



THE AGA KHAN UNIVERSITY

eCommons@AKU

School of Nursing & Midwifery

Faculty of Health Sciences

January 2011

Phasing out the general nursing diploma programme at Aga Khan university school of nursing Karachi, Pakistan

Salma Amin Rattani

Aga Khan University, salma.rattani@aku.edu

Laila Akbar Ali

Aga Khan University, laila.akbarali@aku.edu

Shireen Salim Velji

Aga Khan University

Amina Malik

Aga Khan University, amina.malik@aku.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://ecommons.aku.edu/pakistan_fhs_son



Part of the [Medical Education Commons](#), and the [Nursing Administration Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Rattani, S. A., Ali, L. A., Velji, S. S., Malik, A. (2011). Phasing out the general nursing diploma programme at Aga Khan university school of nursing Karachi, Pakistan. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 15, 3046-3049.

Available at: https://ecommons.aku.edu/pakistan_fhs_son/94

WCES-2011

Phasing out the General Nursing Diploma Programme at Aga Khan University School of Nursing Karachi, Pakistan

Salma Amin Rattani^{a*}, Laila Akbarali^b, Shireen Salim Velji^c, Amina Malik^d

^aAssistant Professor & Director, General Nursing Diploma Programme, ^bSr. Associate Registrar, ^cSr. Instructor, ^dNurse Manager, Aga Khan University, Stadium Road, P.O. Box 3500, Karachi-74800, Pakistan

Abstract

Aga Khan University was established as medical complex in 1980 and in 1983 received charter as first private university in Pakistan. Thus nursing education moved under the umbrella of a university which allowed starting under graduate and graduate degree education and in light of global trends in nursing profession and staffing and financial impact of nursing education, 2010 was the last intake of university's founding programme; general nursing diploma. Concerns; male vs female nurses and taking nursing education as an easy route to enter in higher education resulting in unattained staffing require deliberations by stake holder including Pakistan Nursing Council.

Keywords: Higher Education, Pakistan Nursing Council, Aga Khan University, Global Trends in Nursing, Gender in Nursing

1. Introduction

The first Institution to commence operations in, what is now, the Aga Khan University (AKU) was the School of Nursing in 1980. The first academic programme to be initiated in the School, with support from McMaster University in Canada was the three year General Nursing Diploma Programme (RN).

When the 'Medical Complex' received its charter as the first private university in Pakistan in 1983, the School of Nursing came under the umbrella of the University. This was the beginning of a new era for the nursing profession in Pakistan.

In his inaugural address the Chancellor had spelt out his vision for the nursing profession:

“...today, this is the beginning, the birth of a new medical institution in Pakistan, the Aga Khan University...and I hope, this day will also be the dawn of a new dimension for the profession of nursing in Pakistan”.

(Aga Khan, February 16, 1981)

And true to his vision and mission, today, three decades later, nursing education at AKU which began with a three year RN programme, has been the first in the country to introduce the two year Post RN BScN degree programme in 1988; a four year entry level under graduate degree programme in General Nursing in 1997 and a two year masters' degree in nursing sciences for experienced nurses in 2001.

Briefly, the two year Post RN BScN is for Registered nurses holding a diploma, who after gaining experience in the field, want to develop professionally. The four years baccalaureate degree (BScN) on the other

*Salma Amin Rattani: Tel: (92 21) 4930051 Ext 5401. Direct: 34865403; fax: (92 21) 493-2095
Email: salma.rattani@aku.edu

hand, is first time entry into the nursing profession. This programme enables young men and women to obtain a degree in nursing in a shorter period of time. The graduate degree programme; masters in nursing sciences (MScN) is a two years programme for nurses who have an undergraduate degree in nursing and want to move further in the profession to take on leadership positions. The University also invites senior registered nurses to join the MScN programme by first attending a specially designed one year 'transition programme.' These nurses may not have an undergraduate degree in nursing sciences, but have an academic under graduate degree in other courses/sciences. The Aga Khan University School of Nursing (AKU-SON) thus has the entire range of qualifications; has set a new trend and has made a difference to the profession of nursing in the country.

In the same vein, to keep abreast with global needs, the eight year (2008- 2016) strategic plan for the School developed in 2007 required a feasibility to decide whether to phase out the RN Diploma programme. In April 2009 a team was formed. The team included representatives from School of Nursing, the stake holders, Nursing Services of the Aga Khan University Hospital, the employers, and member in the Office of Registrar, the office responsible for managing the recruitment process at the University. The team deliberated on important aspects of the phase out plan. The objective of this paper is to share the deliberations of this Committee which then guided the decision to phase out the diploma programme.

2. Committee's Deliberations

The committee deliberated on rationale for phasing out the general nursing diploma programme. These deliberations are presented succinctly.

2.1 Global trends in nursing practice

Globally in nursing trends are changing and minimum preparation for beginning professional nursing practice at the present time is suggested to be baccalaureate degree education in nursing (ANA as cited by Ellis and Hartley, 2004). Thus it was important that the University avoid shorter term gains considering the long term consequences and disservice to the women joining the profession. It therefore became essential to control the overall number of RN graduates. The feasibility also required the team to assess the time that would be required for the RNs produced by AKU to complete their Post RN BScN degrees. Several projections were made; innovative means of imparting the degree were also discussed. This discussion is beyond the scope of this paper and is not being discussed here.

2.2 Changing trends in applicant pool and enrollment

An important consideration during the discussions related to the change in the eligibility requirements for the RN programme by the Pakistan Nursing Council.

To give the reader some understanding of the enrolment process that needs to be followed in Pakistan, it is essential that the reader has an orientation to the Pakistan Nursing Council [PNC]. In Pakistan, all Schools of Nursing are required to follow the basic admission guidelines set by the PNC. This is the accrediting and licensing authority in the country. The PNC plays a vital role in updating and reviewing the nursing curriculum. The council registers nurses and provides them license to practice within the country. PNC also facilitates nurses in legal matters, particularly when they apply internationally to practice or to obtain higher education. It is thus essential that the PNC criteria are followed (<http://www.pnc.org.pk/Home.htm>).

To be eligible to apply for the RN programme, until 2007, candidates from multiple educational backgrounds i.e. Arts, Commerce, Computer Science or premedical [twelve years of education with subjects to include biology, chemistry and physics] were eligible to apply. In 2008 however, PNC changed the application criteria. PNC now require only those candidates to apply for the RN who had a pre-medical background. These were comparable to the eligibility and entry requirements for the BScN programme. This change impacted the applicant pool and the demography to a great extent.

During the deliberations, two aspects in favour of the phasing out were noted immediately. These pertained to the benefits to the individuals who wished to pursue nursing as a career. These benefits were not only financial as discussed below but the time taken to complete the degree programme was significantly lower. Taking the RN route, a nurse would take 7 years, while the direct BScN would be a four year programme. This also has significant financial implications at two ends. One, lower cost for programme completion and two, the RN would need to discontinue full time employment to pursue the Post RN BSc N, thus causing a loss to family income.

2.3 Financial impact

The market value for BScN programme is more than RN programme. At present at AKU the initial pay scale for a graduate from the RN programme is Rs 16000 [\$18.82.] per month whereas, the starting salary for the BScN programme graduate is Rs 17200 [\$ 200] per month. Moreover, to seek promotions in the management level, a BScN is the minimum requirement. In other institutions within the country, BScN programme graduates have a greater demand and are valued much more than a graduate of the RN programme.

Based on the discussions it turned out that phasing out the RN would benefit young men and women in the long run.

Amidst these advantages however, there was a fear. This related to the very ethos of the School. The team members were concerned that in pursuing the BScN, would the institution be overlooking its mandate of developing women from underserved areas. To give the reader some background, the SON had developed an 18 month Track One programme, [a bridging programme] for women from underserved areas who the Admission Committee had admitted into the RN programme but on condition that they would successfully complete the 18 month Track One programme. This intensive programme [comprising English Language, science, mathematics, courses for soft skills building; communication skills and interpersonal relationships, study skills and time management etc] was developed keeping in mind the resources available in the underserved areas in Schools to educate the children attending these schools. Since the level of education at AKU-SON is high, it was important to enrich these young women, to bring them up to a level where they would succeed in the programme. The likelihood that they would, was based on the fact that they had shown interest in the nursing profession, had made an application, showed promise and potential through the assessment made by the University in the Admission Test and interviews. So far a total of 1936 nurses have graduated from RN programme, out of them 306 students have benefited from the Track One programme.

This fear was allayed as the School developed a new programme in 2007; the enrichment programme (EP). This was offered to candidates who in similar circumstances as those who joined the Track One programme. Through the enrichment programme concern about taking care of the candidates from disadvantaged areas was much reduced and further guided the decision making process for phasing out the RN programme in the SON.

Another fear that loomed large was the issue of staffing the Aga Khan University Hospital [AKUH]. Majority of AKU-SON graduates of both RN and BScN programme join nursing services at AKUH. The number of graduates recruited from RN programme is much higher than from BScN programme. Thus during the deliberations, special attention was given to this important aspect. It was important that the number of graduates from the BScN programme, after the phase out is not be less than the total number of graduates from RN and BScN at present. During the deliberations, the data suggested that during the transition, there would be only one year during which there could be less number of graduates available to be recruited by nursing services and it was concluded that the gap would be filled by recruiting non AKU-SON graduate. This was in line with the present situation in the AKUH. At present of the total number of nurses at the AKUH, 65% are AKU-SON graduates and 35% are non AKU-SON graduates. These percentages may reverse. But this gap could be filled by recruiting non AKU-SON graduates. And the quality of the nurses could be looked into by organizing a more thorough orientation programme for these nurses prior to their joining the nursing units.

2.4 Concerns which remain unresolved: the dilemma

In Pakistan, nursing continues to remain predominantly a female profession. The demand of female nurses is more than male nurses. In fulfilling this demand AKU-SON has played a role by choosing to offer RN programme to female students whereas, it could have decided to enroll male students from its very inception. This was permissible according to PNC guidelines. However AKU-SON did not follow this route. But in BScN programme, PNC permits co-education. Thus it was felt that phasing out the RN programme may have an affect on AKU-SON's contribution in developing female nurses. Young men who join the nursing profession do not always fulfill the need of bedside nursing; it is generally considered that they take nursing education as an easy route to enter higher education. While data is required to substantiate this assertion, it was felt that phasing out the diploma programme may create a gap in availability of nurses in the field. However, this aspect needs further discussions.

As discussed earlier, since the Post RN BScN programme is for those nurses who want to develop professionally, further deliberations are also required to understand how the current nurses holding a diploma will be able to obtain a Post RN qualification.

3. Conclusion

Aga Khan University initially known as medical complex started in 1980 with school of nursing as its first entity in which general diploma was the founding education programme. Later on in 1983 medical complex by receiving the charter got the status of a university. This was dawn of a new era for nursing profession in Pakistan as the nursing education system moved under the umbrella of university thus allowing it to be upgraded from diploma to under graduate and graduate degree education and gave future direction for nursing profession. Keeping in line with setting new trends, Aga Khan University planned to phase out general nursing diploma programme and to prepare its feasibility a team was formulated. In view of the deliberation by the team 2010 was the last intake of diploma class a journey that began in 1980 came to a close.

Acknowledgements

Ms. Munira Akber, Senior Officer Human Resource, through telephonic communication, providing information related to nurses' composition; AKU-SON, Non AKU-SON at AKUH and their initial pay scale (January 2011).

References

- Ellis, J.R. & Hartley, C.L. (2004). *Nursing in today's world: trends, issues & management* (8th ed.). Lippincott Williams & Wilkins. Retrieved on January 12, 2011 from [http://books.google.com.pk/books?id=g8YR18m6tvG&pg=PA356&lpg=PA356&dq=Ellis,+J.R.+%26+Hartley,+C.L.+\(2004\).&source=bl&ots=DU9w4Ec-Mr&sig=sZQK5sLQMIImOks-IQ2wubeIhjig&hl=en&ei=OewuTeWfJDKrAf2yoiLCg&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CBQQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q&f=false](http://books.google.com.pk/books?id=g8YR18m6tvG&pg=PA356&lpg=PA356&dq=Ellis,+J.R.+%26+Hartley,+C.L.+(2004).&source=bl&ots=DU9w4Ec-Mr&sig=sZQK5sLQMIImOks-IQ2wubeIhjig&hl=en&ei=OewuTeWfJDKrAf2yoiLCg&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CBQQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q&f=false)
- Khan, A. (February 16, 1981). University Chancellor's speech at the inauguration of the Aga Khan School of Nursing. Retrieved on January 13, 2010, from <http://ismaili.net/drupal5/node/27583>
- Nursing faculty. (2007). *Strategic Plan for Nursing Education 2008- 2016*. Aga Khan University School of Nursing. Un published document Pakistan Nursing Council. Retrieved on January 13, 2011 from <http://www.pnc.org.pk/Home.htm>