

Preparing Nurses for the 21st Century: Re-envisioning Nursing Education and Practice in Nigeria.

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Abstract

The paper explores the current situation and future development of nursing education and practice in Nigeria and their influence on health care. This is necessitated due to the significant advances in biomedical science and in the complexity of health care, coupled with observed shortage of nurses and the numerous reports of unsafe and poor quality of patient care, which have served as precursors to the concerns about nursing education and nursing practice in developed parts of the world sincerely twentieth century. This move was initiated and led by American Association of College of Nursing since year 2000. However, stake holders of Nursing profession in Nigeria are yet to take this initiative, which have direct implications for both nursing education and nursing practice in Nigeria, hence the need for this advocacy paper.

Major issues and challenges in this regard are discussed with some suggestions on the way forward.

Key Words: Re-envisioning, Nursing Education, Nursing Practice, Nurses' Preparation.

Introduction

The word 'Re-envisioning' refers to the process of re-thinking of something you believe might exist or happen in the future. It could also mean, "to conjure, conceive, dream, envisage or have a vision of a thing or situation¹."

Teaching is an integral part of nursing, so becoming a nurse educator is a natural step for many nurses. Whether they work in the classroom or the practice setting, nurse educators prepare and mentor patient care providers and the future leaders of the profession. They play a pivotal role in strengthening the nursing workforce, serving as role models, and providing the leadership needed to implement evidence-based practice and improve patient outcomes.

Nurse educators typically express a high degree of satisfaction with their work. Mentoring students and watching them gain confidence and skills are particularly rewarding aspects of their jobs².

Nursing education lays the foundation for nursing practice and whatever nursing care given is a reflection of the nursing educational training one has received. A standard nursing education will produce

quality-nursing care. Whereas if the education is shoddy nothing significant can be expected from the clinical practice, it will lead to production of mediocrity.

Nurses occupy a very significant position in the multidisciplinary health care team making major in-puts into the promotion patients' safety and maintenance of clients' optimum well-being and they are expected to make correct nursing diagnoses and treat clients' problems comprehensively³.

This can only be achieved through empowerment by improving the quality of nursing education, thereby enhancing the competences of the practitioners for effective delivery of quality care to the consumers of nursing services.

The aim of nursing education is to develop the nursing profession by ensuring that nurses are well prepared and equipped to ensure that they are fit-for-license and equally save-to-practice.

As reported by Long⁴, due to significant advances in biomedical science and in the complexity of health care, coupled with a worsening nursing shortage and numerous reports of unsafe and inadequate patient care, have prompted concerns about both nursing

education and nursing practice in advanced countries of the world.

However, concerns with regards educational preparation and practice of nurses as they affect the safety of patients and patients' outcome, and the available manpower in nursing, are yet to receive the desired attention in Nigeria.

Given the fact that some of the scenarios earlier mentioned are also being witnessed in Nigeria, and coupled with the large number of nurses that migrate from Nigeria due to the 'push', to seek employment in developed countries because of the 'pull'⁴. The need to re-envison both nursing education and nursing practice in Nigeria has therefore become a priority issue to ensure that Nigerian nurses are able to provide quality care to their clients, both at home and abroad; hence the need for this advocacy paper.

Nursing Education and Practice in Developed World

Nursing education and nursing practice have been referred to as the two sides of a coin. It is the belief of the American Association of Colleges of Nursing⁵, that education has a significant impact on the knowledge and competencies of the nurse clinician, as it does for all health care providers. In the opinion of these professional bodies, nurse clinicians with Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) degrees are well prepared to meet the demands placed on today's nurse. This solid preparation has enhanced the quality of the professional nurses, as evident by their skills in critical thinking, leadership, case management, and health promotion, as well as their ability to practice across a variety of inpatient and outpatient settings.

According to these professionals, nurse executives, federal agencies, the military, leading nursing organizations, health care foundations, magnet hospitals, and minority nurse advocacy groups all recognize the unique value that baccalaureate-prepared nurses bring to the practice setting.

Current Pattern of Nursing Education in Nigeria

Nursing education has passed through various stages of reforms since its inception in Nigeria. This has become necessary because healthcare delivery system involves a multidisciplinary approach and team members. Nursing education is the pivot foundation for nursing practice⁶. It then means that the quality of the nursing care a patient or client receives will depend on the quality of the caregiver, such as the nurse. This outcome serves as a reflection of the quality of the nursing education the nurse had.

Currently, there are two pathways or tracks of nursing education programs in Nigeria. The first track for becoming a professional nurse is for the individual to study for 3 years as a student, in a basic school of nursing and obtain a diploma certificate after a successful completion of the 3-year program and passing the professional board examination. Those who still desire to obtain a university degree in Nursing will then apply as a direct entry student to their choice universities that offer nursing programs.

The second pathway is through a 4 or 5-year generic program in tertiary institutions that offer nursing program. Professional nurses are expected to be on the program for four years, while the non-nurses spend five years in the university. However, the 5-year generic students are prepared for the professional (board) examination, which they will challenge at their fourth year in the university, before sitting for the university final degree examination.

Upon completion of first degree, individuals who want to advance in their academic career may proceed for a Master's program to obtain M.Sc. (Nursing); thereafter, a Ph.D. (Nursing), in their chosen specialties.

Models of Nursing Care Approach in Nigeria

Among the nursing care approaches which Nigerian nurses have adopted to organize their activities include: primary care nursing, functional nursing, case nursing, and team nursing. Out of these four models of nursing care delivery, the most prevalent and most preferred in most health care facilities in Nigeria is the functional approach. This model of care does not individualize care and it robs the nurse of developing skills in planning, implementing and evaluating the care given to individual patient. In addition, it does not allow for continuity and holistic approach to care. This has a negative impact on best practices, standards and quality of care rendered. There is need for nurses to adopt other nursing care approaches so that the quality of the rendered care can be enhanced.

While analyzing the challenges of nursing care in Nigeria, Ojo⁷ implicated the educational level of most Nigerian nurses as being the impediment to the understanding and utilization of the most current concepts in nursing; such as nursing process, evidence-based practice, advanced nursing practice and reflective practice; which are designed to improve quality of care rendered by nurses globally.

The Way Forward

Review of Nursing Curricula

The contents of the current nursing curricula for both diploma and undergraduate nursing programs in Nigeria need overhauling. We need to include current global health issues and their implications to nursing practice in the curricula. This is to enable us educate nursing students who are adequately prepared to meet the health challenges of the 21st century. All Nurses need to be aware and be knowledgeable about global health disease prevention, control and management. Recently, infectious diseases such as Ebola Virus Disease (EVD), Lassa hemorrhagic fever, and most recently Zika; have become the concern of all, worldwide.

Comprehensive and multi-disciplinary

pain management; Palliative and End-of-Life Care Nursing and Psycho-Oncology nursing are other necessary modules to be included in the educational curricula. Knowledge gained from these topics will impact positively on the care received by their patients, and ensure best practice.

Inclusion of Relevant Concepts and Skills in Nursing Education that Have Implications for Nursing Practice

Assertive Training

Assertiveness is an important behavior for today's professional nurse. As nurses and midwives move away from traditional roles, it is increasingly being recognized that they need to behave in an assertive manner. A number of studies on nursing and midwifery conducted outside Nigeria have found stress and bullying to be frequent problems. Those suffering from bullying and stress need to have high levels of assertiveness to enable them resist and cope successfully. Many studies have supported the use of assertiveness in clinical practice^{8,9,10}.

The role of nursing involves interaction with clients, peers and other health professionals. This role is enhanced when nurses have a good command of communication skills. An essential component of effective communication is the ability to behave assertively. Several studies have indicated that nurses lack assertiveness skills. The lack of assertiveness results in diminished effectiveness of communication and compromised patient care. Unfortunately, many Nigerian nurses are not assertive because they were not taught to be.

Assertive behavior should be encouraged through learning methods. It is preferable that nurses receive this educational preparation during undergraduate programs¹⁰. Little empirical evidence exists to support teaching in this area, however role-play is a concept that is suggested for the experiential teaching of communication/interpersonal skills in general¹⁰.

Therefore, Nigeria nurse educators have an important role in the development and

implementation of assertiveness training for diploma and undergraduate nursing programs. Nurses should preferably obtain this training throughout their studies. The development of assertiveness aids the confidence of the profession. This has implication for curriculum review.

Reflective Practice in Nursing

Reflection is the examination of personal thoughts and actions. For nurses, this means focusing on how they interact with their colleagues, clients and with the environment in a bid to have a clearer picture of their own behavior.

Reflective practice is a process by which nurses can better understand themselves in order to effect necessary corrections, build on existing strengths, and take appropriate professional actions aligned with professional ethics, personal values and beliefs.

Although reflective practice has been identified as a valuable tool to help nurses recognize their own strengths and weaknesses¹¹, this concept is not included and taught in the current nursing education curricula in Nigeria; hence the professionals find it a difficult concept to embrace. This calls for its inclusion in curricula at the diploma and undergraduate levels, as its knowledge will benefit nurses both on a personal and a professional level.

Integration of Information Technology

We live in the world of technology; hence Information technology course is another important topic to be included in the reviewed curriculum. For today's nurse to be effective either in the classroom or in practice area, he/she must be IT compliant. Having an appropriate technology infrastructure and up-to-date resources is also critical to successful learning.

Since we are in the era of E-learning, tele-health, tele-medicine, tele-nursing, tele-counseling, and so on; lecturers and nurse educators must be prepared to use available resources, have access to needed support, and develop competency for using these

resources. The onus rests on nurses to learn and re-learn as the society changes.

In-Service Education

These are supplementary education received on the job by employees in order to keep up-to-date with knowledge explosion and new skills. It could also be for better practice, for professional development or personal development.

Functions of in-service education in nursing include:

- (1) Professional goals and development of each individual nurse.
- (2) Promoting the quality of nursing care.
- (3) For upward mobility (promotion)
- (4) For the growth of the profession (to consolidate professional status)
- (5) For the growth and strength of professional association (NANNM, ANNE, GNAN)

Nursing Research

For nursing profession to grow and be recognized by Nigerian society, nurses must be engaged in vigorous researches that will have direct impact on the improvement of the lives of the people because the findings of such studies will positively influence nursing practice and administration. Promoting research utilization through formation of nursing research Committee is a potent way to promote evidence-based nursing. In this era of globalization, Nigerian nurses need to be aware, familiar, and knowledgeable about contemporary global health initiatives and their implications to health policy, nursing education curriculum and nursing practice.

Agbedia¹², in her paper on re-envisioning nursing education and practice in Nigeria, highlighted the following topics as some of the areas that nurses can conduct research, to include:

- Patients' safety,
- Patients' satisfaction with nursing care,
- Staffing and patients' outcome,

- Effect of environment on workplace wellness,
- Quality of nursing care across the care continuum,
- Development of instruments to evaluate the effectiveness of nursing care delivery system
- Development of assessment tools for measuring symptoms such as pain, fatigue, nausea, and sleeplessness, to mention a few.
- Patients' choice of dying place
- Through nursing research, it will become possible to generate, assess evidence for nursing practice and the level of patients' satisfaction in Nigeria.

Partnership to Design Innovative Educational System

The bulk of healthcare activities rest on the shoulders of nurses hence the need to tackle inadequacies suffered by nurses in terms of resources for education and research. The lack of continuing education is a major challenge to Nigerian nurses. This has implications for Nursing and Midwifery Council of Nigeria (NMCN) and the National Association of Nigeria Nurses and Midwives (NANNM).

All nurses irrespective of where they practice should embrace the concept of Life-Long Education. Continuing Nursing Education could be on long-term basis, such as higher degrees in nursing, obtainable in universities or on short-term basis, through in-service education, short courses, training workshops and conferences.

For so long nurse Nigerian nurse educators and their counterparts working in clinical settings though have cordial relationship and demonstrate mutual respect to one another, they have not been fully involved in collaboration to prepare a work force that can practice effectively in new healthcare environments.

This calls for innovative ideas, creative thinking and actions, aimed at bridging the gap between theory and practice. Nurse

educators need to be conversant with current practice in the clinical areas to enable them identify and develop research focus and the theoretical bases for practice.

Transformational Leadership and Mentorship

Mentoring is a veritable means of bridging the gap between older and younger generations. It is desirable that experienced, knowledgeable and older nurses serve as mentors to younger colleagues. It is more desirable for nurse leaders with appropriate higher qualification in nursing to act in this capacity. Some of the benefits of mentoring in nursing are:

- It promotes the exchange of ideas, support and friendship.
- It increases the self-esteem of the mentee.
- The mentee may enjoy career development
- It diminishes stereotypes.
- It minimizes nursing care errors.

Continuing Professional Development

Continuing professional education is a synonym to in-service education. The goal of continuing education is to be current or keep abreast with advances in the occupational career field, trends and advances affecting medicine, medico-legal practices, and hospital administration, and nursing practice. There is need for nurses to keep the channels of receiving information open. It is only when an individual is current that he/she can be correct.

The Nursing and Midwifery Council of Nigeria had taken a good step to ensure all professional nurses in the country go through refresher courses as part of the Mandatory and Compulsory Professional Development Program (MCPDP). However, through observation and reported clinical practice, many issues about global trends in nursing practice, have not been addressed in the MCPDP curriculum.

Settings for Nursing Education

It is desirable that all nurses be educated in higher institutions of learning. Nurses require university education to be whole. In addition, it will promote TEAM LEARNING, respect for one another and enhance assertiveness of nurses because nursing students will see themselves as peers rather than subordinates to other students in health-related disciplines. Aina¹³ had advocated for the need to raise nursing education to a level where at least 80% of practicing nurses in Nigeria would hold a minimum of a Bachelor's degree.

There is a need to also consider the appropriateness of where education of nurses is provided. Among all the health-related professional courses in Nigeria, only nursing program, is being anchored in the National Open University (NOUN) out of all other health disciplines, such as medicine, pharmacy, physiotherapy, medical laboratory science, even community health). This situation needs to be re-visited and addressed by the relevant stakeholders; such as the Association of Nigerian Nurse Educators (ANNE), the Graduate Nurses Association of Nigeria (GNAN), the National Association of Nigerian Nurses and Midwives (NANNM) and the Nursing and Midwifery Council of Nigeria (NMCN). It is high time that all stakeholders in nursing profession should try thinking of converting all schools of nursing into Masters, DNP, PhD running degree awarding institutions so as to prepare knowledgeable, competent and skilled man power that would favorably compete with their counterparts, and meet the internationally accepted health best practice⁶.

Recommendation

Nurse employers in Nigeria are encouraged to foster practice environments that embrace lifelong learning and offer incentives for registered nurses (RNs) seeking to advance their education to the baccalaureate and higher degree levels. We also encourage BSN graduates to seek out employers who value their level of education and distinct competencies

Conclusion

There is no doubt that the re-envisioning nursing education and practice is about aiming at excellent nursing care rendered to patients and the community; and the need to re-appraise how the next generation of nurses are being prepared to function effectively in a variety of settings during their career. Just like a good touch light illuminates the path of whosoever holds it. Nurse Educators are better positioned to provide leadership for nursing profession in Nigeria. However, to perform this role effectively, nurse educators must be knowledgeable, assertive, exposed, proactive, and be ready to face challenges.

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