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PERSPECTIVE

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CHALLENGES IN NURSING EDUCATION IN CAMBODIA: A PERSPECTIVE FROM A NURSE

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After passing the Khmer Rouge regime from 1975 to 1979, Cambodia starts to develop its own country with limited resources to compete with the other ASEAN countries. The Ministry of Health (MoH) of Cambodia has been pushing and encouraging nursing schools to produce more human resources for better health of community.

Historically, Cambodian nursing education started from the end of 10th centuries and the beginning of 11th centuries along with the leadership of the Queen INDRADEVY and Khmer's pharaoh JAIYAVARMAN-VII during the Angkor era. In 1979, the primary nursing and midwifery course was firstly commenced. In 1980, the 3-year program (called as Diploma of Secondary Nurse) started and recognized as the highest nursing education at the national level ([Cambodian Council of Nurses, 2007](#)). Today, there are only five government schools of nursing are established: one in Phnom Penh called as Technical School for Medical Care (TSMC) under the umbrella of the University of Health Sciences (UHS), and

the other four schools are Regional Training Center (RTC) located in four provinces, at Komport, Kompong Cham, Battam bang and at Stung Treng under direct supervision of MoH, which have been operated in the entire country with a very limited facilities ([International Council of Nurses, 2017](#)).

The University of Health Sciences is well known as the oldest government university in Cambodia, which offers various programs in health sciences including nursing, medicine, dentistry and pharmacy under the support from MoH ([University of Health Science, 2013](#)). Led by the UHS's Rector, Professor Saphonn Vonthanak, nursing program has more opportunities to expand international networking and provide more nursing programs such as: Associated Degree in Nursing (AND) for 3 years, Bachelor of Sciences in Nursing (BSN) as national program, and International Program for Bachelor Nursing (IPBN) for 4 years. In addition, the upgrading program is also established, which is called as Bridging Bachelor Nursing (BBN) for 2 years in

part-time curriculum (one week per month and 9 hours a day from Monday to Saturday), and Bachelor of Ophthalmic Nurse (BON) for full time with 1-year curriculum established in 2014. Both programs are eligible for those who hold ADN diploma certificate ([University of Health Science & National Institute of Public Health, 2016](#)). Specifically, the UHS has been nominated as the Technical Working Group (TWG) in order to develop the curriculum of Master of Sciences in Nursing to support further education to all nurses in Cambodia. The TWG will be working as well with the local and international stakeholders.

On the other hand, private universities are also established in Cambodia, such as the International University (IU), the University of Puthisastra (UP), the Chenla University (CU), the Norton University (NU), and the Health Sciences Institute of Royal Cambodian Armed Forces (HIS-RCAF) to produce more nurses with better quality in Cambodia. However, the successfulness of nursing education is not without its challenges. This article aims to provide some challenges in nursing education in Cambodia, according to my perspective as a nurse.

CHALLENGES IN CAMBODIAN NURSING EDUCATION

There are some challenges to improve the nursing education in Cambodia, namely:

Lack of faculty members with higher degree

There are limited faculties who have obtained master degree or doctoral degree in nursing field. Currently, there is only one PhD in Nursing, Dr. Virya Koy, who has just graduated from Chulalongkorn University Thailand. There are 8 nurses who currently holding master degree from Thailand, Philippines, and about 2 nurses are still undergoing master nursing program in South Korea. However, not all

graduates are majoring in nursing, but specifically in health professions education, public health, and nutrition. This may limit the knowledge or understanding regarding nursing and its underpinning philosophy. Although the Ministry of Health of Cambodia has been encouraging nurse educators to continue education since 2001 ([Koy, 2016](#)), but nurse intention to continue education remains low. It may be due to lack of promotion for nurses who hold higher degree to get higher position, lack of scholarship or educational supports from the government, and the absence of master nursing program in Cambodia, which force nurses to go out of the country leaving their family. However, the factors related to nurse intention to continue education should be further explored for more understanding.

Lack of facilities for clinical nursing practice

Most universities offering health sciences program have no own teaching hospital for practice while the number of students have increased every year. Thus, this should be prioritized. The teaching hospitals should be added in response to this issue to ensure the proper knowledge and skills of the future nurses.

Different types of nursing degrees

Cambodia is similar with the other ASEAN countries such as Indonesia and Lao PDR, which has different types of nursing background, such as associate degree in nursing (diploma) and bachelor of sciences in nursing ([Aungsuroch & Gunawan, 2015](#)). Practically, both levels do not have much difference in clinical practice. Thus, the job description should be further explored and identified. In addition, nurses who have bachelor level should be able to do at least descriptive nursing research and use evidence-based practice. However, according to my perspective, diploma nurses may fit with the current needs of Cambodia to provide the basic needs of people in rural area.

Limited of research studies in nursing

Bachelor of Sciences in Nursing (BSN) program has given an opportunity for students to do nursing research as one of the requirements for completing the study. However, most of research is using secondary data, instead of conducting original research from primary data. As the results, the research skills of the graduates are still limited to identify the research needs with appropriate issues in Cambodia with appropriate methods. Thus, this issue should be more emphasized for better nursing education, practices and research.

Lack of use of technology in nursing education

We are now living in the digital era, and it is therefore we should be able to utilize it, especially in nursing education. However, there is still lack of ability of faculty members to use that technology, and the poor Internet access as well as limited access to database, which is considered as the weakness of nursing education today in Cambodia.

In conclusion, by identifying the challenges related to nursing education, all nurses in Cambodia are invited to support each other, and analyze the strengths and weakness for providing better education in order to enhance the quality of nurses to provide better quality of care, patient

safety and effective health services delivery in Cambodia.

Declaration of Conflicting Interest

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Author Contribution

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