

2020, year of the nurse

The global Nursing Now campaign sees nurses and midwives as the backbone of the health workforce

The global Nursing Now campaign is a three-year campaign that started in 2018. It aims to empower nurses to take their place at the heart of tackling 21st century health challenges and maximise their contribution to achieving Universal Health Coverage.

Judy Khanyola, Africa's representative for the campaign, notes that the nurses' work and the vast indigenous knowledge they possess is an opportunity Africa must grab as a means of making people do things that benefit Africa. Africa already has the knowledge, skills and talent to manage its health systems, but this is not reflected in where this continent is at the moment.

Why Nurses? Nurses and midwives are the main providers of health care in Sub-Saharan Africa. They provide 90% of health services and are the first points of access in the health care system.¹ They are the frontline defense against the leading causes of mortality and share the responsibility for the survival of communities. Nurses spend a considerable amount of time with patients and provide very personal and intimate care as well as continuity throughout a period of illness or treatment.

Nurses work within a shared system of humanitarian and societal values, and are generally part of the local community. They have a good understanding of the social determinants of health and personal relationships with the patients they serve. Moreover, empowering nurses has a triple impact: improving health, promoting gender equality and supporting economic growth.

However, nurses face a number of challenges that range from the continued undervaluing of their contribution to the health sector and not being allowed to work to their full potential. Judy asks: 'Is it a must for the Director of Medical Services to be a doctor, and a man?' Nevertheless, nurses face real issues, including lack of higher education and training opportunities, poor remuneration, high patient ratios and limited resourcing, and societal undervaluing of the nursing profession. This contributes to reducing leadership roles narrowing down what nurses can do and achieve.

The Nursing Now campaign was launched on 27 February 2018 as a partnership/collaboration with WHO and

Judy Khanyola is a nursing champion and the African representative for the Nursing Now campaign



International Council for Nursing (ICN) to improve health globally by raising the status and profile of nursing and midwifery, to empower nurses and to improve the perception of nursing. Nurses can be a key part of the solution to today's health challenges if they are properly deployed, valued and included in the decision making processes. Champions for nursing now include Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, Director-General of WHO, and Sheila Tlou, a former Director of UNAID for East and Southern Africa and a former Minister of Health in Botswana, who is now the co-chair of Nursing Now and chair of Global HIV Prevention Coalition.²

The Campaign is set to address governance issues such as policies on sexual harassment within ministries of health, lack of progression and lack of autonomy in the nursing profession. The campaign will focus on five core areas: ensuring that nurses and midwives have a more prominent voice in health policy-making; encouraging greater investment in the nursing workforce; recruiting more nurses into leadership positions; conducting research that helps determine where nurses can have the greatest impact, and sharing of best nursing practices.³ In this Campaign, there are 192 regional and

local groups in over 80 countries and this is growing. 2020 has been designated as the year of the nurses and midwives by WHO during the 72 World Health Assembly in Geneva.⁴

With regard to supporting Universal Health Coverage, the Nightingale challenge was launched to train young nurses and midwives below the age of 35 in leadership and advocacy skills and thus prepare them to participate at an influential level and taking up more leadership roles. In 2020 the WHO first State of the World's Nursing Report will be launched. The launch of the report and ICN efforts will be directed towards informing national policies and driving investments in the nursing workforce to achieve global goals.

References

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