

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF'S NOTE

Retaining the Nursing Workforce for Quality Healthcare

Health workforce retention is critical for maintaining high-quality patient care, as it ensures consistency, efficiency, and stability in healthcare services. Retaining a skilled health workforce especially in the developed countries is a critical global challenge, directly impacting the quality of patient care and the stability of health systems. The continuous migration of nurses and midwives from Nigeria to Europe, Asia and America is creating a severe workforce shortage in the healthcare system thus, negatively impacting the quality of healthcare services and the quest for universal health coverage.

Over the last five years, more than 75,000 Nigerian nurses and midwives have migrated to countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Saudi Arabia with more than 42,000 nurses reported to have left the country between 2022 and 2024 alone. This migration is partly responsible for the nurse-to-population of 9:10,000 as against the WHO recommended 83:10,000 and the nurse-patient ratio of 1:120 as against the WHO recommended 1:4. In Nigeria, Nurses and Midwives are almost absent at the primary health care level where about 70% of the population are receiving healthcare services. It has been severally observed and reported that nurses' migration is largely prompted by poor remuneration, poor conditions of service including lack of adequate facilities at work place, poor career progression, non-inclusion of nurses in leadership and decision-making process despite nurses contributing over 60% of the total skilled health workforce in the country and despite being academically and professionally competent, poor placement of nurses, denial of nurses from practicing in accordance with their competencies as well as increasing workplace violence from patients, patient relations and other health workforce.

In addition, the increasing shortage has been responsible for excess work load with one nurse managing 40-60 patients or even more per shift that sprang over 12 hours as against the traditional 8 hours per shift. It is important to note that nurses in Nigeria face discrimination in terms of recognition as key stakeholders, with poor professional development opportunities and poor safety issues at work place. While there has been deliberate increase in enrolment in nursing training institutions in the last few years aimed at ameliorating the shortage, it is important to note that there have not been commensurate efforts towards employment of nurses in many states leaving most of the trained nurses unemployed. Since there has not been improvement in the remuneration and other conditions of service, nurses are still migrating despite attempts to tighten the processes of migration.

As a matter of urgency, there is need for improvement in the remuneration of nurses and other conditions of service including improved and sponsored training programmes, proper recognition and seamless career development opportunities. Special allowances should be paid nurses working in rural and hard-to-reach areas in addition to enhanced specialists' allowances. Qualified nurses should be involved in leadership and decision-making processes at all levels of healthcare services. There should be adequate investments in nursing education and research for quality service delivery. Deliberate efforts should be put in place to employ and retain nurses so that the nurse-population and nurse-patient ratios will be improved in order to reduce the excess workload. Effective retention strategies are crucial for maintaining organizational stability, increasing staff morale, ensuring team cohesion, and improving the quality of patient care.

Professor Saleh. N. Garba, RN, PhD, FWACN

**Department of Nursing Science,
Bayero University, Kano.**

Email: bjnhc.nur@buk.edu.ng, sngarba.nur@buk.edu.ng

Website: www.bjnursing.com

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