

Higher Education in Nursing: Paving the Way to Success

Almost three decades have elapsed since the initiation of tertiary education for nurses at the Open University of Sri Lanka. Since then the demand for higher education for nursing has increased rapidly. Nevertheless, to produce competent nurses with favourable skills and attitudes has always been a challenge. We are happy to have made a steady progress of the profession which is evident through the increasing number of nursing programs established and the number of nurses reading for a Bachelor's Degree. With increased opportunities and intake into higher education institutes, it is imperative to envisage where we stand today. It is commendable that many nurses embark on higher education at the early stages of their career; however, the quality over quantity is questionable as the impact of their services to the public has not been evaluated yet. Quality depends on how the content of nursing curricula is imparted. Winning public trust through safe and effective care and commitment to one's work coordinated with other health care providers is what one would expect as the ultimate quality of the profession.

A traditional complaint made regarding undergraduate nursing curricula is giving less emphasis to practical skills while overloading theory. With this in mind, a compulsory Nursing Orientation and Co-ordination Training program of six months has been introduced to new nursing graduates under the Ministry of Health. However, the effectiveness of this program is yet to be evaluated. Nevertheless, students need to be directed and guided by the practicing nurses who are not dedicated to do so. Therefore, exploring the challenges for undergraduates in clinical education and introducing trained clinical mentors would be a useful measure in facilitating the students

(Farzi et al., 2018). Another option would be developing a mechanism for nursing academics to practice with their students in respective teaching hospitals at least for a limited number of hours. In addition to student facilitation, it will also create an opportunity for nursing academics to get updated with new developments in health care.

The need for a national framework for nursing education for Sri Lanka has been long-standing (Jayasekara, 2009). In spite of an initiative being taken to develop a benchmark statement in nursing by the University Grants Commission (UGC) in 2014, it did not reach the level of its finalization. However, there is a ray of hope as a green light is given by the UGC to revamp the work. Unification of all universities and colleges concerned is the need of the hour in making it a success.

Further, accreditation of nursing programs of some universities and private health institutions has been long overdue, depriving the candidates of their professional progress. The newly elected Sri Lanka Nursing Council (SLNC) of December 2021 is authorized to explore and take necessary steps to do so. Developing national guidelines to ensure quality nursing education on par with other countries is the paramount duty of the SLNC with the support of all concerned.

The progress of higher education in nursing calls for an increase in research publications. As such, inculcating a research culture is essential in the nursing profession to utilize their findings in improving their practice. Nursing undergraduates conduct research as a part of their curriculum requirements; it has been observed that very few of them select topics related to nursing practice. Hence, finding the obstacles related to

students' research within clinical settings and proposing strategies and encouraging them would be beneficial.

No doubt we can be proud of our achievements, yet there's much to be done in reaching the expected goals. In this endeavour, taking a step forward, we rejoice in our pioneering effort of publishing a scientific journal in nursing. This would create a platform for nurses to get motivated in publishing their research. Motivation and commitment lead to success, which in turn brings satisfaction. It is the duty of nurses at all levels to contribute in uplifting nursing education in Sri Lanka to its optimal potential.

References

Farzi, S., Shahriari, M., & Farzi, S. (2018). Exploring the challenges of clinical education in nursing and strategies to improve it: A qualitative study. *Journal of Education and Health Promotion*, 7, 115. https://doi.org/10.4103/jehp.jehp_169_17

Jayasekara, R.S. (2009) Issues, challenges and vision for the future of the nursing profession in Sri Lanka: a review. *International Nursing Review*, 56, 21–27

Sujatha Seneviratne, PhD, MPhil, MN, RN,
*Senior Lecturer, Department of Nursing & Midwifery,
Faculty of Allied Health Sciences,
University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka.
Editor-in-Chief
Email: senevir@sjp.ac.lk*