

HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY OF NURSING.

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Abstract

It could be claimed that nursing is one of the most challenging and remarkable professions in the country. Maldivians value the humanitarian work of the nurses. Nursing has existed in the Maldives ever since man first inhabited the islands. However professional nursing or modern nursing was introduced in the early nineteen sixties. Nursing education developed at a very rapid rate as compared to education within other professions in the country. The vision of nursing/ midwifery is to provide support and leadership towards the development of socially relevant, sustainable, efficient and high quality health services to meet the health challenges in the Maldives. The philosophy that underpins nursing practice in the Maldives is derived from the culture and the religion along with finer points from philosophies of nursing worldwide.

Introduction

Nursing is one of the most challenging and remarkable professions in the Maldives. Many Maldivians value this humanitarian service that is dedicated towards the sick and their families.

Inherently Maldivian nursing share the proud international tradition of nursing whereby the female members of the family or the community took care of the children, elderly and sick. Therefore it could be said that the Maldivian nursing actually began at home and the history of this goes back to as early as human life began in this archipelago. However, the government of the Maldives recognized the need for institutionalized professional nursing care in order to achieve a sustainable development of a healthy population. Subsequently few school graduates were sent for training abroad in the early nineteen sixties. The philosophy that underpins nursing practice in the Maldives is derived from the culture and the religion along with finer points from philosophies of nursing worldwide.

This article will explore the history of nursing in the Maldives and the philosophical background on which the nursing practice is established.

History of nursing

Institutionalized health care began with the return of three Maldivians who trained as professional nurses overseas, between 1963-1965. Even before they returned home an elementary hospital, then called “doctaru ge” (meaning “doctor’s house” in Dhivehi, the Maldivian language) was functioning with minimal facilities in terms of the number of beds, human resource and technology (Moosa, 1998). According to the Institute of Health Sciences (1998), initially only one doctor worked in this hospital without any trained nurses. Moosa (1998) specified that there were only three beds in this hospital. It is

evident from the author's findings that there were no trained nurses but a few local women were given the job of assistant nurse aids in 1961 and were given very basic training at the bedside to enable them to perform basic nursing procedures. The author had the opportunity to meet one of the first nurses in the country.

Faiza recalls, " there was an advertisement from the Ministry of health and I applied with nine other young girls. We were recruited and given an eight-month's training by Mrs. Joseph a Srilankan nurse who was in the medical team appointed by World Health Organization (W.H.O). We were taught to do the nursing procedures and also a little bit about the human body and systems. We were told that we would be sent abroad for studies later. However, when the formal training began in the Maldives, our batch was given the opportunity to enroll in it" (Faiza's own words translated to English by the author of this article).

This kind of training in nursing was not unusual in those days because of high demand for nursing care and growing number of hospitals in many countries. Two years later, that is in 1963 the first professional nurse returned home after training overseas. By 1964, there were three Maldivian professional nurses and nine assistant nurse aids working in the hospital or 'doctaruge'. Gradually, the demand for medical and nursing services grew to a state where the services provided by the few nurses in the country became explicitly inadequate to meet the demand of the population even at that time.

Subsequently, government of the Maldives with support from WHO, recruited a nurse trainer from Ireland, Miss Canon to design the first formal training program for nurse aids. This was the first milestone in the establishment of nursing training the Maldives. The first cohort of nurse aids was recruited in 1964 for training. This was followed by the opening of a 48 bedded hospital in 1997. Consequently more nurse aids were trained and this training continues to date.

During the 1970's an epic growth and development started taking place in Male'. Consequently, the country faced acute shortage of health care facilities and service providers to meet the cumulative need for health care within the rapidly growing population.

Strategically, , the government started establishing health centers at island level and hospitals at regional level in order to strengthen the health care delivery system to cater for the demand of the population. Concurrently, more health centers and clinics were opened in the capital by the government and private sector. Accordingly, a 200 bedded public hospital and a 34 bedded private hospital was established in the mid-1990. Each of these milestones in the health care delivery system resulted in an increased the demand for more nurses and midwives.

One of the colossal steps that had been taken by the government was the establishment of Allied Health Services Training Center in 1973 where, apart from the training of nurse aids (enrolled nurses) that of other paramedical

services began. Concomitantly, the government continued to send people for professional nursing training abroad. However, all these measures failed to win the battle of fulfilling the health care demand due to the rapid growth of population resulting in increasing demand for health care services. In order to overcome this problem, a large number of expatriate nurses were recruited for hospitals. Simultaneously, the Allied Health Services Training Center was upgraded and renamed as Institute of Health Sciences (I.H.S.) in 1990, which embarked upon training nurses and midwives at diploma level. Nursing therefore became the first profession to offer a diploma program in the country. This training program made the vision of the founder of the modern nursing, Florence Nightingale, an education for nurses that include both theory and practice a reality in this country. An action plan was also formulated to identify and carry out the nursing requirement for the country during the later half of the nineties. The policy of the country is to eventually replace the trained expatriate nursing staff with that of Maldivians (Moosa1998).

As stated, nursing is the first health care profession to start an advanced education program in the Maldives. In early 1999 the Institute of Health Sciences signed a memorandum of understanding with the University of Newcastle and the intention being to provide improved training for teaching and thus offer more efficient training for future health care providers. With this innovation, acceptance of the graduates of I.H.S for postgraduate courses in the University of New Castle is made possible

Socioeconomic and political influences on nursing in the past

The growing economy of the Maldives has facilitated the improvement of the living standard of the average Maldivians increasing the number of the affluent people. Conversely, this development has contributed to the raise in life expectancy over the last 40 years from 46 years comparable to that of industrialized countries. The prevailing socio- economic conditions have played a momentous part in shaping the way in which nursing services have been developed in this country (Moosa1998).

At the same time these factors have an undesirable impact on the nursing profession. Non availability of appropriate candidates for nurse training due to the expansion of other professions that offer comparative salaries and social status for less grueling work is one of the major problems that is persistent throughout the history of professional nursing in the Maldives and elsewhere.

However in the past the issues related to these factors were not often considered in setting priorities in the development of the profession in the country (Moosa 1998).

In spite of many constraints, for example, the geographical and socioeconomic disparities still exist in the Maldives; many measures have been taken to improve the health care delivery in the country. However the working conditions of nurses have not improved in the past few years. This may be one reason for the prevailing problem of not getting candidates of high merit to undertake nurse training.

In 1999, the government of Maldives established a Nursing Council, the mission of which is to improve the quality of nursing care in the Maldives through regulation and standardization. Thus all nurses practicing in the country have to comply with the regulations and codes of practice as specified by the Maldivian Nurses Council. At the same time it is compulsory for nurses who wish to practice in the country to register with the council and have a current license to practice nursing in the country.

Philosophy of nursing

The literal meaning of philosophy has come from a combination of two Greek nouns 'Phil' meaning love and 'Sophia' meaning wisdom (Leddy and Pepper, 1993) stated that. They defined nursing philosophy as “the intellectual and effective outcomes of the professional nurse’s efforts to.

1. Understand the ultimate relationships between humans, their environment and health;
2. Approach nursing as a scientific discipline;
3. Integrate a sense of value; and
4. Articulate a personal belief system about human beings, environment, health and nursing as a process”.

In the Maldives there is no philosophy defined in the area of clinical practice. However a vision statement of nursing and midwifery states: “future vision in nursing/ midwifery is to provide support and leadership towards the

development of socially relevant, sustainable, efficient and high quality health services to meet the health challenges in the Maldives (Vision statement of nursing and midwifery (1997), cited in Moosa, 1998). This statement underpins nursing practice in the Maldives at present. However, it is anticipated that following the establishment of the nursing council, the philosophy of nursing in the Maldives will be defined in the very near future.

The author's own philosophy of nursing is that, it is the caring action of a nurse to improve the physical or psychological status of sick or well with the application of scientific and empirical knowledge to practice.

The philosophy of training at the faculty of Health Sciences is to train health personnel to enable the country self-sufficient in meeting various health care needs of the people.

The philosophy of the faculty of health sciences addresses nursing as a therapeutic, educative, and a psychosocial process that is carried out with:

- An understanding of the basic principles of physical, biological and social science.
- Art and skills of observation and effective communication.
- Positive professional attitude towards co-operation and coordination of the health care team.
- Autonomy and Accountability in decision-making.

Dolan (1997) bestows an overview of nursing philosophy. He asserted that nursing philosophy deal with the philosophies of knowledge, mind, science and language, as well as moral and political philosophy. Almost all of these are

incorporated in the faculty of health science's belief of nursing and the vision statement that is laid down in the National Action Plan for Nursing and Midwifery. He also claimed that philosophies are not just cherished but excited about their subject and are warmly written, they have a capability of using examples, which capture the reader's imagination while imparting important philosophical knowledge.

The faculty of Health Science's concept of nursing is based on the International council of Nurses' definition of nursing, and its belief of health is based on World Health Organization's 1984 definition of health "A state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity"

In August 1999, the postgraduate nursing students enrolled in the University of New Castle (at I.H.S.) conducted a workshop to explore the philosophical basis of nursing in the Maldives. Nurses from different areas of nursing including the author, worked together to explore the philosophy on which the nursing practice is based on. They came up with fascinating results. It was found that the culture and religion backed up by scientific, aesthetic and personal knowledge played a major in shaping up the nursing practice in the Maldives rather than the political and legal systems. However the latter was found to be important as much as the economic and geographical structure of the country. It was concluded that the eastern philosophy supported by the religion blended with the unique culture of the Maldives and the western philosophy made up the philosophical

basis for nursing in the Maldives. Thus Maldivian nursing philosophy could be considered as a philosophy that has a heterogeneous approach.

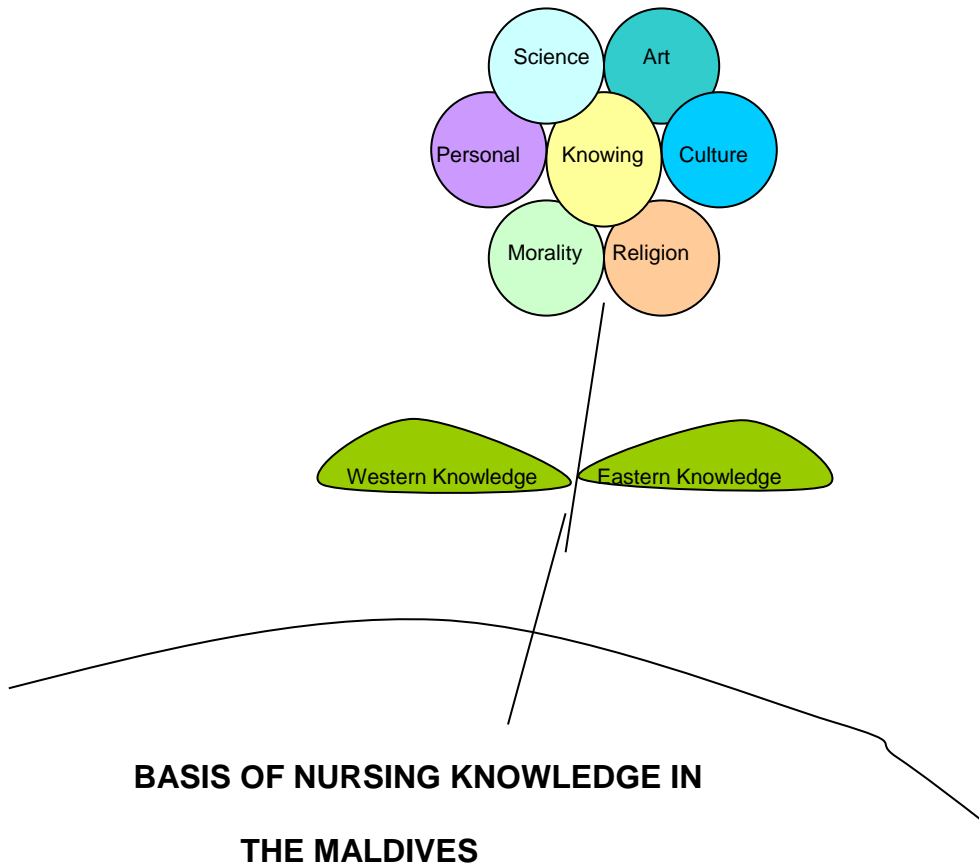


Figure1: The Maldivian ways of Knowing

Formulated by: Rasheed, A., Fahmy, Z., Ibrahim, H., Rameela, A.

Conclusion

The challenging and amazing history of nursing is the pride of every nursing professional in the country. Despite of the challenges and setbacks, throughout the journey, nursing education has progressed to a commendable level in the country. The establishment of the nursing council in the Maldives is a milestone

in the history of nursing profession in the Maldives as it will standardize and regulate the quality of nursing and ensure the professionalization of nurses. The opening of more educational opportunities brighten the future of nursing education in the Maldives.

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