential strategy to achieve the universal health coverage and sustainable development goals. Empowering nurses and midwives by educating and training, supporting them in health promotion and disease prevention, employing specialist nurses across continuum of care and investing in nursing and midwifery leadership can be vital in achieving the Universal health coverage. Investments in nursing could additionally accelerate the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on quality education (SDG 4), gender equality (SDG 5), and decent work and inclusive growth (SDG 8)¹².

With its health strategy plan and the Economic Vision 2030, Bahrain aims to tackle major changes in the health sector to ensure that all nationals and residents have access to high quality evidence-based healthcare in line with the best international standards^{13,14}. A four-pronged system is established by the government which include - 1. Promoting and encouraging a healthy lifestyle, 2. Providing quick, easy and equitable access to high-quality health care, 3. Ensuring regulation of the health-care system by an independent health regulator and 4. Developing, attracting and retaining health-care talent and fostering a high performance ethics among all healthcare employees¹⁴.

Grappling with the pandemic is daunting, and many nurses have succumbed their life in this battle. According to the recent estimates of the international council of nurses, more than 230,000 health care workers have contacted the illness and almost 600 nurses have lost their lives¹⁵. Government and policy makers need to ensure that nurses are provided with necessary personal protective equipment and secure environments for safe clinical practice. Despite being a significant part of the healthcare team, nursing remains underappreciated¹⁶. Nurses across the world also face discrimination in terms of low pay and poor working conditions.

3. Increasing Investments in Nursing and Midwifery Workforce: The Nursing Now campaign was launched to increase investments in nursing and midwifery workforce. The UK, "All parliamentary group on global health" published the triple impact of Nursing report in October 2016. The report argued that strengthening of nursing is vital to achieve universal health coverage. Improving nursing could improve health, promote gender equality, and support economic growth. Based on the recommendations of the triple impact report, the nursing now was launched¹². Nursing now is a three-year global campaign initiated in the year 2018 as a collaborative effort by the Burdett Trust for Nursing,

WHO and the ICN and will continue till the end of 2020. The campaign seeks to enhance the profile and global status of nursing by underscoring the critical role nurses play in achieving the sustainable development goals of universal health coverage. The five core areas of nursing now are "1. ensuring that nurses and midwives have a more prominent voice in health policy-making; 2. encouraging greater investment in the nursing workforce; 3. recruiting more nurses into leadership positions; 4. conducting research that helps determine where nurses can have the greatest impact, and 5. sharing of best nursing practices¹²."

The shortage of nurses in the region calls for the strengthening of nursing education in Bahrain as well. The promotion of nursing and midwifery as a career choice among youngsters could result in increased awareness, acceptance, and enhance enrolment to the profession. Tawash and Cowman explored the factors influencing the choice of nursing among high school students. The study found that despite having a positive perception towards nursing, only 13.7% of high school students said they would consider choosing nursing as a profession. This led to the development and testing of NURSING-Positive Recruitment Arabic Model, a unique multi-component model encompassing guidance and interactive strategies to promote nursing as a career in the Arab region¹⁷.

Strengthening nursing services will improve the quality of health care systems and will lead to better patient care and satisfaction. The global and regional efforts taken in accordance with the celebration of the international year of the nurse and midwife are commendable; however, we are still away from utilizing the full potential of nursing. Hope the efforts to strengthen nursing and midwifery will continue, and the nursing workforce can lead the system to achieve universal health coverage.

CONCLUSION

More than 50% of the health care workforce includes nurses and midwives. Nurses and midwives across the world join together for a collective impact and strive to make a difference in global health. The year of the nurse and the midwife provided us a unique opportunity to celebrate the achievements of nursing. Globally, the policymakers need to invest in nursing/midwifery education and employment to make universal health coverage a reality. We need to be cognizant of the unique role nurses, and midwives play in the health system and ensure that nurses are involved in decision making. Investment in nursing and midwifery is invariably an investment in health for all.

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