

SHORTAGE OF QUALIFIED HEALTH WORKERS: A CALL TO ACTION FOR NURSES

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The current reality of health is marked by critical issues and urgent matters that require attention not only of the health sector itself, but also of governments, non-governmental organizations, public and private sectors and civil society. While much has been achieved and many diseases have been better controlled or even eradicated, significant challenges remain worldwide: poverty, climate change, endemic and pandemic diseases, to name but a few. *One particular challenge that stands out for the health sector is the shortage of qualified workers*⁽¹⁾.

At a recent meeting of the Global Advisory Group for Nursing and Midwifery (GAGNM), Primary Health Care (PHC) and the Attainment of the Millennium Development Goals were recognized as fundamental for the health of all nations. As stressed by Dr. Margaret Chan, Director General, WHO, "...primary health care is the best way to ensure sustainable improvements in health outcomes, and the best guarantee that access to care will be fair"⁽¹⁾.

The year 2008 marks the 30th anniversary of PHC and the International Council of Nurses has chosen it as the theme of International Nurses Day 2008, celebrated on May 12th, stressing the importance of essential health care to meet the needs of individuals and families as an integral part of countries' health systems⁽²⁾.

As we approach 2015, date set for the achievement of the MDGs, not much progress has been made. The recognition that we, nurses and midwives, are key players in the achievement of such goals, as well as in WHO priority programs, impels us to action. Realizing that the shortage of health workers can interfere and hinder the efforts towards these achievements, plenty of action is needed. As health professionals, leaders in our communities, and as citizens, we must work to mobilize and sensitize governments and society in general to address the issues of scaling up nursing and midwifery capacity, to focus on the skill mix of existing and new cadres of workers and to harness positive workplace environments. And all nursing professionals should assume the commitment to mobilize in the search for permanent development guarantees, nourishing talents and using them appropriately, working towards qualified service delivery, promotion, awards, opportunities and acknowledgement. If all professionals join around common goals and shared values, this will strengthen them to act at the political level, granting them more adequate conditions to demand that their countries assume the commitment to strengthen nursing and midwifery, as recommended in the Islamabad Declaration⁽³⁾.

In this context, we at the Latin American Journal of Nursing and at the University of Sao Paulo at Ribeirão Preto College of Nursing, headquarters of the WHO Collaborating Centre for Nursing Research Development, Brazil, are committed to be part of a plan of action, to share information, to adopt personal practices and to implement policies in our communities and nations, which is in agreement with the Nightingale Declaration⁽⁴⁾.

This Declaration was formulated by the Nightingale Initiative for Global Health. Its key aims are to convince: a) governments to declare 2010 the International Year of the Nurse, and b) to achieve a UN Resolution for a UN Decade for a Healthy World by 2020. The initiative involves partners from all around the globe and the target is to collect at least 2 million signatures from all 192 UN Member States. A Portuguese version of the Declaration is available on www.eerp.usp.br.

Therefore, we also declare our willingness to support this Declaration, so that health conditions of people can be improved not only in our community, but also in our nation and worldwide.

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