

Editorial



Article 25 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights states that “everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including medical care... and the right of security in the event of... sickness and disability...”¹

The theme for 2018 International Nurses Day (12 May 2018) “**Nurses A Voice to Lead – Health is a Human right**” immediately poses the question “Why should nurses be interested in the right to health as an approach to health care?” The International Council for Nurses (ICN) highlights the following reasons for the theme in the 2018 Toolkit:

- The right to health approach to health systems is **evidence based** and is an important and proven way of improving health and equity within a population.
- Each person has intrinsic value/worth and an expression of humanity: Nurses can lead by supporting a people-centred approach to care and the health system. This places the wellbeing of individuals, communities and populations at the centre of the health system.
- There are numerous **legally binding obligations** related to the right to the highest attainable health. This means that governments and health systems have responsibilities to provide a certain standard of care to communities and populations.
- Nurses have a critical contribution to make: Nurses need to be making the decisive contribution to this process as they possess the scientific reasoning, philosophical underpinnings and proximity to the patient, family, and community.
- The success of Universal Health Coverage (UHC) through people-centred care is dependent on the nursing profession providing a transformational approach to the way health is conceptualised and how health care is delivered. A people-centred approach, a functional health system, the availability of an appropriately skilled workforce and addressing the issues of access are the critical building blocks for UHC.²

“Fundamentally, no one should be denied access to their country’s appropriate standard of health care because of their

financial status, where the health care provided leads them deeper into poverty. A human rights perspective on health means that wherever you live, you can receive health care to assist with your health needs.”³

There is no other profession that attends to people’s needs in their most vulnerable periods of time as nursing does. The relationship between the client and the nurse provides a unique and intimate view of a person’s life.²

The demand and supply for nurses to fulfil their role in providing health care to everyone, is influenced by numerous factors and these factors have to be addressed to improve the current situation. These factors include.

- The aging workforce with many nurses nearing retirement. This might open opportunities for nurses entering the job market but might also result in major skill shortages.
- The uncertainties and the opportunities in the implementation and management of Universal Health Coverage through National Health Insurance. This is the ideal platform to provide the much-needed health care but many nurses (and other health care professionals) are reluctant to enter these unknown market prospects.
- The economy has a direct influence on recruitment and appointment of all categories of nurses – from students to clinical nursing specialists. The current growth rate has a negative impact on the resources needed for tertiary education, this includes both the training and the practical institutions.
- The nursing profession is not attracting the younger age group to fulfil the existing and future demand for nurses.
- Employers are unable to recruit and bring foreign educated nurses to assist in filling the existing vacancies within a reasonable time-frame due to the cumbersome processes.

International Nurses Day 2018 is an opportunity for us to not only focus on the theme but also to reflect on current health care systems, including the ways to improve health care through a competent and motivated health care workforce.

References:

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