

Challenges Facing the Saudi Nurses: Personal View

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Environmental pressures such as water, air, and noise pollution are some of the challenges affecting the health of men, women, and children in the region. Natural water supply is decreasing and other alternative sources of water can not really keep up with the increase in population. Many countries in the region, especially golf countries are becoming more industrialized adding more environmental pressure in terms of air and noise pollution. Other environmental challenges might include climate changes as a result of global warming, increase in population density, and shortage in food supply for a healthy diet. These challenges are likely to affect the patterns and distribution of disease. The resurgence of infectious diseases and the increase in incidence of chronic illnesses may require more preventive and high-touch services, at the same time recent discoveries in genetic research is given a new meaning to high-tech and personal health services.

The health care industry and health services organizations in particular are labor intensive, and nursing constitutes the majority of this labor. Approximately 80% of the nursing workforce in Saudi Arabia is expatriates who are recruited from different countries. Communications between patients', their families and the nursing staff is usually difficult because of socio-cultural and language barriers. Many health services organizations in Saudi Arabia have started their own Saudization programs to recruit, train and retain Saudi nurses, however, such programs are faced with the difficulty of finding qualified graduates to recruit.

I agree with Professor Barbra Brown views of nursing in Saudi Arabia, Saudi nurses face a social stigma working as a nurse. Many families still reject nursing as a profession for their children especially if they are female. Saudi Arabia had a similar experience about 40 years ago when it first introduced girls' schools in all parts of the country. Families did not want to send their daughters to schools, some of them even rejected having girls' school in their neighborhoods, however, with the political will of the nation and the right policies that were instituted by the Saudi government, the total number of female students in general education in Saudi Arabia today exceeds the total number of male students. Socio-economic factors are beginning to change, more schools and colleges of nursing are being developed, and more applicants are seeking admission to these colleges.

Environmental pressures and socio-cultural challenges, in addition to an ever increasing demand for qualified Saudi nurses requires that existing and prospective nursing schools put forth strategic plans that takes into account admission policies, curriculum design, faculty development, training, and technology adaptation. May be some day 80% of the nursing workforce in Saudi Arabia will be Saudis.