

Nursing Care in Mental Health: Challenges in Resource Scarce Settings

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Holistic mental health care needs the collaborative effort of psychiatrists, psychologists, psychiatric social workers, psychiatric nurses as well as occupational therapists. All the individuals involved in mental health care have their unique responsibility, without which mental health care delivery is compromised.

As per the Mental Health Atlas 2011, majority of underdeveloped and developing countries are struggling to provide holistic mental health care to the people in need [1]. Globally, nurses constitute the most prevalent mental health professional (5.8 per 100,000 population) to provide mental health care [1]. So far the mental health resources are concerned, African and South East Asian countries have 0.61 and 0.77 nurses respectively for every 100,000 population in comparison to global median rate of 5.8 per 100,000 populations [1]. All over the world, there are very few nurses associated with mental health settings (1.67%) [2]. In European, Western pacific and American countries the proportion are 4.53, 2.30 and 2.14 respectively, where as in African and South East Asian countries, it is found to be 0.56 and 0.76 respectively for every 100,000 population [2]. The above data indicates about the gross global scarcity of mental health nurses [2]. So far the psychiatric units of general hospitals are concerned, the global median rate of 0.31 nurses per 100,000 populations [2]. There is scarcity of all mental health resources including mental health nurses in developing countries like India [3]. In low income countries the rate is 0.07 and in high income countries, it is 5.99 per 100, 000 population [2]. In the psychiatric units of South East Asian countries, there

are 0.05 nurses' per 100,000 populations [2]. In the community mental health settings of South East Asian countries, there are 0.01 nurses per 100,000 populations [2].

Globally, it is found that 71% of countries do not allow nurses to prescribe medicines, whereas 26% countries allow it with some restriction and 3% countries without any restriction [1]. Globally 13% countries have the law or policy to permit primary health care nurses to independently diagnose and treat mental health disorder in primary care settings, however in South East Asian Region (SEAR), there is no such law or policy [1]. Though in many developing and most underdeveloped countries, nurses involve in prescribing other than routine nursing care, but they were either not formally trained or inadequately trained in prescribing drugs [2]. In the developed countries, nurses are adequately trained and play a pivotal role in mental health care delivery [2].

As per the survey data from World Health organization (WHO), across the globe, nurses are involved in various activities related to delivery of mental health like [2]:

- Primary health care
- Promotion & prevention of mental health
- Psychiatric rehabilitation
- Pharmacological, psychosocial as well as occupational management & follow-up
- Assisting doctors/ psychiatrists
- Psycho-education
- Teaching and training (mental health nursing)
- Referral services
- Independent consultation

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- Management of mental health services
- Developing mental health nursing policy
- Research

In resource, poor settings with inadequate training and exposure these responsibilities are difficult to be dealt with. It is likely to compromise the quality of mental health care. As per the mental health Atlas 2011, in India, 0.301 psychiatrist, 0.166 nurses, 0.047 psychologists and 0.033 social workers per 100,000 populations are working in different sectors of mental health [4]. So far the training of mental health professionals in educational institutions is concerned, 0.0364 psychiatrists, 0.016 nurses, 0.010 psychologists and 0.003 social workers per 100,000 population, are trained [4]. These figures reflect the scarcity of mental health professionals in delivery of mental health care delivery and grossly inadequate training of the existing manpower.

Due to scarcity of nurses, inadequate training, nurses have to face a lot of challenges in delivering the mental health care. The burden of nurses further increased due to scarcity of other mental health professionals like: psychiatrists, psychologists, psychiatric social workers, pharmacists and occupational therapists. In resource poor settings, nurses have to bear additional responsibilities, which are supposed to be dealt by other mental health professionals. This ultimately compromises the quality of mental health care. Another big challenge that all mental health professionals face, so also the nurses is enormous social stigma related to mental illnesses.

In most of the undeveloped countries and developing countries, there is inadequate spending on mental health, so the mental health professionals including the nurses have to work in a compromised condition to provide the best possible mental health service.

There is a need to focus on increasing, empowering as well as enabling the mental health professionals including the nurses to provide a quality mental health care.

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