Editorial title

Growth, Challenges and Opportunities in Indian Nursing

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In India, nurses and midwives make up more than 30% of the national healthcare workforce (World Health Organisation, 2016). The country has also witnessed a phenomenal growth in the uptake of nursing education with an increase during the last eight years of Graduate nursing schools; 285 to 3215, BSc colleges; 30 to 1936, and MSc nursing colleges; 10 to 643 (Indian Nursing Council, 2019). Many of the BSc and MSc colleges are now moving to health universities and deemed institutes. Academic nursing is also developing apace and the University Grant Commission (UGC) of India now requires that university lecturers must hold, as a minimum, a master's degree in their subject and preferable a PhD. In order to meet these requirements there has been a growth in universities offering PhD programmes, and a growth in the number of Indian nursing academics pursuing a Doctorate. A national consortium for PhD in nursing was established by the Indian Nursing Council in collaboration with the Rajiv Gandhi University of Health Sciences, Bangalore in the year 2006 (Indian Nursing Council, 2019), and has seen a total of 74 PhDs in Nursing as of November 2018 (Indian Nursing Council, 2019). This is welcome, but is a figure that requires a substantial increase to continue to develop a cadre of PhD qualified nurse academics, and nurse clinicians.

The scope of the nursing sector in India has widened, and nursing roles and responsibilities have increased – developing the autonomy of nursing practice. However, a number of challenges remain related to the development of the nursing workforce. Improvements are needed in selection and recruitment, provision of suitable placements, and a clear career path for nurses – however, we note that this is not a problem unique to India. Furthermore, as the health demands of a rapidly growing population increase and development continues apace India still faces an acute shortage of nursing staff with an estimated deficit of 2.4 million (Senior, 2010) despite the expansion of nursing providers. The nurse-population ratio is 1:2,500 compared to a ratio of 1:150 to 1:200 in higher income countries (Raha et.al, 2009). Subsequently, the current Indian nursing workforce is not sufficient to meet the sustainable development goals (World Health Organisation, 2017).

India is presently in a state of transition- economically, demographically, and epidemiologically. The health sector, which was a state level task, is now becoming a national priority, and taken into consideration by the central government through 'National Health Mission' programmes. The country at present suffers from the triple burden of disease - the unfinished agenda of infectious diseases; the challenge of non-communicable diseases (NCDs), and emergence of new pathogens causing epidemics/pandemics. In addition, the health infrastructure is already over-stretched and needs to be strengthened to confront these new and old challenges. In the health sector, India has made some developments over the past decades. The life expectancy has crossed 67 years, infant and under-five mortality rates demonstrated a constantly declining trend (World Health Organisation, 2019). Many diseases, such as polio, guinea worm disease, yaws, and maternal and neonatal tetanus, have been successfully eradicated. However, in spite of this progress, communicable diseases are expected to continue to remain major public health problems posing a threat to both national and international health security. As India develops, there are also increases in the typical Western long-term illnesses, such as heart disease, cancer, diabetes, and chronic pulmonary diseases. The value of nurses in both prevention roles and disease management has been proven in many health care settings – thus India needs its nursing profession to develop, grow and contribute to attempts to address these new health challenges brought about as a result of economic and social developments. Allied to this is that financial limitations still prevent many young women entering the profession – this needs

attention to enable more nurses to be trained – and is an issue that needs to be included in the gender equality work taking place throughout the country.

As Indian nursing is undergoing tremendous changes and challenges, research will help support and inform its growth and development as a profession. There is actually a long tradition of nursing research, which can be traced back to 1955 when Ms Margarette Craig (Principal of the College of Nursing, New Delhi) presented her paper at the International Council of Nurses meeting in France on the 'Need of Nursing Research in India'. In 1975, the World Health Organisation tasked Dr Mary Ferrell and Dr Aparna Bhaduriwith the development of nursing research in India. They conducted series of workshops on research, and its importance to nursing. Today the 'Nursing Research Society of India' (Nursing Research Society of India, 2019) has launched its own Journal in 2007 (launched at the Bharati Vidyapeeth Deemed University, Pune and continues to be printed from the university). In 2005, the National Consortium for Nursing PhDs was launched and the Central Institute of Nursing Research was formed in 2009 – both organisations being influential in laying the foundations of research in nursing. Indeed, research is now becoming a required element within the nursing curriculum and it is important that the Indian Nursing Council continues to support and monitor research initiatives nationally. In doing so they identify nine key areas for nursing research;

- Clinical intervention studies to generate evidence based nursing practice.
- Research to set practice standards in various nursing specialties
- Nursing education research – measurement, evaluation of competencies, quality assurance, and innovations
- Research to inform teaching strategies in nursing
- Healthcare workforce generation and distribution research
- Healthcare cost benefit analysis
- Development of tools to test nursing theories and models in the Indian health care environment
- Impact studies and research that informs Indian health policy
- Independent nursing practice

Indian academic nursing is moving forward. It is important that this momentum is maintained and increased. Research is embedded in all BSc and Graduate nursing programmes now but there needs to be an acceleration of the development of PhD level nurses and nurse academics in India. This can then facilitate a growth in nursing research targeted at addressing India's health challenges in the future and ensuring Indian nurses are a central part of the development of the country, its health professionals, and its universities.

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