



The Role of Aga Khan University in the Development of Nursing in Pakistan

Salma Amin Rattani*

Assistant Professor, School of Nursing and Midwifery, Aga Khan University, Karachi, Pakistan

***Corresponding Author:** Salma Amin Rattani, Assistant Professor, School of Nursing and Midwifery, Aga Khan University, Karachi, Pakistan.

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Abstract

Aga Khan University, Pakistan started as a school of nursing enrolled its first batch of General Nursing Diploma in 1980 and in 1983 chartered as the first private university uplifted the profile of nursing from diploma to doctorate. In 2010, the university phased-out its first program and shifted to a baccalaureate degree education in nursing. This path is now followed at the national level. Accordingly, since 2020 in Pakistan enrollment in nursing is through baccalaureate. This paper briefs about the role of Aga Khan University past four decades particular to nursing in the country.

Keywords: Nursing; Pakistan; Aga Khan University; Higher Education

Introduction

This paper briefly describes the historical background of nursing in Pakistan and its transition in the country from 1947 until the first quarter of 2020. A major piece of the historical background cites Hafiza Hemani, who submitted her thesis to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Nursing in 1996 [1].

In 1947 when Pakistan became independent and the colonial rule ended, the majority of non-Muslim nurses migrated to India and the British nursing sisters left for England. There was no school of nursing left in operation in Pakistan. As an immediate measure, the government initiated training of nursing in those school which had operated before the partition. The three main training institutions where nursing education was restored were Lady Reading Hospital, Peshawar; Civil Hospital, Karachi; and Mayo, Lahore. In 1948 new schools of nursing that established were Sir Ganga Ram Hospital in Lahore, and Jinnah Hospital in Karachi. This development was followed by the commencement of other schools of nursing in Bahawalpur, Hyderabad, and Multan. Nurses were categorized in four ways; grad "A" nurses were fully trained in the nursing men, women and children. Grade "B" nurses were trained in nursing women and children. Assistant nurses were trained in practical nursing. Existing Assistant Nurses were the same as the assistant nurses [1].

Progress of nursing in Pakistan

In 1950 it was approved that instead of four, there would be only two grades of nurses, a general nurse, and an assistant nurse. The admission criteria for general nursing stated that girls should not be less than 17 years of age and the preference would be given to unmarried, widowed and childless women. Candidates were to have passed eight grades of schooling and were be able to read and write English. For nursing assistants, the criteria were the same, except that educational qualifications were lower, and simply stipulated that students should be able to read and write Urdu. Both types of nurses could be trained in the same institution in a separate class for three years, with three months of preliminary training at the beginning of the program. Men were not allowed to take the nursing assistant course, but they could take up general nursing after they had passed matriculation (grade 10th). An examination after the first and third years of their education was given for both categories of students. The curriculum included anatomy and physiology, medical-surgical nursing, fundamentals of nursing, hygiene and sanitation [1,2]. In the 1950s, certificates were issued after three years of general nursing following midwifery education. Later in the 1960s, following the improvement in the nursing curriculum, certificates were superseded by diplomas [1].

In 1951, the World Health Organization (WHO) initiated a three-month-long preliminary school with the help of a few nationally trained staff nurses as trainers. The preliminary provided a sort

of orientation to the profession of the student before joining it as a full-fledged student nurse. Gradually, the nursing education system became more formally organized. After three years the WHO withdrew leaving the school in the hands of national trainers. Gradually, in the country, the nursing education system became more formally organized. Schools were better equipped with teaching material provided by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) [1].

In 1955 nursing curriculum was revised and the draft was presented to the Pakistan Nursing Council (PNC), which established in 1948, is the regulatory body constituted under the Pakistan Nursing Council Act (1952, 1973) [3], by this time most of the applicants to nursing had achieved matriculation. Therefore, at its annual meeting in 1959, the PNC decided to upgrade the entrance educational level for registered nurses to matriculation and grade eight for midwifery education. It was also decided to abolish the grade "B" and other nursing levels and progress with only one general nursing level that is level "A" [1].

To fulfill the need of nurses with advanced preparation in teaching and nursing service administration in the early 1950s consideration was given to the establishment of an institution in Pakistan that could offer a program of advanced study in the areas of administration and teaching. In 1955, a college of nursing was proposed as a Health and Sanitation Project under the office of the Director-General of Health in collaboration with an agency of the Government of the United States of America, the Agency for International Development as it was then called. In 1955 the project of establishing a national post-graduate education program was approved to prepare sister tutors for hospitals, schools of nursing, and health agencies throughout the country. The long-range objective over ten years to develop a degree program which would have sufficiently high standards to be accepted by the University of Karachi [1]. However, this objective could not be achieved.

Started as a medical complex in 1980 with a General Nursing Diploma Programme (RN) [4], Aga Khan University (AKU) is the first private, self-governing university in Pakistan that received its charter on March 16, 1983 [5]. This brought nursing education under the umbrella of a university and permitted higher education in nursing and midwifery in Pakistan. In 1988 a Post RN BScN, in 1997 BScN [4], in 2013 Post RM BScM [6], in 2001 MScN [4] and 20015 Ph.D. in Nursing [7] started at AKU. Moving towards higher education, in 2010, AKU phased out the General Nursing Diploma Programme [4]. This journey was through the investment and mobilization of resources as highlighted by the chancellor His Highness Aga Khan IV through his address on the occasion of receiving the University's Charter. The chancellor said that AKU should

"... become an international university, able to mobilise resources from other countries, to coordinate international research, and to encourage the exchange of ideas between nations" [8]. Guided through the Chancellor's vision AKU has invested and built partnerships with international universities in North America, Europe, Australia, and Asia [9]. In nursing, this partnership has benefited nurses that they attained education at AKU and or its partner universities and obtained Post RN BScN/BScN/ Post RM BScM/Masters/Doctorate qualification. Among these graduates, many are in the leading positions in Pakistan. Thus, AKU leads the transformation of the profession of nursing and nurses in the country and this journey is to be continued. At present at the country level General Nursing Diploma is phased out and from 2020 entry in nursing is through admission in BScN. There are many nursing institutions offering undergraduate and graduate degree programs either through holding a position as a university or through their affiliation with other universities.

Conclusion

In Pakistan Aga Khan University has played a vital role in the transformation of nursing started with a diploma and has led to a doctorate in nursing. These trends are followed by other institutions in the country. In most of these institutions nurse leaders, educators or administrators are those who attained education at AKU and or through AKU at its partner universities.

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Conflict of Interest

I declare no conflict of interest financially or personally. I also like to mention that my connection with AKU started in 1981 as a student Diploma in nursing and this relationship is continued till date. At present, I am a nursing faculty AKU and also a candidate doctorate at the University of Alberta, Canada. I have no obligations to write about AKU or nursing in Pakistan. This paper is just a small contribution from me to say thank you to the institution and the profession.

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