

A GLANCE AT THE DEVELOPMENT OF NURSING EDUCATION IN THE MALDIVES 1950-2018



Asiya Ibrahim

Dean, School of Nursing

The earliest evidence of institutional patient care dates back to the late 1950s. From then onwards the government of Maldives has played an important role in developing nurses for the health sector.

In 1961 the government selected few local women and provided a non- formal six-eight months training as assistant nurse aides to support patient care. This initial training was conducted at the bedside by a Sri Lankan nurse who was appointed by the WHO (Fulhu, 2010).

Later, formal training of nurses started in 1963 and continued through 1965. A basic midwifery training of three months duration also commenced. The training was conducted in a classroom in an elementary hospital called “Dactaruge” (meaning “doctor's house”) located in Male’, the capital of Maldives (Fulhu, 2010).

Ms Moomina Haleem who was the first professionally trained nurse in the Maldives, returned in 1963 after being trained

abroad, with a Diploma in Nursing and Midwifery. On her return, basic formal education for nurses began in the country. In the same year the government of the Maldives received WHO assistance to design a nursing curriculum to start the first formal training program for nurse aides (Maldives Nurses Association, 2011). This was carried out by a nurse educator. The first nurse aide batch from this training program graduated on 31st May 1965 (Fulhu, 2010). This was the ground work laid for training assistant nurses and the current Advanced Certificate of Nursing program (ACN) which still continues to train enrolled nurses. The current curriculum is the result of several revisions with regard to the content and duration, from the original program that was developed in 1963.

Along with the formal nurse aide training, a basic midwifery training of 3 months was commenced in 1963. The first training was given to “foolhumaas” (term used for traditional birth attendants). The completion of training was marked by handing over a tool kit which was called “the delivery box” which consisted of the equipment necessary to conduct a delivery at home (Fulhu,2010).

Further development in nursing education was seen when a separate training institution, Allied Health Services Training Centre (AHSTC) was established on 2nd September 1973, in Male’ with a mandate to conduct nurse aide training. AHSTC was an institute formed to train health professionals needed for the country and it was under the administration of Ministry of Health. According to The Maldivian Nurses Association (2011) the AHSTC was upgraded in 1991 and renamed as Institute of Health Sciences.

The biggest achievement with upgrading of the AHSTC was the commencement of Diploma in Nursing and Midwifery program in 1991, which was also the first diploma level training for nurses

in the whole country. The initial years of conducting the Diploma in Nursing program was assisted by consultants from WHO and local staff who had received their nursing training abroad.

With the establishment of the Maldives College of Higher Education (MCHE) on 1st October 1998, the IHS which was under the Ministry of Health, and came under the same “umbrella” of training institutes governed by the MCHE. This development led to renaming IHS as Faculty of Health Sciences (FHS). During this period nursing courses such as Advanced Certificate of Nursing, Diploma of Nursing and Diploma in Midwifery were the nursing related courses conducted by FHS. In 2000 Diploma in Nursing "conversion" was offered to nurses with a Nurse Aide qualification. The conversion course was an upgrading course which provided opportunity for nurse aides to upgrade to a diploma level. With the opening of regional campuses of MCHE in both northern and southern parts of Maldives there was opportunity to expand nursing training to other parts of the Maldives.

In 2002 Advanced Certificate in Nursing course was inaugurated in Kulhudufushi and Hithadhoo campuses and in 2004 the Thinadhoo campus opened and ACN courses commenced there too (Maldivian Nurses Association, 2011).

Another great achievement to nursing and midwifery education in the country was the commencement of Bachelor of Nursing conversion course in the year 2005 for diploma trained nurse who needed to be upgraded to a Bachelor level without having to follow a normal bachelor curriculum. This curriculum was developed by consultants from the University of Newcastle, Australia (Maldivian Nurses' Association, 2011).

Until 2007, Diploma in Midwifery was the only speciality course offered in the nursing field locally. However in 2007 a course on Advanced Diploma in Critical Care was designed and offered to registered nurses who had the qualification of Diploma in Nursing.

Nursing education in the country had the opportunity to further strengthen and develop with the establishment of the Maldives National University (MNU) in February 2011, when nursing education was incorporated into the university education. A direct Bachelor of Nursing course for those with GCE “A” level qualification was designed and commenced in 2011.

Apart from the trainings in the Capital City, Male’, trainings expanded to the outer atolls. From 2012, FHS started offering Diploma in Nursing courses in the regional campuses of MNU. The first campus to start one of the nursing courses was, Khuldhuffushi campus followed by Hithadhoo and Thinadhoo campuses. In 2013, the fourth regional campus of MNU, namely Laamu,Gan campus was opened and the ACN course began.

Nursing trainings continued to develop to higher levels. One of the biggest achievements in nursing education was the successful inauguration of Master of Nursing course in July 2013. This is the beginning of Post graduate nursing education in the country and has given the opportunity for nurses to do higher studies locally, without having to leave the country.

Until 2017, the MNU was the only institute to offer nursing trainings in the Maldives. However, this status changed with the beginning of Advanced Certificate in Nursing course by a private higher education institute, Zikra International College, in the island of Fuvamullah in July 2017. This was followed by Village College of Male' offering Bachelor of Nursing course,

which is an international program of University of West of England. The program is targeted at registered nurses with a Diploma in Nursing qualification and was launched in the beginning of 2018.

The year 2018 is a remarkable and historical year for nursing in the Maldives. The establishment of a separate School of Nursing (SN) in MNU, marks a historical landmark development for nursing in the Maldives. The present day MNU offers nursing courses ranging from ACN to Masters in Nursing with nursing specialties such as Midwifery and Critical care. As of 2018 the SN conducts ACN and DN courses in four regional campuses as well as one outreach center of MNU apart from Male’.

Nursing training is certainly one of the most popular and prestigious training programs in the Maldives National University.

References

- Fulhu MI. *History of health services of the Maldives* [S. Aminath, Trans]. Sri Lanka: Print- N –Gard (Pvt) Ltd; 2010.
- Maldivian Nurses’ Association. (2011). *Country self-assessment; Report on Nursing and Midwifery- Maldives*. Funded by WHO