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The implications of nursing degree education for future workforce planning in Saudi Arabia: A case study

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Health system reconfiguration in Saudi Arabia as a response to changing demographic and related health needs is an important and timely driver for the development of nurse education, specifically, the introduction of degree education as a basic requirement for nursing practice. The Saudi government is trying to meet international standards when it comes to nursing degrees and implemented a change to degree education, but, as a result of this, there are many challenges that still need addressing. Utilising a qualitative case study approach, a document analysis was undertaken and semi-structured interviews conducted with twenty-five participants (at a macro, meso and micro level) in order to critically assess the actual implications of a nursing degree as the baseline criteria for and to enter nursing practice. The formal and informal documentary analysis indicated that there was a clear lack of involvement from nurses in the consultation process of the implemented degree education policy. However, the interviews indicated a general agreement that a Bachelor's degree for nursing would further support knowledge and communication requirements and improve the quality of nursing practice. Factors affecting degree attainment included a personal commitment/passion for self-improvement, private versus government institutions, education quality and financial implications. Data indicated the benefits of an increased knowledge base in degree education, that it supported confidence and decreased absenteeism, enhanced nursing skills and responsibilities, and gave opportunity for advancement, but, more importantly, it increased the quality of nursing practice, and patient safety outcomes. Recommendations based on the findings of this study, highlight the importance of a need for consultation between governmental bodies and relevant nursing staff affected by future policy changes. The need for a national curriculum, and a differentiation of nursing job descriptions, based on the education level attained, together with improved clinical supervision for nurses in practice.

Biography

Noura is senior nurse educator. She has twenty years' experience in a variety of nursing roles including clinical and administrative positions within the Ministry of Health (MoH) in Saudi Arabia (SA). In 2000, she achieved a Bachelor's degree in nursing and worked in clinical and managerial positions. In 2003, She joined a newly established General Directorate of Nursing at the central level of the MoH as Head of Training and Nursing Programmes. In 2009, Noura obtained her Master's Degree in nursing education from Marymount University, United States of America (USA) and became actively involved in the development of nursing departments in twenty regions of SA, to promote nursing as a profession. She has been involved in a five-year strategic plan of nursing, promoting it as a competitive and professional choice. In 2011, she became Director of Training and Nursing programmes. This role focuses on the assessment of the educational needs for nursing across twenty regions in SA. In 2012, she joined the Nursing Technical Committee of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), a political and economic alliance of six Middle Eastern countries. Currently, she is a PhD student at Salford University and her thesis on (nursing workforce planning and development).

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