



ADDRESSING THE NURSING SHORTAGE

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THANK YOU

- I am honored to be invited to speak here today
- Thank you to the organizers and those that made my visit possible



OBJECTIVES

- Quantify the global shortage of nursing
- Examine the root causes of the manpower crisis
- Identify the implications of the nursing shortage in neonatal care
- Discuss possible solutions to address the nursing shortage



HOW BAD IS THE SHORTAGE?

- 2022, UK headline: “Post-Covid-19 global nursing workforce challenges ‘too big to be ignored’”

www.nursingtimes.net/news/global-nursing/post-covid-19-global-nursing-

- 2023, the International Council of Nurses (ICN) declared “Nurse shortage ... a ‘global health emergency’”

www.nursingtimes.net/news/global-nursing/

Globally, WHO predicts a shortage of 10 million HC workers by 2030

ICN: shortage of 13 million for nursing alone



WHAT ABOUT SAUDI ARABIA?

- Al Arabiya News (June 2023): by 2030 Saudi Arabia will need:
 - 69,000 more doctors,
 - 64,000 extra nurses, and
 - 42,000 extra allied health professionals to address the healthcare shortage

... AND IN NEONATAL CARE?

- No specific data, likely proportionate to the general shortage
- UK: national survey published in 2020- 69% of NICU shifts met the national staffing recommendations, only 44% of shifts had enough specialist nurses
- Similar neonatal nursing shortages reported in Canada, Australia and the US. Is the same true in KSA?





WHAT HAS CAUSED THIS SHORTAGE?

- Decades old problem, now a global crisis
- Increased demand
 - Aging population
 - Increased burden of chronic diseases- sicker, more complex patients
 - Advances in treatment
 - Increase in patient expectations



WHY THE SHORTAGE?

- **Decreased supply**

- Aging workforce, stress and burnout
 - 2022 US workforce study- 67% of nurses were considering leaving the profession
- Fewer high school students, reduced numbers of faculty
 - In 2021 in the US, 90,000 eligible applicants were declined nursing school admission due to lack of faculty, clinical sites and preceptors



CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE SHORTAGE

- Pay inequities, working conditions
- Other more attractive positions
 - Many nurses seeking jobs that don't require nights, weekends and holidays, especially if they have a family

WORKFORCE MIGRATION

57 percent of nurses in Saudi Arabia (232,000 medical professionals in total) are expatriates (Al Arabiya News, 2023)

The average length of stay for expatriate nurses is 43 months

Challenges with language, skill level, cultural differences may increase the difficulty in retaining health care workers, creating a revolving door which puts more strain on those who educate and support nurses (and doctors).





CONSEQUENCES OF A NURSING SHORTAGE

Across all areas of health
care

Impact on quality of care

- Increase in error rates-
 - increased medical errors when short staffed
- Higher rates of nosocomial infections



NICU PATIENTS THRIVE ON EXPERIENCED PROVIDERS

- Caring for a 26 week infant is part science, aided by technology that gives us the numbers
- But ... it is extremely dependent on an experienced provider who reads the subtle signs of clinical change

NICU STAFFING LEVELS

- A 2023 scoping review:
 - 6 NICU papers; correlations between staffing levels and mortality
 - higher staffing ratios resulted in fewer medication and feeding errors and less equipment malfunction (Genna, Eur J Ped, 2023)
- Another paper in this review showed that neonatal nursing qualifications were inversely related to mortality (Hamilton et al Arch Dis Child 2007)

NICU STAFFING AND INFECTION RATES



- 2013 retrospective study of 67 US NICU's from Vermont Oxford
 - In these hospitals understaffing relative to recommended guidelines occurred for 31% of NICU infants, 68% of high-acuity infants
 - In VLBW infants in these units, understaffing increased the risk for nosocomial infection.

CONSEQUENCES

- More 'missed care'- parent education, parent participation in feeding
 - US Study of 54 bed Level IV NICU found significant correlation between nursing workload and missed including safety checks, medication checks, feedings, adherence to infection control practices, and patient reporting (Tubbs-Cooley et al JAMA Peds, 2019)
- Care innovations such as infant-driven or cue-based feeding depends on adequate staffing
- No time to participate in quality improvement, continuing education



CONSEQUENCES

- Increased overtime leading to burnout and exhaustion
- Inability to provide high quality of care also leads to higher turnover creating a cycle that needs to be broken

SOLUTIONS

- Major challenge to address such a global issue
 - No country has a surplus therefore recruitment is limited and may worsen shortages in those countries- moral and ethical issues
 - Large sums of money spent recruiting and retaining staff- short term benefit but not sustainable
 - Increase number of seats in training programs- where do students and faculty come from



WHAT IS THE ANSWER?

- Must be setting specific, based on assessment of local issues
- Recruitment can only be a small part of the solution
- Strategies to address retention will take longer but will have a more sustained effect

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS



- Public education to raise the profile of nursing as a profession may improve the ability to recruit students into nursing programs
- Is the length of current nursing education programs appropriate?
- Are there bridging programs for diploma-trained nurses?
- Can nurses receive full salary for their year of internship?



THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Working conditions:
 - scheduling, ease of trading, floats or part-time positions
- Benefits other than salary:
 - educational allowances, availability of continuing education, recognition for acting as a preceptor
 - Is on-site childcare possible?



THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Staffing ratios to establish appropriate baseline
- Ensuring a supportive culture
 - fairness in assignments, dealing with bullying or incivility
- Ensuring adequate support staff so nurses are not performing non-nursing duties

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Mentoring and support programs for new graduates and newly arrived expatriate nurses.

Programs educating foreign trained healthcare professions regarding Islamic cultural values and practices are important

IN NEONATAL CARE ...

- What ongoing education is available for NICU nurses?
- Is there a program of specialization for neonatal care?
- Are nurses incorporated as full members of the team?
 - Participate in rounds
 - Be represented on committees





IN SUMMARY

- The problem is very real and expected to worsen
- The solutions are complex and must be specific to the setting
- Neonatal Care is often overlooked in literature regarding healthcare shortages
- We are unique providers caring for a very special population and have to work to preserve our standards

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