

THE IMPACT OF MANPOWER SHORTAGE IN THE HEALTHCARE INDUSTRY

A Portfolio

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Abstract

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Title of Publication The Impact of Manpower Shortage in the Healthcare Industry		
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<p>The job of the healthcare workers is considered as one of the noblest jobs and is critical in the health industry. They are in demand globally and are always needed wherever they go. Unfortunately, because of some factors like the increase in the aging population, the aging work force, burnouts and among others, their number continue to decline resulting to the current problem in the industry which is the shortage of manpower.</p> <p>The aim of this thesis was to know the impact of the continuing deficiency of health workers and how did it affect the patient care and patient safety.</p> <p>The purpose of this thesis was to have a better understanding and knowledge on the shortage of healthcare workers and what is being done by the authorities to address the problem.</p> <p>A portfolio method was used for this thesis wherein data were gathered as well as observations and critical reflections from different clinical placements were compiled in a learning diary.</p> <p>The results of this thesis show how the shortage of the health workers affect the patients' safety and care and the healthcare workers' physical and mental health. Likewise, job satisfaction is low and burn outs are high leading to resignation and seeking a less stressful and better paying jobs. Therefore, to prevent this trend to continue and avert a severe crisis in the healthcare industry, policy makers and healthcare care authorities should attentively listen and take serious actions on their workers grievances to solve this problem.</p>		
Keywords Shortage of healthcare workers, healthcare workers, health workers, nurses' shortage, patient safety		

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1 Introduction

“A healthcare worker is one who delivers care and services to the sick and ailing either directly as doctors and nurses or indirectly as aides, helpers, laboratory technicians, or even medical waste handlers” (Joseph & Joseph 2016).

Healthcare workers comprise half of the workforce globally. They are considered the most valuable human resource in health services because of their vital role played in providing assistance and in protecting and enhancing the health of their communities through health promotion and giving utmost care. (WHO 2021.) Unfortunately, their dedication and hard work are often under-praised and barely recognized and their health and other factors that might affect their work in general are often overlooked.

The shortage of healthcare workers has been a problem not just in the low- and middle-income countries but also in rich and developed countries (WHO 2021). This has also been reported during the time of Covid-19 pandemic where many health care professionals got sick because of overwhelming number of patients or died because of exposure to the deadly virus. This shortage can have a big impact in the healthcare system because of their vital role in giving quality care to unwell patients, preventing the spread of disease, and promoting healthy living and lifestyle.

There are multiple reasons why there is a shortage in the high demand of healthcare workers. Some of these include the migration of nurses from low-to-middle-income countries to highly developed countries seeking for greener pasture. Another one is the aging health workforce wherein there are more retiring workers than newly graduates to replace them. The growing aging population wherein those who are in dire need of healthcare services is rising thereby expanding the need of healthcare workers. There is also the realization of some healthcare workers, especially the nurses, that the job is simply not for them, so they quit after working for few years. Additionally, for female healthcare workers, choosing between career and family and violence in the healthcare setting causing emotional or physical abuse in addition to a stressful environment. (Haddad & et.al 2020.)

2 Theoretical Background

Health systems around the world can only function when there are health workers available. Healthcare workers play a vital role in providing quality health care, promoting health, and preventing disease to individuals, their families, and communities while on the other hand, their own lives are at risk of exposure to harmful viruses, bacteria, and other pathogens. (World Health Report 2006.) The Covid-19 pandemic is just one of the eye openers for people to realize the importance of the healthcare professionals and workers' existence. During the pandemic, many of the healthcare providers got sick or were tested positive with the virus and, worse, succumbed to this deadly pathogen resulting in the shortage of healthcare workers in this crucial time.

The shortage of manpower in the healthcare industry has been a problem that is continuously rising and has been estimated to reach 18 million by 2030 especially in low and lower-middle income countries. Healthcare workers are needed for the health systems to function systematically and give sufficient care to those who need it. Factors such as low investment in the education and training of students vying to be future health care workers and dissemblance between education and employment strategies in relation to the health system and the need of the people contribute to the continuing shortage of health care workers. International migration of health care workers from low and middle-income countries has also been augmenting. (WHO 2021.)

The focus of this paper is to know the impact of the shortage of manpower, most specifically, the deficiency in the number of nurses working in the healthcare industry. Few of the issues affected by this shortage are the quality of patient care, patient safety, patient satisfaction, the healthcare workers' work satisfaction and the overall wellbeing of the healthcare worker.

The **quality of patient care** in the healthcare industry means providing the best health care service to the patient, which is safe, effective, easily available, economical, and patient-centered (WHO 2021). For this reason, health care organizations monitor patients' experiences to improve and evaluate the quality of care they receive in the healthcare premises (Kieft & et.al. 2014).

Patient safety is one of the integral parts in nursing care that aims to protect the patient from harm during and after treatment by healthcare professionals and avoid human errors that may cause harm and compromise the patient's health and life (Royal College of Nursing 2022). This portfolio will look at how the shortage of healthcare workers affects the quality of care in assuring the patient's safety all throughout their treatment process.

Patient satisfaction is the most desired outcome and the essential indicator of the quality of care received by patients (Karaca & Durna 2019). This portfolio will look at how the patient's satisfaction with the shortage of healthcare workers is. How the shortage affects the healthcare workers job in giving quality care.

Work satisfaction defines the overall feelings of the healthcare workers about their job and the factors surrounding it. With work satisfaction, the quality of the working life of the healthcare worker and the quality of healthcare patient will be better. (Khamlub & et.al. 2013.) However, a shortage of healthcare workers has a great influence on the quality of care given to patients.

The **overall wellbeing of the healthcare worker** needs to be considered as well. Providing quality care to patients is the main goal of the healthcare industry and healthcare workers. With the shortage of healthcare workers, working hours for those who can go to work become longer and exhausting. Prioritizing and protecting the mental and physical health and wellbeing of the healthcare workers is essential. However, with the shortage and other contributing factors like pandemics and other crisis like strikes, this portfolio will look at how the healthcare workers can still give quality care and at the same time maintain a healthy mental and overall wellbeing. (Søvold & et.al. 2021.)

3 Approach of the Thesis

3.1 Aim and Purpose

The aim of this portfolio thesis is to know the impact of the manpower shortage in the healthcare industry and how it affects the patients and the healthcare workers in the student's point of view.

The purpose of this portfolio is to have a deeper understanding and knowledge related to the shortage of manpower in the healthcare industry. Additionally, to find out what is being done to resolve this crucial problem and if healthcare workers' grievances are being heard and given enough action by the authorities who in the healthcare industry.

3.2 Method and Research Questions

According to Timmins, a portfolio is a collection and cohesive account of work-based learning that contains relevant evidence from practice and critical reflection on this evidence. Its primary purpose is to display achievement of your learning and knowledge development. (Timmins 2008, p.1.)

This portfolio will help in the learning process during clinical practices, as well as in the future career development. This is a self-directed learning tool that uses the observations and learning diary made during the clinical practices.

This will also try to give an answer to these research questions. What is the theme and phenomena in the healthcare industry and how does it affect in the nurses' role.

4 Implementation/Thesis Process

4.1 Data gathering

The data were gathered by creating a learning diary that compiled the observations and critical reflections made during clinical placements. The observations were made in four clinical placements with two different working environments. The first was in a school where children ages 9-12 years old were taught and guided about their overall wellbeing, promotion of health, multicultural collaboration, and UN sustainable development goals. The other three clinical placements were done in the surgical, cardiology, internal medicine, and skin diseases wards. Learning diaries were compiled with a total of 11 pages, in a Word file with 1.5 line spacing and with Calibri Bold font size 12.

4.2 Content Analysis

Content Analysis is one of the most important research methodologies used in finding facts and analyzing data. The term, "*content analysis*" was first added in the 1961 edition of the Webster's Dictionary of the English language. But its cerebral origin, however, can be tracked down way back to the history of humanity, starting from when humans became aware of the uses of signs and symbols as well as voice. It started to evolve from the ancient to the present time and the depth of its usage became significantly important. (Krippendorf 2019.) Today, it is highly utilized to evaluate languages used in articles, interviews, speeches, magazines, newspapers, and other materials, to collect data. Texts are gathered, categorized, and scrutinized to dig into the purpose and messages then analyze the findings. (Luo 2019.) There are two general types of content analysis. Conceptual analysis ascertains the presence and persistence of perceptions in a text or theme, and the Relational analysis which after categorizing the text, further examines and explores the relationships between the concepts in the text. (Columbia Public Health, Population Health Method 2022.)

From the accumulated learning diary, the following themes have been gathered.

Table 1. Healthcare workers and the outcome of its shortage gathered in four different clinical placements

Phenomena	Healthcare workers	Results of the shortage of healthcare workers
Busy work shifts of the workers	Newly graduate nurses	Compromising patient safety and care
Nurse strike from April-May 2022	Long shifts for nurses	Compromising healthcare workers' physical and mental health
	One available doctor per specialization	High demand of nurses per shift
	Ratio of nurse to patient, 1:5	Overwork and underpaid
	English speaking nurses' availability	Compromising nursing students' practical training 's learning
	Nursing students accepted to work part-time	Compromising maintenance workers' job resulting in broken computers, beds and equipment left in long queue

4.3 Results

4.3.1 Healthcare workers and Patients

From the observations and learning diary collected, it was confirmed that the demand of the healthcare workers' job is high that the shortage of manpower greatly affects every aspect in the healthcare industry. The patients and clients are the one

who are primarily affected by this issue. It has been determined that patient care and safety are threatened because of the lack of manpower.

Healthcare workers accept double shifts in their work because of the additional income that they earn but on the other hand, bargaining the quality of their work because of exhaustion and at the same time their own mental and physical health. An increased number of patients in the end are dissatisfied by the care and treatment that they received from doctors and nurses.

Senior nursing students are also welcomed to work part-time to join the healthcare team to give them the chance to enhance their practice and to help manage the under-staff problem in the facilities. Nursing students who are in their clinical placements also experienced the lack of mentoring from their supervisors because of the limited time given to them. The students have no choice but to be with other nurses who can only spare them a little time while doing their practice. Though it gave them the opportunity to work independently, still they need someone to check their work.

Doctor specialists are also limited per ward making it difficult when multiple number of patients need immediate attention all at the same time. Some patients must wait until a doctor is available for them.

4.3.2 Results of the shortage of healthcare workers

Complaints about low-quality care and overlooking the importance of patient safety has likewise been reported. To solve this existing problem, the healthcare industry started hiring nursing students to work part time. This might have solved the problem for a while, but the lack of experience and knowledge of the students has been found to affect the quality of patient care and safety as well. Furthermore, guidance and supervision of the senior nurses are still needed when nursing students and newly graduate nurses start working in the healthcare facilities. Work satisfaction has also been perceived to be unsatisfactory because of the low salary income that the healthcare workers are earning. Most of them believe that they are not fairly compensated. Overwork and underpaid is the perfect description given. As a result, some decided to resign and change to a more high-paying jobs or stay and take double shifts to earn more. However, taking double shifts induce their overall

wellbeing at risk. Stress, lack of rest and sleep result to short temper and low body resistance and immunity further resulting to conflict at work and sick leaves.

International nursing students who are accomplishing their clinical practices here in Finland also suffer from the lack of supervisors who could mentor them in the hospitals or other healthcare institutions using the English language as a means of communication. This issue highlights the lack of nurses who has the capacity to guide international students as well as exchange students using the universal language. This restricts the chance of the students to learn.

On the technical side, broken computers, defective beds, faulty doors, and other equipment that need to be fixed had to wait on queue due to limited workers who can check and do the work to fix it. This resulted to health workers sharing computers thus limiting the speed to finish their job, delay in admitting patients to the ward and most often patient is sent to another ward since there are no more room or bed for that patient. These problems are considered as minor but because of the limited workers available it emanates a bigger burden to the health care industry.

As for the nurses, it has been identified that their workload is high however the compensation that they get is lower than they deserve. This in turn resulted to resignations and changing of profession thus increasing the demand of nurses globally. Nursing union also hold strike to express their dissatisfaction over the wages they currently receive with the workload that they have especially during the time of the Covid-19 pandemic. Nurses have been flexible and credible in their work amidst the exhaustion that they felt because of the weight of their workload. But there is a limit to this that the government should not overlook. (International Council of Nurses 2022.)

5 Discussion

5.1 Evaluation of the Process

The shortage of healthcare workers in the healthcare sectors has been a long-standing problem and has become more acute lately because of several contributing factors like the declining quality of education and training of health workers and unemployment. These are due to insufficient resources of the government to absorb health workers caused by monetary limitations in some countries notably in low- and middle-income countries. (WHO 2021.) While in the first-world countries, the problem comes from health workers, especially nurses, resigning and changing professions on the ground that either they feel that it is not the profession for them after working for some time or they look for a more high-paying job, or female healthcare workers who had to choose between career and raising a family (Haddad & et.al 2020). With different reasons, the problem still comes down to one which is the deficit of the quantity of healthcare workers working in the healthcare industry.

5.2 Validity and Ethical Issues

The content of this portfolio thesis has been gathered from the learning diary and observations made during the clinical placements done in different venues. No patients' information has been revealed, and the confidentiality of the people involved during the gathering of the data and the places where the clinical placements were done has been maintained and respected.

5.3 Future Development Needs

From the observations and learning diary gathered, the manpower shortage in the healthcare industry made an immense impact on the patients and the healthcare workers. Even if the patient care and safety are the focus of the healthcare workers, they are still humans in which their body feel exhaustion and their mind get tired from everyday stress resulting to either of them getting sick or resigning from their job and look for a less stressful and better paying jobs. The nurse strike that happened while the learning diary for this portfolio was written, was the healthcare workers' way of expressing their grievances to the government that the problem of manpower shortage will continue if they do not heed to the message conveyed.

In the African region, giving trainings to healthcare workers has been advised and promotion of Public Health Workers' programmes has been enhanced as well. To retain the current staffs and too be able to attract other health workers who left to find a better paying jobs, greater incentives has been offered. (WHO 2017.)

Multiple solutions and laws have been proposed to solve the increasing problem. However, its implementation should be carried out to ensure the future and stability of the industry and the security and safety of both the patients, clients, and the health workers. The industry should consider the needs of the health workers to decrease the cases of burn outs while maintaining an outstanding and safe care to patients and clients. It is paramount that workplaces motivate and acknowledge the workers to reinvigorate and preserve them and avoid their inclination of leaving the industry. The advancement of the technology in the healthcare industry should also not be a detrimental to the health workers' job of giving direct care to their patients. (Haddad & et.al. 2022.)

This problem has been ongoing for a long time, and it is about time that policy makers and healthcare authorities act soon before it is too late.

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