

Hong Kong Scenario

The Development of Nurse Practitioner Education Program

The First Master of Science Nurse Practitioner Program commenced in 2001 in the Department of Nursing and Health Sciences (now School of Nursing) at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University. Initially, the Yale School of Nursing in the USA was invited and agreed to provide consultative teaching for our Master's students to prepare them to become Adult Health Nurse Practitioners (NP) in Hong Kong. The aim of the program is to offer experienced registered nurses an opportunity to develop the knowledge, understanding and competencies to function effectively as Adult Nurse Practitioners and as nurse leaders in meeting the changing needs of Hong Kong's health care system.

This program is a pioneer in developing nurse practitioners in Hong Kong. Building on Yale University's expertise in educating nurse practitioners, the program was initiated to educate a cohort of nurse practitioners; among them are some of the teaching colleagues within the School of Nursing. These students will become change agents for establishing a nurse practitioner-prepared workforce in Hong Kong.

The Establishment of the NP Position

The initiative to develop an education program for nurse practitioners is supported by the Hospital Authority, which is the largest employer of nurses in Hong Kong. The Hospital Authority has indicated that a Master's degree with a clinical focus will be required for promotion, and that the position of Advanced Practice Nurse was introduced in 2003-2004. It is envisioned that the nurse practitioner's role would be more visible and a planning group would need to be established to delineate the roles of Nurse Practitioners (NP) and to discuss related-regulations in Hong Kong. There is speculation that those who have specialized education and training at the master's degree level might need to be certified or licensed.

Nurse clinics have been set-up in hospitals and community settings. These clinics are now run by registered nurses with advanced academic and clinical experience. Currently these clinics have been established in specific areas such as midwifery clinics, diabetic clinic, continence clinic, stoma clinic, etc. The nurse practitioners, with the support of the medical team, focus on health maintenance, disease prevention, counseling and patient education in a wide variety of settings and within different specialties. These nurses can diagnose and manage common chronic illnesses. The nurse clinic provides nurse-led services operating within an established framework to ensure standard of care, continuity of service and appropriate accountability. Nurse Practitioners are professionally accountable for their practice; they must also be given the authority to make decisions in the best interests of patients and within the scope of practice supported by medical team.

The establishment of nurse clinics in HA hospitals is still at developmental stage. It is understood that important issues such as: legal authority for prescribing, professional liability, regulation of independent practice certification and registration needs to be established by the Hong Kong Nursing Council.

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