

# Pacific Heads of Nursing & Midwifery Meeting

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### **Exploring Factors Influencing Motivation and Retention of Nurses in Kiribati - A Qualitative Study**

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The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore factors influencing motivation and retention of nurses in Kiribati. A sample size of thirty-two nurses who work in hospital wards and clinics throughout South Tarawa and Betio were chosen through the use of purposive sampling. To collect crucial information, semi-structured open-ended interviews were employed. Thematic analysis was used to assess the qualitative data from this study, and the results are provided in text and narrative. The thematic study yielded four characteristics that influenced nurses' motivation and retention. These are the following: 1) leadership and management; 2) financial and economic variables; 3) workplace circumstances; and 4) training and education or ongoing professional development. Nurses have experienced many challenges, but they have persevered in their work because of their passion and dedication to provide financial assistance for their loved ones.

## 1. BACKGROUND

Kiribati is one of the Pacific Island nations, made up of 33 low-lying dispersed atolls, together with 21 inhabited islands. It is one of the smallest countries in the world, with a total land size of about 811 square kilometres ([World Bank, 2018](#)). The government of Kiribati runs the country's public healthcare system that provide free health care services to citizens. The Ministry of Health and Medical Services is made up of 934 employees consisting of 60 doctors, 479 nurses and 395 other health support workers ([PSO, 2022](#)). The Kiribati healthcare system is divided into three services: Hospital, Public Health and Nursing Services. There is 1 main referral hospital, 3 sub divisional hospitals, 34 health centres, and 66 dispensaries ([MHMS, 2015](#)). Nursing services is the dominant role in the workforce making up 51.3% of the total workforce. Hospitals were predominantly operated by nurses, whilst all health centres and dispensaries are manned by medical assistants and public health nurses alone without doctors.

## 2. PROGRESS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

The Ministry of Health and Medical Services are currently imposing and implementing several activities in order to address retention and motivational issues among nurses. Progress and achievements on these are covered below.

### 2.1 Nurses with qualification in management and leadership

Higher degrees in nursing, healthcare management, and leadership have been attained by certain nurses. It is now expected of them to apply the knowledge they acquired to maintain their retention in the nursing field and to boost motivation. Furthermore, additional nurses have filed for prospective scholarship opportunities, and there are nurses who are continuing their management and leadership degrees.

### 2.2 Hospital facilities (ward) renovation

Renovations are ongoing in certain wards to improve the working environment. Staff members reported that the medical/surgical ward looked new and was suitable for patients to remain in, and that it was a more pleasant place to work than it had been in the past. As a result, they were motivated to work more and enjoyed their time there because they could see that the ward was well-maintained.

### **2.3 Recruiting of 26 new graduate nurses**

After many nurses departed to work abroad, there was a labour shortage in the nursing field, which has been addressed in part by the hiring of 26 new graduate nurses in August of this year. Since these nurses began serving across different wards, the nursing workforce has experienced a small alleviation of the shortage. Nurses now enjoy their jobs and feel at ease functioning as a cohesive team.

### **2.4 Restructuring of the nursing structure**

In response to complaints from nurses regarding the need to increase the pay scale for nurses in different roles and the antiquated nursing structure that is now in use which has not been evaluated in many years, the organizational structure of nursing is being altered. Several new positions are to be made available for competent applicant nurses to fill. The reorganization of the nursing structure was filed and if approved by cabinet will be implemented next year.

### **2.5 Training and education for continuous professional development**

The internal workshop and training program for improving nurses' competencies is still in progress. This is a crucial part of improving the abilities of nurses so they may work consistently in a confident and safe manner and be able to provide optimum quality nursing care. Training opportunities should be made available to all nurses through the timely, fair, and well-planned provision of ongoing professional development.

## **3. CHALLENGES**

The study demonstrated the high intention of nursing turnover in both the past and the future, which is associated with retention and motivation as contributing variables. Fifty percent of the nurses who took part in the study said they would leave their jobs soon. It is expected that more nurses will depart in the near future, as a large number of nurses have quit their jobs to take positions in neighbouring countries such as Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, the Marshall Islands, Nauru, and Tuvalu. The main cause of nurse turnover is their desire for better employment.

Most of the nurses who participated in the study said that they would consider leaving their positions at some point in the future. They persisted in their job because of their passion, love for their family

and a desire to keep providing for them, despite the difficulties they faced, which influenced motivation and retention.

The study shows that nurses in Kiribati have a 25.2% turnover rate. Given the high number of nurses who have left their positions this year, it is likely that this number will increase. Nursing services are currently facing a serious manpower shortage as a result of the high incidence of nurse turnover, which has turned into a major issue for the Ministry and nursing services. Concerns about understaffing in wards and clinics, as well as a nursing “brain drain” from experienced staff members quitting abruptly, must be addressed. Both the Ministry itself, and its ability to provide patients with high-quality nursing care are greatly impacted by the shortage of nursing staff and the loss of competence caused by nurse turnover.

#### 4. FUTURE DIRECTIONS

This study offers potential approaches and suggestions that the government should consider. It is highly recommended to look at current workforce development efforts. Nursing management and health administration must consider the creation of retention and motivational strategies in order to maintain nurse motivation and control over future nurse turnover.

Areas to be addressed include:

- The **management and leadership** system has to be enhanced to address current failures.
- There is a need for job evaluations to be undertaken for reviewing and upgrading the **nursing salary structure and benefits, remunerations and payment system**.
- A **positive working environment** should be created to improve service delivery and safety of both health care providers and patients.
- For continuous nursing **education** a system should be formulated for fair distribution of nursing education to all and to increase opportunities for easy accessibility. The government should invest on the nursing by granting more opportunities for **training and education** for nurses.

The Ministry of Health and Medical Services works with many agencies, including WHO, UNFPA, UNICEF, DFAT, MFAT, SPC, and others, in a cooperative and sustainable manner. The Kiribati Nursing Association (KNA), the Kiribati Midwifery Association Incorporated (KMAI), Rotary clubs, community and religious organizations, and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) also partner with the Ministry and Nursing Services to accomplish their purposes. The Ministry of Health and Medical

Services' objectives could not be met without solid collaborations with these development partners. It is imperative that the nursing network be strengthened and expanded as much as possible with development partners. Whilst considering the factors influencing the motivation and retention of nurses in Kiribati, development partners should look to support nursing services via activities such as: providing work equipment and resources to enhance work quality for health care; offering trainings for capacity building such as in-house training, update workshops, short courses and work attachments for refresher and for exchanging knowledge to maintain the nurses' competencies for quality care; and, lastly, updating nursing procedures and guidelines.