NURSING MATTERS

*Nursing Matters* fact sheets provide quick reference information and international perspectives from the nursing profession on current health and social issues.

**Nurses and Ageing Workforce**

“A society for all ages encompasses the goal of providing older persons with the opportunity to continue contributing to society. To work towards this goal, it is necessary to remove whatever excludes or discriminates against them.”

**Background**

In 2012 one out of nine persons worldwide was aged 60 years and older. By 2050 one out of five persons will be aged 60 and older, that equates to more than two billion people. The proportion of the total population that is 60 years or older is much higher in the more developed regions than in the less developed regions. This demographic includes an ageing workforce and the management of older workers which has implications for governments and employers. It will affect all segments of society, especially in terms of financing healthcare and retirement.

Figure 1: Population Pyramid 2010 worldwide (Population: 6,916,183,000)

Figure 2: Population Pyramid 2050 worldwide (Population: 9,550,944,000)

In relation to effective workforce policies, attention and reference to the ageing workforce have been increasingly discussed in the last decade and require a strengthened focus from employers and policy makers. For example, in the European Union, “[…] concerns about the sustainability of pensions, economic growth and the future labour supply have stimulated a range of policy processes and recommendations […]”:

- “to promote the health and working capacity of workers as they age;
- to develop the skills and employability of older workers;
- to examine raising the pension age; and providing suitable working conditions as well as employment opportunities for an ageing workforce.”

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Within nursing, the situation in many industrialised countries is that the nursing workforce is ageing. For example: In the United States 850,000 nurses are between 50-64 years of age, which equates to one third of the nursing workforce.\(^7\)

This trend, if left unaddressed, is set to deepen the current shortage of employed nurses, particularly in countries where there is a shortfall of new nurses entering the labour market. It will also have a knock-on effect on developing countries where the age profile may be very different but where aggressive international recruitment efforts may drain the supply of nurses in active practice. Failures in dealing with the nursing shortage will directly lead to failures in maintaining health care.

**Causes and consequences**

The increased length of life results in part from improved medical treatments. Former terminal illnesses have become chronic illnesses which require an increasing complexity of care.

These demographic trends also occur in nursing and implicate a decreasing flow of young nurses into the workforce and an increasing outflow of the workforce by reaching the retirement age. Hence there are two crucial consequences reported: a need to replace retired nurses and a need to retain nurses beyond the average age of retirement.\(^8\)

In addition, older nurses may be challenged by normal age-related changes, such as chronic diseases, visual and hearing impairments, balance issues, aches and pain associated with musculoskeletal disorders or arthritis.\(^9\) In addition, older people with workplace injuries require longer times for recovery.\(^10\) Therefore, the work environment requires adjustment.

As another consequence of the ageing workforce special and interpersonal discrimination and stereotypes are reported and constitute an increasing significant appearance of ageism.\(^11\)

**Prevention and protection**

Older nurses are a potential source to augment the workforce. Their premature or forced exit from the workforce and/or reduction in working hours means a loss of much needed and experienced nurses to care for patients. When they retire, their knowledge, wisdom and clinical expertise are lost, as is their contribution to training and mentoring the next generation of nurses. Tailoring employment strategies to this group is important to their retention.
Government/Legislation:
Governments have to ensure the persistent implementation of the Political Declaration and Madrid International Plan of Action in Ageing. It was adopted at the Second World Assembly on Ageing in 2002 for building a society for all ages. It involves the three main priorities:
1. "Older persons and development;
2. Advancing health and well-being into old age;
3. And ensuring enabling and supportive environments."

Organisation: ICN/ICHRN
Actions of the International Council of Nurses and its International Centre for Human Resources in Nursing include:
• Advocating/campaigining for positive practice environments for all health professionals across all age groups, to end age related discrimination and improve working conditions.
• Publishing scholarly material on managing the multi-generational nursing workforce and supervising and mentoring this workforce in order to inform and improve policy and practice in this area.
• Collecting, collating, analysing and disseminating data on the nursing workforce (e.g. ICN nursing workforce profiles) in order to better assess the profile of nurses in different countries, regions and sectors.
• Raising awareness through position statements and at meetings and other forums on the specific issues facing the older nurse, including the promotion of a “living” pension.
• Developing and promoting nursing human resource management competencies in order to improve the abilities of managers to develop and implement HR policies that effectively address the needs of an ageing nursing workforce.
• Evaluating and disseminating good HR management practice in this area, to lead to improvements in policy. This is accomplished through presentations at meetings and other forums and through the ICN-ICHRN website and published case studies.
• Presenting and discussing research and analysis of age related issues at international conferences, congresses and regional forums.
• Discussing job redesign, pension benefits and retention strategies of particular relevance to an ageing nursing workforce during Workforce Forum meetings.

Employer:
• Knowledge of physical and cognitive challenges in ageing
• Creative solutions for addressing flexible work arrangements (e.g. modified workloads, flexible scheduling options, reduction in hours of work, etc.)
• An organisational culture that promotes participation in decision-making and autonomy over practice
• Work recognition, encouragement and positive feedback from supervisors\textsuperscript{12}
• Alteration of work environment: Ergonomic design especially addressing the needs of older nurses, safe and effective work environments for reducing workplace injuries
• Creating a respectful communication environment without discrimination\textsuperscript{13}
• Access to professional development activities that target the needs of experienced nurses

\textbf{Individual:}
• Sharing knowledge with younger nurses (e.g. in mentoring programmes)
• Sharing information and staying in a socialised connection to co-workers\textsuperscript{14}
• Pursuing access to professional development

\textbf{Examples}

\textbf{Africa:}

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Added to the usual physical and cognitive changes in ageing, older people in Africa are disadvantaged because of a lack in social security. In 2003, the \textit{African Union Policy Framework and Plan of Action on Ageing} were established. The aim of the plan is to guide member states in designing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating national policies for meeting the needs of the ageing population.\textsuperscript{17} Among other aspects, there are recommendations for the elimination of discrimination against ageing persons in accessing employment and training opportunities.
South Africa announced a growth of professional nurses from 2001-2010. As a result of growing job responsibilities due to a high HIV/AIDS, TB and Malaria prevalence a shortage of nurses still exists.\(^{18}\)

Asia:

For the forecast of the nursing workforce in Japan it needs to be considered that Japan has the fastest growing ageing population in the world. With 7.4 million people aged 65 and older in 1970, the number grew up to 29.4 million in 2010. The estimated amount of people aged 65 and older will be one third of the population in 2025. This challenge asks for innovative reforms in the healthcare system and a transformation of the nursing profession. Masaki et al. recommend development of measures following the report “The Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health” by the US Institute of Medicine. But it is necessary to consider the different national contexts.\(^{21}\)

Papua New Guinea is also dealing with an acute ageing nursing workforce problem. In 2012, 20% of a total of 3,429 nurses surpassed the legal retirement age of 55, with nearly 40% in the 45-55 age bracket. Midwifery schools have been reopened, but the number of graduates will not meet the need. The prime minister declared a need for foreign health workers.\(^{22}\)
Australia:

From 2007 to 2011 the proportion of nurses and midwives aged 50 or older increased from 33.0% to 38.6%. The average age of a RN in 2010 was 44.2 years and of an enrolled nurse 45.5 years.

Europe:

The RN4CAST study was conducted up until December 2014. This study aims to forecast the workforce needed and generate effective strategies in the management of human resources in nursing. There are 12 European countries included.

In 2008, more than 65% of nurses registered at the Nursing and Midwifery Council in the UK were over 40 years. In addition, 31% are over 50 years. These amounts are still increasing.
North America:

In the United States approximately 850,000 nurses are aged 50-64. This amounts to one third of the nursing workforce who will reach retirement age by 2020. Influencing factors for retention in the nursing profession until the age of retirement include: security, health promotion, relationships, ego protection and fulfilment. With the knowledge of these aspects, strategies for retaining the nursing profession should be developed as soon as possible.

South America:

Likewise, Brazilian researchers underline the ageing workforce of nurses. They reported a decline in work ability due to ageing among Brazilian nurses in 2011. The mean age of nurses with an inadequate ability to work was about 45 years. In addition, Brazilian nurses showed same work ability index scores as nurses from Finland. There is a call for the development of strategies to manage workforce issues associated with ageing.
The International Council of Nurses (ICN) is a federation of more than 130 national nurses associations representing the millions of nurses worldwide. Operated by nurses and leading nursing internationally, ICN works to ensure quality nursing care for all and sound health policies globally.

References

8 Ibid. Cyr J (2010).

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