

**Environmental Pressure, Nursing Shortage, Future Size, Shape
and Purpose of Sultanate of Oman's Nursing Workforce**

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Shortage of Nursing is a world wide problem and each country is trying its creative strategies to establish a stable, adequate nursing workforce and to retain its nurses. The U.S. Government projects a shortfall of 800,000 nurses by the year 2020. Tennessee will be able to meet only half of the demand for RNs by 2020 (1). Dr. Carol Huston the President of the Honor Society of Nursing, Sigma Theta Tau International emphasized the future of nursing and the nursing shortage issue in her letter in the *Advanced Nursing Practice* 3rd issue of volume # 5 by saying "The theme for this issue of *Create the Future* is the Future of Nursing. Predicting the future is difficult even when environments are relatively static. When environments are dynamic at best and volatile at worst, visioning and proactively preparing for the future is very difficult. What is the future of nursing? What skills will nurses need to be health care leaders as we enter the second decade of the 21st century?" and "At the national and international levels, nurses are increasingly involved in greatly needed health care reform and in addressing the ever-increasing international nursing shortage. In addition, 21st century nurses, as global health care leaders, are part of the health care team that must address global health threats" (2).

Nursing Profession in the Sultanate of Oman in the Gulf Region is considered as one of the reputed professions and is positively imaged. This can be proved by the number of applicants to the nursing institutes that exceeds the available seats ending up accepting the very good Grade Point Averaged high school graduates each year. There are eleven governmental nursing institutes that graduate about 500 diploma level nurses to the country every year (3). The baccalaureate level of nursing education was started in 2002 in the Sultanate of Oman accepting 50 -60 students each year. First batch graduated 44 nurses in December 2007; five of them were graduates of a diploma bridging program that is specially built for those who want to upgrade their professional status (4).

World Health Organization (WHO) expert Michal Krzyzanowski said that the estimate of premature deaths caused by urban air pollution has been revised upwards to over 750,000 globally, including more than 530,000 in Asia. Experts cited the increase in an air pollutant known as fine particulate matter or PM10 that "enters the lungs and stays there" (5). Survey finds pollution to be the cause for 40 percent of deaths worldwide. Pimentel says that 1.2 billion people lack clean water and waterborne infections account for 80 per cent of all infectious diseases. Increased water pollution creates breeding grounds for malaria-carrying mosquitoes, claiming 1.2 million to 2.7 million lives a year (6).

Environmental hazards such as water, air or noise pollution are not major issues affecting the nursing workforce in Oman as in other countries where environmental pressures decrease the number of incoming nurses or increase workload of nurses.

Sultanate of Oman as any other country of this world faces the problem of shortage of nursing. Though it produces a relatively big number of diploma level nurses each year, still the expatriate nurses number is high and the service sector as well as the education sector still rely on foreign nurses. The nursing profession is included in the government's Omanization strategy and 100% Omani nursing coverage is one of its super goals. The Ministry of Health projected requirement and Omanization of nurses in the Sultanate by end of 2010 as 72.3% and 96.5% by 2020 (3).

Currently, there are a total number of 12,458 nurses registered in the Oman Nursing and Midwifery Council; Omani's representing 63% of the total nursing workforce (5109). The other 37% are coming from 40 different countries mainly India (6056), Philippines (523), Malaysia (146), Sri Lanka (92), Jordan (86), Britain (70), China (64), South Africa (57) etc... There are 144 Omani B.Sc. nurses, 35 with a master's degree and one PhD nurse in the country and all of them hold administrative positions in different service areas, or teaching positions in educational institutions (7).

The nursing profession in Oman is guided and organized by the Oman Nursing and Midwifery Council (ONMC) that works under the umbrella of the Ministry of Health. The council since its establishment in 2001 is working hard for shaping up the profession, providing licenses and setting quality standards as the practice and education standards and it had launched its Code of Ethics in 2005. Working conditions for nurses are relatively good compared to other professions in the country, but if compared to other nurses in the Gulf region, they get lower salaries introducing the problem of migration especially by the foreign nurses who resign as soon as they get better offers in the neighboring countries. This migration problem leads to other problems of instability and no sustainability that by the end affects the quality which is the major issue of concern (7, 8).

The future of nursing workforce in Oman is promising. A major attention is focused on producing nurses by concentrating on Nursing Education. There are plans at Sultan Qaboos University to start a master program and to increase the number of students on the B.Sc. level and to widen up the Bridging program gate for more applicants. The Ministry of Health and the ONMC are working on the Omanization strategies and all are trying to follow the WHO recommendations related to nursing education (9).

The major three purposes of shaping up the profession of Nursing in Oman are:

1. No shortage in Nursing.
2. Omanization.
3. Quality nursing services.

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