

Commentary

Ansam F Sawalha*

Nursing Practice and education in Palestine

College of Nursing, An-Najah National University, Nablus-palestine.

Nursing is a dynamic field, the practice of which is continually evolving to include more sophisticated patient care activities. Whenever we try to define "nursing", we find that any definition will be restrictive to this profession. In 1859 Florence Nightingale wrote: "the elements of nursing are all but unknown".

Nursing is the use of clinical judgment in the provision of care to enable people to improve, maintain, or recover health, to cope with health problems, and to achieve the best possible quality of life, whatever their disease or disability, until death.

Nursing is experienced at some time by almost everybody; it is done by millions of nurses world wide. Yet it is difficult to describe. The purpose of nursing is to promote health, healing, growth and development, and to prevent disease, illness, and disability. It also aims at minimizing distress and suffering, and to enable people to understand and cope with their disease or disability and its treatment and consequences. Nursing interventions are mainly concerned with empowering people.

Nursing practice involves intellectual, physical, emotional, and moral process which includes identification of nursing needs, education, advice, teaching and knowledge development, and physical, emotional, and spiritual support.

The focus of nursing is on the whole person, it believes in the holistic view. Nursing is based on ethical values which respect the dignity, autonomy, and uniqueness of humans. These values are

expressed in written codes and ethics, and supported by regulations. Nurses work with partnership with patients and their relatives and in collaboration with other member of the multi-disciplinary team.

The need for medical care will always increase exponentially. As the expected life span for humans increase, chronic diseases will increase, and the costs of health care will rise accordingly.

The nurses in the current practice are aging and will approach retirement which will result in inflating the currently present need for nurses. This shortage of nurses is expected to increase over the coming years world wide. This shortage of nurses is causing hospitals and health facilities to compete for nurses.

Nursing practice in Palestine is in decline. Many reasons could be cited for this, among which are reasons related to the practice of nursing profession itself, other reasons are due to the special situation that nursing in Palestine has.

As for the problems related to nursing profession, many can be mentioned, below are some of those:

- Nurses are burdened by the too many patients, work environment, and the too much paper work.
- Nurses are not recognized as valuable professionals
- Nurses have very little authority which frustrates them

- Nurses are subject to physical, emotional, and verbal abuse by patients and co-workers.
- Most nurses are women who are responsible for their jobs and for the house-related responsibilities.
- Demographic changes and immigration require nurses to elevate and vary their knowledge and skills

Beside all the previously mentioned problems, nursing practice in Palestine has its own problems, among which are:

- a- There is no agreed upon definition for the practice of nursing in Palestine which leads to overlapping with other medical professions.
- b- No recognition from administrators or co-workers for the outstanding nurses which causes frustration and disappointment.
- c- Immigration of qualified nurses to work abroad for safer working environment and better salaries and benefits
- d- Continuously, the quality of health services is declining which leads to people losing trust in it.
- e- No laws are out there to necessitate recertification for nurses or continuous medical education. This has led to nurses not getting any education after graduation.
- f- Lack of specialized nurses in almost all branches of nursing practice
- g- Continuously increasing demands and expectations of the public regarding the quality of care and the commitment to nursing ethics.
- h- Health care reform requires high quality nursing education as well as directing nursing practice toward society needs. This is not available currently.
- i- Nurses do not get continuous training and educations, while the change in disease patterns and the

occurrence of new diseases requires the nurses to continuously update themselves with new guidelines

- j- Technology has provided new methods for diagnosis and treatment of illnesses; nurses in Palestine are not being updated regarding such techniques, and computer-based equipments.

Suggested methods to solve the above problems include increasing the number of qualified nurses, improving the quality of nursing care which will help in changing the negative public opinion about nursing. Establishing an agency to assure the quality of nursing care. Practicing nurses should be enrolled in continuing education programs and should provide them with learning resources and continuous training. This will require the government to increase the funds allocated for health.

It is important for nurses to be satisfied while practicing their job. This requires maintaining safe and comfortable working environment, giving nurses part in decision making, adhering to the nursing job description, provide promotions in order to keep qualified nurses in Palestine. Efforts should be made to assure occupational safety for nurses as well.

Previous paragraphs described the problems facing nursing practice in general, and also the problems that face nurses in Palestine in particular. The other major obstacle for nurses is related to nursing education. The major recognized problems are summarized below:

- a- Declining level of education in general in Palestine which is reflected on students' quality and on nursing education.
- b- Presence of different educational systems which had led to varying knowledge and skills possessed by nursing graduates.
- c- There is a clear shortage in nursing faculty in Palestine and the ones who are present lack education or clinical skills.

- d- Most nursing schools still use old fashioned teaching methods
- e- Existing hospitals are not suitable for the clinical training of nursing students because of the inability to practice at hospitals what they have learned in classes.
- f- Shortage of many medical sub-specialties at the hospitals which leads to improper management of disease conditions and consequently more burden on the health care providers.

To solve the above problems regarding education, the following must be done:

- a- Adopting the WHO guidelines for nursing curriculum
- b- Establishing nursing colleges according to high international standards and providing programs that award degrees in nursing specialties
- c- Encouraging clinical nursing research
- d- Upgrading teaching methods and establishing modern methods such as self-education
- e- Adopting trusted evaluation tools
- f- Improving communication skills.

As a method to solve part of the previously mentioned problems, An-Najah National University has established the College of Nursing two years ago. This college provides a curriculum that grants the Bachelor degree of nursing and it requires four years to complete all the credit hours required for graduation.

We do have about 150 students at the college currently. Our students get their courses at the university and then get their training at the hospitals. There is a great shortage of educated qualified nurses in Palestine; this affects the practice and education of nursing. This is the reason

that made us ask for volunteer nurses who can participate in teaching and/or training of our students.

Volunteers need to have a license to practice nursing (American or European license), or they need to have a master or PhD degree in nursing. Such volunteers will help both in practical training of our students and in course material education. They can join us anytime during the academic year, i.e. from September 2006 until May 2007. Specialized nurses are needed to participate in teaching the following courses:

- a- medical surgical nursing
- b- critical care nursing
- c- maternity care nursing
- d- pediatric nursing
- e- mental health nursing
- f- ethics of nursing
- g- fundamentals of nursing
- h- pharmacology for nurses
- i- microbiology for nurses
- j- pathology for nurses
- k- Nursing research

Interested volunteers can contact us at one of the following emails:
nursing@najah.edu or ansam@najah.edu .

*** Corresponding author:**

 Ansam F Sawalha, PhD
Dean, College of Nursing
An-Najah National Univ.
Nablus, Palestine.
ansam@najah.edu .