

Επαγγελματισμός μεταξύ Νοσηλευτών στη Μαλαισία: Υπάρχει;

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ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Ο επαγγελματισμός συζητείται εδώ και χρόνια μεταξύ των νοσηλευτών. Η νοσηλευτική στη Μαλαισία, παρά την ταχεία ανάπτυξη της νοσηλευτικής εκπαίδευσης, βιώνει μια σταδιακή μετάβαση προς τον επαγγελματισμό. Εμπειρικά, κάθε νοσηλευτής θα παραδεχτεί μάλλον ότι διέπεται από επαγγελματισμό, αν και είναι πιο πιθανό να μιλήσουμε για αυτό παρά να το κάνουμε. Η παρούσα εργασία εξετάζει με εμπειρικό τρόπο την ύπαρξη του επαγγελματισμού μεταξύ των νοσηλευτών στη Μαλαισία και συζητά τη σχετική έρευνα που διεξήχθη στο πλαίσιο της χώρας αυτής κατά τη διάρκεια των τελευταίων ετών. Παρατίθενται δε πολυάριθμες βιβλιογραφικές αναφορές σχετικές με τον επαγγελματισμό στη νοσηλευτική. Αρκετές σχετικές με το θέμα αυτό εργασίες διερευνούν και συζητούν με διαφορετικό τρόπο το πλαίσιο του επαγγελματισμού στη νοσηλευτική, εντούτοις πρόκειται για εργασίες που σχεδιασμένες κυρίως από την προοπτική των δυτικών

χωρών. Επιπρόσθετα, ένα περιθωριοποιημένο πλήθος μελετών συζητά τον επαγγελματισμό στη νοσηλευτική στο πλαίσιο της Μαλαισίας. Η παρούσα εργασία πιθανόν να αναδεικνύει την ανάγκη περεταίρω διερεύνησης της ύπαρξης του επαγγελματισμού στη νοσηλευτική πρακτική και να συμβάλλει στην αποκατάσταση της σημαντικότητας των επιμέρους στοιχείων του επαγγελματισμού μεταξύ των νοσηλευτών στη Μαλαισία, τόσο στην εκπαίδευση όσο και στην πρακτική αυτών.

ΛΕΞΕΙΣ ΚΛΕΙΔΙΑ: Επαγγελματισμός, νοσηλευτική, Μαλαισία

Professionalism among nurses in Malaysia: Does it exist?

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ABSTRACT

Professionalism has been discussed among nurses for years. Nursing in Malaysia also experiences a gradual progression toward professionalism despite the rapid development of nursing education. Anecdotally, every nurse will rather admit that they are professional. However, there might be a possibility of speaking of it rather than doing it. This paper explores the existence of professionalism among nurses in Malaysia empirically and discusses pertinent research and/or studies that were conducted within the Malaysia context in the recent years. Numerous literature pertinent to professionalism in nursing were discussed. Several pertinent papers explored and discussed diversely in the context of professionalism in nursing nevertheless mainly conceived from the western countries' perspectives. Furthermore, a marginalized amount of literature discuss professionalism in nursing within Malaysia context. This paper is likely to suggest

the need to amplify the needs of researching the existence of professionalism in nursing practice and to reinstate the significance of the elements of professionalism among nurses in Malaysia in education and practice.

KEYWORDS: Professionalism, nursing, Malaysia

INTRODUCTION

Professionalism has been discussed among nursing scholars for many years and yet, persistently enduring as one of excellent nursing profession issues to be discussed (Girard et al., 2005; Anderson & Mangino, 2006; Gugerty et al., 2007).

Today's rapid changes in social value systems caused nursing to experience more ethical and philosophical challenges in providing care to its clients and also created new nursing environments that require professional nursing. Accordingly, nursing professionalism definition and its characteristics need to be clarified and adapted with rapid changes (Ghadirian, Salsali & Cheraghi, 2014). Furthermore, the globalization of healthcare markets facilitates international collaboration across national boundaries and the movement of nursing workforce. In this environment, understanding of different healthcare systems and cultural practices is needed for nurses in order to be able to share ideas and self-reflect within the nursing context. Efforts to fulfill these needs have led to greater professionalism and also to progress in nursing education and practice. Barriers to full professionalism include the nursing shortages that have gained international attention (Hwang et al., 2009) as they remain severe especially in most of developing and poor countries. In Malaysia, the story is the same, as it needs 20,000 more nurses in all specialization (Omar et al., 2018). Overcoming this problem of nursing workforce shortage partly depends on improving the retention rates in the nursing profession, as a higher level of professionalism is considered important in retaining experienced nurses in the profession (Hwang et al., 2009).

Professionalism in nursing can be defined in various concepts. Among the earliest concepts of professionalism in nursing is the Miller's Model, entitled "Wheel of Professionalism in Nursing" from 1984 (Wynd, 2003). This model was developed in response to nurses' need to acknowledge the attributes and behaviours necessary for nursing professionalism. Melia in 1985 (as cited in Apesoa-Varano, 2007) also stated that nurses must have the power to enable them to act professionally to patients, organisation and to their professional association to achieve and sustain professional status.

Interestingly, the Royal College of Nursing (2003) defined professionalism in nursing as the progression of the way nurses act and think which derived from the biological, physical, and behavioural sciences. These are applied to the care, diagnosis, treatment, counseling and health teaching of persons who are experiencing changes in their normal health processes or who require assistance in the maintenance of health and the prevention or management of illness, injury or infirmity. Noteworthy, professionalism is an important characteristic of careers that emphasize values and commitment in service to the community (Yeoun et al., 2010). It can be arguable that professionalism is a multi-dimensional concept that provides a platform for nurses to ameliorate personally (Alidina, 2013).

Girard et al. (2005) has extensively defined professionalism in nursing as a commitment to behaviours of compassion, caring and strong ethical values; continuous development of self and others; accountability and responsibility for insightful practice and demonstrating a spirit of collaboration and flexibility. Interestingly, Royal College of Nursing (2003) and Yeoun et al. (2010) differentiated between professional nursing and the nursing undertaken by many in term of the clinical judgement, the knowledge as a basis of assessment and determination of the action. They added that it does not lie only in the type of task performed, nor in the level of skill that is required to perform a particular task. The Registered Nurses of Alberta Ontario Association (RNAO) (2007) has suggested the fundamental principles of professionalism comprise ethics and values, knowledge, advocacy, a spirit of inquiry, innovation and visionary, collegiality and collaboration, accountability and autonomy. These attributes hold an integration of attitudes, skills and behaviours, attributes and values, which are expected from those to whom society has extended the privilege of being considered a professional.

Royal College of Nursing (2003) suggested that the personal accountability for all decisions, and actions and the concrete association between nurse and patient according to the code of ethics within a statutory framework are the essentialities that create the authentication of the nursing profession. The nurses who are able to bring the

attributes of professionalism into their practice will may significantly contribute positive health outcomes and patient satisfaction (RNAO, 2007). Whereas, Morrow et al. (2011) which clearly stated that professionalism is a complex and an origin context which it is relatively easy to define yet it is not simple, and it is not easy to recognise in absolute terms whether a behaviour is professional or unprofessional.

Nursing in Malaysia also experiences a gradual progression toward professionalism (Shamsudin, 2006) despite the rapid development of nursing education (Nordin, 2010). Anecdotally, every nurse will rather to admit that they are professional. However, there might be a possibility of speaking of it rather than doing it. Since the British colonization of Malaya in the early 19th centuries to the evidence-based nursing practice, nursing profession in Malaysia has gradually progressed to the same level with other nursing professions in other developed countries. The dynamic and contemporaneous of the nursing trend around the globe has brought significant impact on the health sector and resonance the overall care that has epitomised the patient outcomes and ensuring the health care system is running at its best condition (Hisar & Karadag, 2010). To align with this progressive trend, the profession itself must be restructured in terms of its policies and standard operating procedures and working culture. This subsequently saw a crucial need for professionalism in every aspect of the nursing profession.

No doubt, journey for the nursing profession in Malaysia is still far from achieving its desired goals, however, there are efforts and positive evidence that this profession in Malaysia is slowly moving forward. One of these positive indicators is presently accepted and in demand globally as substantial numbers of them are working abroad and increasing yearly. Deputy Foreign Minister Datuk Richard Riot (2012) said about 10% to 20% of Malaysia's 84,000 nurses are estimated to be working overseas. Majority of those working abroad were in Saudi Arabia while others went to countries like Australia and New Zealand. He further stated that Saudi Arabia chooses Malaysian nurses because of our high quality of education and being a Muslim country. Other Muslim countries look up to Malaysia as a role model

and nursing was no longer a job for school-leavers but a fully-fledged profession with a degree and postgraduate qualifications available. With the evidences above, nursing in Malaysia could be argued being an acceptable professional despite of these evidences can be vividly justifiable. Despite steady development of nursing education, instilling professionalism is essential to promote this transition as all aspects of nursing particularly within the Malaysia context eventually will be uplifted on par with the public expectation (Shamsudin, 2006). This is because the nurses are the central and the front facet for any health care system. Interestingly, Abdul Wahab (2011) describe how important nursing in Malaysia where he describes them as the frontline of Malaysia Health System that in the line with corporate culture concept of the ministry of health, caring, professionalism and teamwork also need to be portrayed at all times by nurses in Malaysia. In contrast, Webber (2010) (as cited in Holzemer, 2010) mentions that the nursing profession also has been perceived as a continuous abstruse profession. Nurses are not generally referred regarding on the interventions or any form of modalities to health system problems regardless of they are the "around the clock" well-educated care providers and normally the largest group of professionals in the health care system. Nurses are enduring viewed as a complement to the health care workforce in which they are "quick" trained caregivers to fulfil the health provider shortage (Weber, 2010).

As a result, this phenomenon may threaten health outcomes at all level. A good example to predicate this state of affairs is the mushroom phenomena of private nursing colleges in Malaysia. At the moment, there are 106 institutions, 66 are private providers, 11 are public institutions and the rest are run by the Health Ministry (Nordin, 2010). On top of that, nurses who graduated from the private colleges still require training at teaching hospitals before they are fully equipped to work. Consequently, the Malaysian government-initiated moratorium of new nursing schools of colleges to prevent an oversupply graduates, doubtful quality of graduates' augmentation issues and a higher rate of unemployment among the graduates. Notwithstanding, Nordin (2010) encouraged all the existant nurs-

ing institutions to enhance the quality of their education as well as to focus more to on tertiary degree programmes.

Birks et al. (2006) suggest that nursing in Malaysia the profession is heading towards a positive direction despite still has a long way to go in terms of professionalism. On a similar tone, Merican (2006) describes the public perception of nursing standards in Malaysia has declined over the years and that present-day nurses are less skilled, less caring and less efficient compared with those of yesteryears, in other words, lack professionalism in the job description. Despite the criticism and negative perception, there were efforts to evaluate on the professionalism in nursing particularly in Malaysia. In 2007, the division of nursing of Malaysia conducted a nationwide nursing audit, which focuses on the nursing skills instead of focusing on professionalism perspectives in nursing.

A comparative study conducted by Ahmad and Oranye (2010), which focuses on empowerment, job satisfaction, and organisation commitment by comparing nurses in Malaysia and England showed that nurses in a hospital in Malaysia achieved higher level of empowerment compared with the one in England. This was perhaps due to the nurses in Malaysia were likely to have better structural empowerment and organisational commitment. Having mentioned other scholarly works on the matter in Malaysia, it is fair to say that professionalism in nursing is a huge challenge for scholars to grapple with and undoubted under research.

Eventually, nursing in Malaysia has moved forward in its recognition as a profession and currently is the biggest workforce in the Malaysian health care system (Barnett, Namasivayam & Narudin, 2010). Statistically, 50,063 nurses work in the government hospitals and 24,725 work in the private hospitals (Ministry of Health Malaysia, 2012). The Malaysian Ministry of Health has made an effort to elevate the nursing profession to professional status. To achieve this status, the Nursing Division, Ministry of Health in Malaysia in 2009 introduced the framework of nursing professionalism in Malaysia (Abdul Wahab, 2011). The framework comprises five components, which are meeting client's needs now and, in the future, being supported by good governance and

subject to fair fiscal treatment, making good contributions to patient safety, reducing negative impacts on people and the environment and building skills and competency of nurses. There are four main strategies have been formed to succeed the nursing professionalism, which are entry qualification, mentor-mentee programme, ligature of Continuous Programme Development and Annual Practice Certificate and strengthens specialization within the profession itself.

The academic qualification for nurses to enter the profession of nursing in Malaysia was restructured in early 2000 (Lee, 2008). Nurses are trained in colleges or universities by undertaking a 3-year diploma level qualification or a 4-year degree. For the diploma, entry-level is commonly the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM- equivalent to UK GCSE) and entry to the degree, the Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran Malaysia (STPM- equivalent to UK A-Levels) (Lee, 2008). Part-time nursing degree courses also available for working nurses. As nurses have become more aware of the importance of this qualification the demand for a BSc qualification for Malaysian Nurses has increased tremendously (Chiu, 2005). The nurses are fully aware of the importance of upgrading their knowledge to achieve professional status for their profession. Through undertaking a degree course these nurses acquired knowledge as expected yet were also exposed to new information and insights they had not anticipated (Birks et al., 2009). The outcome was the discovery of a new conception of knowledge that saw them gain a fresh perspective on learning and a sense of achievement beyond what had been anticipated which will empower them to practice innovatively, creatively and autonomously (Chiu, 2005; Birks et al., 2006).

Mentor-Mentee programme is known as "buddy system" has started in 2007 (Enrico et al., 2011). The purpose of this programme is to help new graduate nurses to become competent and to get familiarise with the clinical setting. All new graduated nurses will be attached to the senior nurses on their first year of working regardless of which clinical setting that they attached to. The senior nurses who act as a mentor are expected to facilitate clinical learning for new graduate nurses and help them on the transition of being a neophyte to becoming a nurse. The cur-

rent trend about mentoring nurses in Malaysia is a mentor role and outline what is the preparation to be an effective mentor.

Continuous Programme Development (CPD) also introduced by the Nursing Division, Ministry of Health, Malaysia and nurses in Malaysia must participate as well as to contribute to the programmes. In 2008, the Malaysian Nurses Board endorsed that nurses are required to participate in a minimum number of hours of education which is one of the inevitable regulations for them to renew their annual practice certificate (Shamsudin, 2006). Mandating compliance reinforces the message that health care is dynamic, and the nurses must update their knowledge and skills to keep pace with change (PuteriNemie, 2009). The study conducted by Muthu and Chong (2011) revealed that majority of nurses managed to attend their CPD session with total credit points of more than 25 was 41% followed with 1 to 24 credit points of 29%. The minimum accumulation of CPD credit points for them to licensure is 20 points.

The Malaysian Ministry of Health has upgraded the majority of post-basic courses in Nursing to Advanced Diploma in 2012. All nurses in Malaysia are encouraged to complete at least one of various post-basic courses, which offered by the Ministry of Health. Besides the Malaysian Ministry of Health, other private colleges have introduced more new post-basic courses every year to be par with the current and contemporaneous health trends. The purpose of the course is to improve nurses' competencies by providing them with advanced skills and knowledge and attitude of care in specialty care areas.

Apart from improving the qualification for the nursing profession, professionalism in nursing is equally an important component of competency that enables nurses to work safely and efficiently. Hence, in 1998 the nursing division of Malaysia introduced a code of professional practice (Nursing Board of Malaysia, 2008). It focusses the importance of the profession by protecting the interest of society by ensuring that nurses practice safe nursing. The code guides the nurses to carry out their responsibilities in protecting, promoting and restoring of health, preventing of illness and alleviating of suffering while giving care to individuals, families and communities. Six im-

portant areas are highlighted in the codes which are professional nursing practice, neglect or disregard of professional responsibilities, abuse of professional privileges and skills, conduct derogatory to the reputation of the profession, advertising, canvassing and related professional offences and disciplinary proceedings.

THE EXISTENCE OF PROFESSIONALISM AMONG NURSES IN MALAYSIA – THE EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE

With regards to the literature, there is limited information pertinent to nursing practice in Malaysia. Birks et al. (2008) claim that published literature examining the history of nursing in the country is virtually non-existent. Moreover, the current literature review employed in this study suggests that no study has previously been conducted from a Malaysian context. Moreover, Maziah et al. (2012) state that scant research has been conducted concerning nursing professionalism, although there has been a significant increase in the number of nurses in Malaysia. Meanwhile, Ong-Flatherty (2012) mentions the lack of research quality, validity, reliability in addition to the lack of information on professionalism among nurses. These statements may be construed as indications of the slow progress that nursing is making in the country. Additionally, the lack of materials and sources regarding nursing in Malaysia also contributes to this situation (Barnett et al., 2010).

Overall, the most profound work on the nursing profession in Malaysia was by Birks and her colleagues (from 2008 to 2010), who published four prominent papers on this subject. One of their papers, entitled 'From Traditional Healers to Telemedicine: A history of Nursing in Malaysia', is one of the first peer-reviewed and published papers which discusses the history and development of Malaysian nursing. Other work primarily focuses on how nurses undertook tertiary education to elevate the image and acquisition of professional practice among nurses in Malaysia. The paper, published by Birks et al., (2009b) entitled 'Women and Nursing in Malaysia', provides an insight into how the predominantly female workforce within the profession has been subjected to op-

pressive forces that affected them socio-culturally.

Birks et al. (2010) also explored the impact of post-baccalaureate nursing studies on professional practice among nurses in Borneo by utilising a 'grounded theory' approach. This study provides a picture of how nurses' experience being more professional due to taking tertiary education, even though they are equipped with personal experience. However, this study only focused on exploring nurses' experience of undertaking a nursing degree while they are working intending to become professional.

Apart from the papers published by Birks et al. (2008, 2009, 2010), a few other nursing scholars have been able to provide debate related to the subject of professional nursing in Malaysia. Buncuan and Putit's (2010) paper discusses the development of nursing in Malaysia, although they appear to omit current professional practice and where nurses in Malaysia stand in this context. Additionally, Lim and Lai (2012) discuss the importance of assimilating the concepts of professional socialisation in nursing into nursing education in Malaysia but they fail to discuss the issues of professionalism among nurses in Malaysia in greater detail.

In 2010, Ahmad and Oranye conducted a study that focuses on empowerment, job satisfaction and commitment to an organisation by comparing nurses in Malaysia to nurses in England. Although this study seems to be well conducted and relatively successful, it does not provide unmistakable evidence and discussion on the elements of professionalism among nurses in Malaysia. Furthermore, the sample size for this study, i.e. a comparison between one hospital in Malaysia and one hospital in England may have limited its findings.

A study by Kulim Hospital in the State of Kedah Darul Aman, Malaysia in 2012, was aimed to analyse client satisfaction concerning hospital services which included a question about professionalism amongst the hospital staff (Kulim Hospital, 2012). The overall results revealed an appropriate level of satisfaction among the clients towards the services provided by Kulim Hospital. However, neither the term 'professionalism' is clearly described, nor the relevant professionalism components are identified.

However, despite their shortcomings, Ahmad and Oranye (2010) and the Kulim Hospital (2012) studies themselves contribute several useful ideas to assist in the exploration of professionalism among nurses in Malaysia. It should be noted that considerable research on professionalism has been conducted worldwide, but no such study has been performed from a Malaysian context. According to them, no study has been published that explores the relationship between professionalism among nurses in Malaysia and their documentation and professionalism worldwide. Thus, this research seeks to fill the existing gap in the literature.

A more recent study conducted by Vincent Balang, Burton & Barlow (2017) explored the evidence of professionalism in nursing in Malaysia, specifically in the context of their nursing documentation. Their findings are likely to suggest the need to emphasise the quality of nursing documentation in nursing practice, besides the significance of education to improve professionalism among nurses in Malaysia. Several factors and influences were identified, which could be detrimental to nurses' understanding of the elements of professionalism in nursing documentation, such as the working culture and common cultural values, educational backgrounds, different workplace settings and recognition of the profession.

CONCLUSION

No doubt, professionalism among nurses in Malaysia is a questionable dispute and under research. It remains an important issue, yet no one known where it stands.? Anecdotally, nurses in Malaysia strongly refuse if there are any individuals perceives them as the "right hand" maiden to doctors or "traditionally, the doctor-nurse relationship in Malaysia is similar to a master and servant." Despite of these speculation and perception about the local health fraternity, the nurses in Malaysia do not have adequate evidence to prove that they are at the par in achieving the status of a profession through professionalism. Hence, it is recommended studies to explore in this area, particularly the existence of professionalism imperatively.

The study by Apesoa-Varano (2007) concluded that nurses have to be aware that the importance to portray professionalism is not only from the appearances, behaviours, attitude and the way they work but also need to consume it into the aura and persona as well as formulate their identity being health care provider in and out of their workplace. This is emphasised by Scott (2007) establishing professionalism among nurses is life-long continuum process. For a start, the nursing education sectors such as the universities and the nursing training colleges should always concern the elements of professionalism from day one. The student nurses should be exposed and literate of professionalism in nursing and the educators should guide them carefully and appropriately to apply it into their daily practice. This will ensure that it can be assimilated into a very positive habitual and rituals among nurses and surely to be illuminating into their practice and hence positive patient outcomes and good nursing care are seen.

Further research on professionalism particularly among nurses in Malaysia is mandatory. This is essential to ensure the exploration of these matters and its findings will help to improve the nursing profession in Malaysia. Conceivably, professionalism enhances recognition and improves empowerment, job satisfaction and their organisation commitment throughout their career as the front lines of Malaysia health care system (Ahmad & Oranye, 2010). This view is supported by Murphree (2008) that professionalism is a status which is both assessed and delegated by the public. Therefore, nurses should not overlook the fact that their careers are bestowed with the status of being considered professional and have to strive it to achieve it.

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