

## The Need for a Critical Approach to Nursing Education within a Globalized World

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### Commentary

Globalization, though in many ways advantageous, presents a multitude of challenges for professionals and organizations concerned about the health of populations. Globalization and its underlying processes contribute to changes in the world's demographics, social determinants of health, and related disease patterns and health outcomes [1]. Currently, 20 to 25% of the global burden of disease is linked to behavioral and lifestyle consequences [2]. Contributing to the increase in non-communicable diseases is an aging global population, with the most rapid demographic change occurring in low- and middle income countries. "Within the next five years, the number of adults aged 65 and over will outnumber children under the age of 5. By 2050, these older adults will outnumber all children under the age of 14" [3]. As well, the gap is widening between the rich and the poor, and the world is seeing large migratory patterns of internally displaced people. A trend toward increasing urbanization and the resultant formation of large slums and informal settlements around existing cities have contributed to a number of emerging global health issues including increased patterns of pollution, non-communicable diseases, mental health illnesses, and exposure to violence.

Faced with the health challenges of a globalized world, we have moved beyond the Millennium Development Goals (MDG). The recent Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) (2015 to 2030) concentrate on the underlying social issues, with the aim to end poverty, address inequality and ameliorate climate change [4]. Nursing has a significant role to play in achieving these aims, but the profession must be prepared to shift focus to address current pressing global health patterns. More and more, nurses will care for aging populations, vulnerable individuals and families, and communities of diverse cultures that are displaced and have higher incidences of chronic diseases and mental health problems. In addition, nursing and health care will increasingly be delivered outside of tertiary institutions. We need to ask ourselves: "How can nurse curricula be adapted to prepare students for the global realities and the needs of the increasingly multicultural populations we serve?"

Engagement of nursing curricula with the three dimensions of sustainable development, as reflected in the SDGs—the economic, social and environmental [5] is necessary for the profession to have an impact in an increasingly global environment. Nursing curricula must employ a critical thread through theory, methodology and practice to challenge students to ask stimulating questions, consider the possibilities and advance the discussion on global issues as are set out in the SDGs. In order to address the suggested SDGs and changing

global patterns, nurses must be educated about the "social, cultural and political process[es] that leads to the fulfillment of fundamental human rights" [6] with a strong emphasis on social justice as a central principle, and respect for human rights, equity and accountability [6].

Nursing curricula that fail to include the global changes in society "may lose relevance in the 21st century" [7]. This requires that nursing education acknowledge that "contemporary societies are complex, diverse, changing, uncertain and deeply unequal" [8]. If we are serious about "engaging with the social crisis we are embedded in, we need more lenses available to make better-informed choices of what to do in the complex and diverse settings in which" [8] our students work. A critical thread in curricula is needed to allow nursing to understand the sociocultural context in which nurses have to deliver care. This translates into being able to identify the social inequalities related to health and use innovative application of knowledge to address current health challenges. A critical approach in nursing curricula will offer a conceptual structure which nursing students can use to work on effective solutions to modify disparities, enabling the dialogue of science in their day-to-day activities [9].

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