

Men in Nursing, One Possible Solution to the Nursing Shortage. Dennis Bost RN; Nurse, Nursing Administration/CECR, North Shore University Hospital

Abstract

It is well known that there is a nursing shortage. It is anticipated that the shortage will worsen in the very near future. Estimates range from a deficit of 285,000 nurses to as many as 500,000 nurses. Regardless of the actual figures, these shortages will be unprecedented and unlike any experienced in the past. As the nursing shortage continues to escalate, having more men enter into nursing has been proposed as one possible solution. In 2008, men comprised approximately 7% of the nursing workforce. Despite having a documented history dating back to 250 BC, there is limited information and research regarding the male nurse population. Tapping into the male population and having an influx of males into nursing could prove to be extremely beneficial to healthcare in general and the nursing profession specifically. However, before considering this as an option, more concise demographical data on male nurses is needed. Research to determine the reason(s) men choose nursing as a career is needed. An extensive search of the literature was conducted in relation to the male nurse population. This article is a literature review pertaining to the male nurse population and is a call for further research on the subject matter.

Introduction

Men in Nursing

Of the estimated 3,063,163 nurses in the U.S., males comprise 6.6% of the nursing population (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Health Resources and Services Administration, 2010). Minimal research has been conducted on this minority population. According to Roth & Coleman (2008), the historical contributions of men to the nursing profession have been omitted from nursing textbooks, and the pronoun “she” has exclusively been used when referring to the nurse. Few male nurses were aware of the male contribution to nursing.

Men have been bestowing nursing interventions for as long as women have been, if not longer. According to Evans (2004), men had been providing care to the sick,

wounded, and dying as far back as the 4th and 5th centuries. The author reported that Nightingale established nursing as a female occupation and believed that only women should be nurses. Blackman (2009) indicated that men had dominated nursing from 250 BC until the 19th Century. Stein (as stated in Kahn, 2005) had noted that men dominated nursing during the American Civil War (1861-1865) due to the physical demands of caring for the infirmed and injured. O'Lynn (2003) voiced that men had a strong presence in nursing prior to Nightingale. MacKinnom (2007) reported that nursing schools stopped admitting men in the 19th century due to the feminization of nursing and Nightingale's influence. The author stated that Nightingale dismissed the notion of men as nurses entirely.

Nightingale (1898) believed that every woman was a nurse and that every woman made a good nurse. In his biography on Nightingale, Bloy (n.d.), wrote that Nightingale actively searched for a female specific occupation. She spent eleven years on her quest that began in 1844. Initially, Nightingale held a negative opinion of nurses and viewed them as uneducated. While in Egypt in 1850, she had positive encounters with the sisters of St. Vincent de Paul and the nursing care they provided to individuals. Nightingale viewed the sisters as organized and disciplined. It was after this experience that she reconsidered nursing as a female profession.

Improved recruitment of male nurses may be one solution that could help alleviate the nursing shortage. It is predicted that by 2020 there be a shortage of 285,000 nurses in the United States alone (Evans, 2008). Buerhaus (2008) stated that the demand for nurses will begin around 2015, will grow to an estimated 285,000 by 2020, and will escalate to 500,000 by 2025. Roth & Lance (2008) indicated that nursing positions accounted for

75% of vacant hospital positions. The American Association of Colleges of Nursing noted that in 2002, the Health Resources and Services Administration projected an increase in the shortage of nurses over the next two decades. Additionally, they revealed that according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, more than 1 million additional nurses would be required by 2012. The nursing shortage is both a national and an international concern (Clementson, 2008).

Ellis, Meeker & Hyde (2006) conducted a study that examined male nursing students to identify why there were few men in nursing. The research participants believed that nursing school curriculum was developed by women and geared towards women. This important finding highlights the lack of /absence of the male influence in nursing. The researchers indicated the need to employ the male nurse perspective in marketing strategies.

McMillian, Morgan & Ament (2006) purported that the majority of past research conducted on the male nurse population had been completed by disciplines outside of nursing such as psychology and sociology. Coincidentally, this Author was recently solicited to participate in research directly related to nursing being conducted by the Community Psychology Department of a very prestigious Ivy League university. Disciplines other than nursing appear to have a greater desire to learn more about nursing than nursing itself does.

If the nursing profession truly wants to encourage more men to enter into the field, more research needs to be conducted to ascertain the characteristics, attributes, etc. of those males already in nursing.

Literature Review

An extensive search of the literature was conducted on the male nurse population.

Male Nurses and the Nursing Shortage

The notion of having more men enter nursing to alleviate the nursing shortage is cited in the literature. Evans (2008) voiced that more men could be attracted to the profession if marketing strategies portrayed nursing as a career with high intensity. According to Ericksen (2007) men tend to work in the emergency department, intensive care or critical care units. MacKinnon (2007) proposed two strategies to bring more men into the profession. First, marketing nursing towards men, and secondly, to professionally support male nurses. To illustrate nursing's lack of/difficulty in recruiting men into nursing, Grencher (as cited in O'Lynn, 2004) reported that if men entered into nursing at the same rate as women, there would be no nursing shortage.

Clementson (2008) provided a historical accounting of men in nursing. She indicated that the limited number of men in nursing had been due to the barriers encountered attempting to enter and while working within the profession. The author attributes these barriers to the negative societal perceptions of men working in a female-dominated profession. O'Lynn (2004) attempted to illuminate the barriers male nursing students encountered in nursing school and in clinical settings, which the author attributes to gender-role conflict. McMillian, Morgan & Ament (2006) purported that numerous studies had attributed negative characteristics to both male nursing students and male nurses, specifically that men in nursing are effeminate and/or homosexual.

Demographics

Male nurses are younger than female nurses, tend to have an Associates degree in nursing, and are more likely to be employed in nursing as compared to female nurses (HRSA, 2004). Meadus & Twomey (2007) found that men tend to enter into nursing for practical reasons such as salary, job security, and career opportunities. The researchers indicated that “several researchers” reported as the most common reason men enter nursing was “the wish to help others” (p. 13). Weber (2008) surmised that it was the male nurse’s desire to help others and to meaningfully contribute to society as being the most common reasons men enter into nursing.

Conclusion: A call for further research

The male nursing population is miniscule in comparison to its counterpart. A review of the literature indicated that little research to date has been conducted on this particular group. What is known is limited and of little value in terms of recruitment of more men into nursing. Until more research/data are obtained on this particular population, it seems premature to conclude that the nursing shortage could be resolved by having more males enter into the profession. Just as female nurses have provided a significant contribution to healthcare and the well-being of others over the centuries, so too have male nurses.

The nursing profession needs to support and encourage all nurses. It needs to change its language to include both genders. Nursing needs to acknowledge and reduce the barriers men in nursing encounter by eliminating male nurse stereotypes, to provide male nurse mentors and role models, and to embrace the gender differences. Most importantly, research is urgently needed related to this particular population.

Recommendations

Research is essential on and about this particular population. Gaining knowledge as to why men chose nursing as a career and better identification of their perceptions about nursing would be invaluable. Obtaining accurate statistics/demographics regarding male nurses are urgently needed.

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