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# 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-](https://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/](https://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
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# 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



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

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The average length of stay for expatriate nurses is 43 months

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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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