

Pacific Heads of Nursing & Midwifery Meeting

Réunion des directeurs des soins infirmiers et obstétricaux du Pacifique

THE VALUE OF NURSING WORK IN PACIFIC ISLAND COUNTRIES

Achieving Universal Health Coverage (UHC) will require an extra 43 million health workers, two thirds of whom are nurses and midwives¹ The increased need for nurses and midwives is particularly important in Pacific Island Countries where they make up more than 70% of the health workforce. As well as UHC there are other pressures such as climate change, changing burden of disease and illness, rapid changes in medical knowledge and increasing demands from health care consumers and governments.

The pattern of nursing and midwifery work is changing and new work roles, increasing clinical demands and the pressures of an ageing workforce are affecting clinical and organisational outcomes. However, little is known about the impact these changes and expectations are having on workforce effectiveness and efficiency.

This paper presents a proposal to examine the value of nursing work in Pacific Island Countries. It suggests that there is a need to establish empirical evidence that evaluates nursing staff skill mix, role function and care delivery models which will allow evidence-based decision making about the health care workforce of the future.

¹ [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(22\)00532-3/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(22)00532-3/fulltext)

1. BACKGROUND

Health outcomes and quality of health services in Pacific Island Countries (PIC) vary widely, with non-communicable disease the largest disease burden. Newer challenges include COVID-19, climate change and effective response to disasters, whilst many older challenges remain unresolved. Within PIC nurses and midwives make up more than two thirds of the regional regulated health workforce²³⁴ Due not only to their sheer numbers but also to their transformative role at the front lines, nurses and midwives have the potential to meet the need for UHC⁵ and to optimise and improve individual and community health outcomes.

However, while there is general acknowledgement about the high value that nurses add to the health system, decisions made about the nursing and midwifery workforce are often based on custom and practice without a strong evidence base about the current scope of practice and roles and functions of nurses. Changing levels of nurses, the introduction of other cadres of health workers and the need to effectively manage the limited funding available for health services provides a sound rationale for the proposal which follows.

2. PROGRESS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

The South Pacific Chief Nursing and Midwifery Officer Alliance (SPCNMOA) has become an important building block to strengthen health in the Pacific⁶ The Pacific Heads of Nursing and Midwifery is now in an ideal position to leverage off this alliance to further strengthen the nursing and midwifery in the region.

Policy Priority 1 – Invest in improving career pathways for midwives and nurses across the region. A number of PIC are now invested in improving the quality of their nursing and midwifery workforce through the development of postgraduate educational programs focussed on clinical specialisation. This will create a workforce looking to improve their career prospects through improved career pathways and increased remuneration.

² <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240003279>

³ [https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/health-workforce/who_strategic-directions-for-nursing-and-midwifery-2021-2025.pdf?sfvrsn=a5ffe81f_5#:~:text=The%20WHO%20Global%20Strategic%20Directions,coverage%20\(UHC\)%20and%20Other%20population](https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/health-workforce/who_strategic-directions-for-nursing-and-midwifery-2021-2025.pdf?sfvrsn=a5ffe81f_5#:~:text=The%20WHO%20Global%20Strategic%20Directions,coverage%20(UHC)%20and%20Other%20population) .

⁴ <https://www.un.org/pga/73/wp-content/uploads/sites/53/2019/05/UHC-Political-Declaration-zero-draft.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.uts.edu.au/research-and-teaching/our-research/who-collaborating-centre/what-we-do/1.-leadership/vital-roles-nurses-and-midwives>

⁶ [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(22\)00532-3/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(22)00532-3/fulltext)

Policy Priority 2 – Embedding Government Chief Nursing and Midwifery Officers (GCNMO) across the region. There is a crucial role for GCNMOs in improving health outcomes by advising governments on workforce and policy issues. To do this effectively requires sound and current evidence.

Policy Priority 3 – Effective and efficient distribution and skill mix of health care staff. Nurses and midwives provide the majority of health care across the region yet there is little empirical evidence about how their roles have changed and how best to plan for the health care needs of communities into the future.

3. CHALLENGES

Providing empirical evidence about the work of nurses and midwives across the region to influence decision-making, allocation of health care resources and career pathways.

An International Council of Nurses (ICN) survey in 2020 showed that *‘two-thirds (67%) of countries report having a GCNMO ‘focal point’, ...and that the full range of responsibilities and resources associated with the GCNMO role are essential to directly influencing health policy formulation⁷*

One of the challenges about providing accurate and strategic advice is access to relevant, current and accurate information about the workforce in terms of role function, whether or not functions can be as effectively carried out by other levels of workers, appropriate staff numbers, skill mix, the effects of role redesign and the impact of changing models of care. There is limited data available in the region which provides empirical evidence to evaluate the impact of any of these changes on the quality of clinical care and professional practice and to guide policy and practice into the future.

4. FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The proposal is to conduct a regional work value/work sampling study of nurses and midwives similar to the one conducted in PNG in 2008 by WHOCCUTS⁸ to establish a data base that will provide evidence of the scope of nursing and midwifery activities across the region. It will allow evaluation of possible skill mix options, the benefits of role redesign and impact of changes to models of care. There is a need for evidence-based, coherent and transparent pathways and policies that enables healthcare workers to move between the various levels of work and education e.g. nurses

⁷ <https://www.icn.ch/news/icn-snapshot-survey-year-nurse-and-midwife-approximately-only-half-countries-world-have-chief>.

⁸ Duffield, C. Roroi M. George C. et al. A report on the work value of nurses in PNG, 2008. Department of Health, Papua New Guinea Nurses Association, Australian Nursing Federation and the WHO Collaborating Centre, University of Technology, Sydney, Australia. Unpublished Report

aid, community health worker, registered nurse, midwife, clinical nurse specialist, to nurse practitioner.

Recommendations

4.1 Recommendations for governments/PHONM:

- Commitment at ministerial, regional and national level for policy dialogue about the nursing and midwifery workforce with GCNMOS.
- Support for a work value study of nurses and midwives across the region.
- Ensuring that decision about career pathways and nursing and midwifery work are based on best evidence and accurate and contemporary models of care and practice.
- Support the development of a research proposal designed to evaluate the work value of nurses and midwives across the region,
- Form a working group/steering committee to develop a proposal,
- Seek funding and provide the guidance and leadership for the research work,
- Identify one or two countries to trial the methodology prior to a regional roll out.

4.2 Recommendations for development partners:

- Provide funding to support the research project as outlined above.
- Support developing a regional approach to research and the development of an evidence-based framework for workforce development.