

CONFERENCE REPORT

RESEARCH ON THE STATE OF NURSING
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INTRODUCTION

The University of the Witwatersrand, School of Public Health hosted its Research on the State of Nursing (RESON) symposium on the 25th of June 2013 at their main campus in Johannesburg. The welcoming address was delivered by Prof. Laetitia Rispel, the Head of the School of Public Health.

The first keynote address was delivered by Mr Chris Rakuom, Kenya's Chief Nursing Officer. He spoke on "Transforming nursing policy, research and practice in Kenya". His message was clear: nursing practices need to change, but the path to nursing reform is not easy. He emphasised, however, that better managerial practices will translate into improved healthcare. He concluded by stating: "An effective leader leads people to where they ought to be and not where they want to be."

Background on the RESON project

The University of the Witwatersrand commenced with the RESON project in July 2008 after receiving a R9 million grant from the Atlantic Philanthropies. The project focused exclusively on nursing with the goal to develop and strengthen the evidence for improved nursing policy development and practice in South Africa.

Policy development and leadership

Evidence has shown that nurse leaders need to participate in health reform to enable them to advocate for their patients regarding patient-related policies. Unfortunately the nurse leaders currently lack the political and policy-generating skills to have a significant impact on health reform in South Africa. These aspects need to be addressed in the current nursing education curricula to empower nurse managers to contribute to health reform policies. Currently the nursing profession allows people (with no nursing background) to manage nurses and make decisions on behalf of nurses. There will be

little real progress unless the current crisis in nursing governance and leadership is resolved. The nursing profession needs to regain control of itself.

Papers delivered at the symposium

A total of nine papers were presented. Delegates were mostly academics from the University of the Witwatersrand who were immersed in the RESON project. The presentation topics included aspects such as:

- how the profiles (types) of the unit managers relate to the quality of nursing care in hospitals
- job satisfaction
- costs of agency nursing
- influence of research on policy development
- professional poverty
- the value of reflective diaries
- participation (or non-participation) in key nursing policies
- policy analysis
- male nurses.

One of the themes that emerged from the various presentations was the use of pen-portraits and diaries. Analysis of the results indicated that nurse managers are not a homogenous group and should not be viewed and treated as such. A significant finding in the diaries indicated that when nurse managers reflected on their work life, they seldom reflected on their own practices. They did, however, reflect on their many frustrations, feelings of powerlessness, burn-out, dehumanisation, lack of support, and having to take work home. They also aired frustrations regarding the fact that people did not implement what they were taught.

Nurse managers view themselves as being inadequately prepared for their managerial roles and responsibilities. The need for mentors was highlighted. A knowledge deficit was identified, which has major curriculum implications for training institutions that offer the management courses. Concerns were raised that the South African Nursing Council (SANC) was slow to realise the implications of South Africa's National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and of the South African Qualifications Association (SAQA).

Technology also came under the magnifying glass with the question: "Is technology an enabler or impediment?" The conclusion was that nurses and nurse managers need to be trained/educated to use technology effectively.

Panel discussions

Four interactive panel discussions were held. During the first panel discussion, Dr Marshall reiterated the importance of the proposed nurse manager's competencies. She further stated that accountability should be linked directly to the various managerial positions.

Dr Vasuthevan raised the question of whether the current nursing shortage is one of quantity or one of quality. She further indicated that nurse managers have difficulty in transitioning from practitioner to nurse manager and that assistance in the form of mentoring is required. She further alluded to the division between research and practice and suggested cross-sectional, dual appointments to avoid working in isolation.

During the second panel discussion, Dr Joyner raised the concern that clinical nurses are no longer passionate teachers. She emphasised that the clinical role cannot be separated from the teaching role. She then indicated that the academic preparation of nurses needs to be revised and that compassion has to be revived in everyday nursing lives.

The third panel discussion was in the form of a personal reflective journey for the participants in the RESON project.

The last panel discussion included some of South Africa's key role players in the nursing profession. Ms Masemolo (Democratic Nursing Organisation of South Africa, DENOSA) supported the previous speakers, indicating that there is a need to transform nursing management programmes to address key problems/areas. She concurred that mentoring in management is crucial. A further concern raised was that nurse managers do not advocate for their nurses anymore.

Dr Makhaya left the audience with a mandate: "Invest in developing leaders who can enable ordinary nurses to do extraordinary things in the face of adversity".

Prof. Klopper (Foundation of University Nursing Departments in South Africa, FUNDISA) focused on collaboration and the creation of pockets of excellence. But first, the profession needs to go back to values, attitudes, responsibilities, accountability and professionalism.

CONCLUSION

The very interesting symposium has major implications for the nursing profession and specifically for nurse educators and nurse managers. The 'take home' message can be summarised as: