AN ASSESSMENT OF THE HEALTH HUMAN RESOURCE
DEVELOPMENT PROVISIONS OF THE PHILIPPINE NURSING ACT
OF 2002

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of Master of Public Policy

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Republic Act No. 9173, or the *Philippine Nursing Act of 2002* enunciates a bevy of incentives under its Health Human Resource Production, Utilization and Development provisions, intended to stem the rising tide of Filipino nurses leaving the country to work overseas. Under Sections 30 to 34 of the Nursing Act, these incentives include the following: (1) upgrading the minimum base salary of nurses from salary grade 10 to 15; (2) establishing a nurse specialty program in government hospitals to upgrade the nurses’ skills whereby recipients of the program are required to work in government hospitals for two years; and (3) the provision of other benefits such as scholarship grants, free medical care, etc. These provisions are the government’s policy response to mitigate the impact of nurses’ migration and retain an adequate supply of skilled Filipino nurses in the country:

This research is a qualitative study that seeks to assess the health human resource development provisions and their implementation and aims to help improve them. This study examines the responsiveness of the provisions to the needs of nurses, and identifies the deficiencies of the provisions by looking into the working conditions of nurses in two Philippine government hospitals. It also examines the processes and the factors affecting the implementation of the provisions.

This study employed a combination of four data collection methods: (1) focus group interviews of nurses working in two Philippine government hospitals, (2) key informant interviews of officials of government agencies and private organizations tasked to implement the health human resource development provisions, (3) document analyses, and (4) researcher’s field notes/journal. The researcher conducted five focus group interviews with a total of 15 nurse participants and 12 key informant interviews.

The nurses are working under conditions of low salaries and heavy workload, that is characterized by low nurse-to-patient ratios in the National and LGU Hospitals. The problems of inadequate nurse staffing, large number
of patients and inadequate supplies in the two government hospitals are identified as causes for the heavy workload of nurses. The nurses want a salary increase that is commensurate to their heavy workload, their professional qualifications and long years of service. For the nurses, a salary increase signifies the government’s recognition of their dedication, hard work, and commitment to provide health care to Filipinos despite working under dire circumstances. The nurse specialty training program in areas such as oncology, nephrology, critical care, etc. has not been implemented because of the limited capacities of government hospitals to provide this kind of training and the lack of regulatory framework for the practice of nurse specialists in the Philippines. The other benefits have not been implemented as well.

The provisions of the Nursing Act are deficient because they do not address the causes of the heavy workload of nurses. To improve the work conditions of nurses, the Philippine government needs to prioritize to the long-neglected health sector by increasing the budgetary allocation in order to create more nurse positions in government hospitals, to provide adequate supplies and equipment for government hospitals and to improve the facilities for nurses.
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### TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page No.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER ONE</strong></td>
<td><strong>INTRODUCTION</strong></td>
<td>– 1-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1.</td>
<td>Background and Research Problem</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2.</td>
<td>Research Objectives</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3.</td>
<td>The Researcher</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4.</td>
<td>Significance of the Study</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5.</td>
<td>Structure of the Thesis</td>
<td>4-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CHAPTER TWO</strong></td>
<td><strong>REVIEW OF LITERATURE</strong></td>
<td>– 6-40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.</td>
<td>History of the Migration of Filipino Nurses</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.</td>
<td>The Stock and Flow of Nurses in the Philippines</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4.</td>
<td>Push and Pull Factors</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4.1.</td>
<td>Wages</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4.2.</td>
<td>Professional Advancement</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4.3.</td>
<td>Working Conditions</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5.</td>
<td>Globalization and International Migration</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5.1.</td>
<td>Global Shortage of Nurses – The New Pull</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5.2.</td>
<td>International Recruitment of Nurses</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6.</td>
<td>The Philippine Context</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6.1.</td>
<td>The Philippine Labor Export Policy</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6.2.</td>
<td>The Philippine Health Care System</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7.</td>
<td>Impact of Nurse Migration</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7.1.</td>
<td>Impact on the Philippine Health Care System</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.8.</td>
<td>Nurse Retention Policies</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.8.1.</td>
<td>The Philippine Policies</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.8.1.1. The Philippine Nursing Act of 2002</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.9.</td>
<td>Summary of the Review of Literature</td>
<td>39-40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER THREE  RESEARCH METHODOLOGY  –  41-62

3.1 Introduction 41

3.2 Theoretical Perspectives 41

3.3 Research Design and Its Limitation 45

3.3.1 Data Collection Methods 47

3.3.1.1 Focus Group Interviews 47

3.3.1.2 Key Informant Interviews 53

3.3.1.3 Documents and Records Analyses 54

3.3.1.4 Researcher’s Field Notes/Journal 55

3.4 Validity of the Research Findings 55

3.5 Research Ethics 57

3.6 Data Analysis 58

3.6.1 Role of the Researcher 58

3.6.2 Presentation and Organization of Data 59

3.7 Summary of the Research Methodology 61-62

CHAPTER FOUR  THE WORKING CONDITIONS OF NURSES  –  63-127

4.1 Introduction 63

4.2 Description of the Nurses and the Hospitals 64

4.2.1 The Nurses 64

4.2.2 The Hospitals 65

4.2.2.1 The LGU Hospital 66

4.2.2.2 The National Hospital 66

4.2.2.3 The Nursing Service Organization - LGU and National Hospitals 70

4.3 The Working Conditions of the Nurses 74

4.3.1 Dissatisfaction with Salaries 74

4.3.1.1 Many Duties and Responsibilities 74

4.3.1.2 Professional Qualifications and Years of Service 77

4.3.1.3 Costs of Living 77

4.3.1.4 Salaries in Other Government Hospitals 78

4.3.1.5 Salaries in the Private Sector 79

4.3.1.6 Summary - Dissatisfaction with Salaries 81
4.3.2. Heavy Workload
4.3.2.1. Summary - Heavy Workload

4.3.3. Low Nurse-to-Patient Ratio
4.3.3.1. Inadequate Nurse Staffing
- LGU Hospital Nurse Staffing
- National Hospital Nurse Staffing
- Summary - Inadequate Staffing

4.3.4. Large Number of Patients
4.3.4.1. LGU Hospital Patient Census
4.3.4.2. National Hospital Patient Census
4.3.4.3. Summary - Patient Census

4.3.5. Factors to Inadequate Nurse Staffing & Other Work Conditions
4.3.5.1. The Migration of Nurses
4.3.5.2. The "Politics" in Health
- Hiring, Promotion & Security of Tenure
- Filling up of Vacancies
4.3.5.3. Decreasing Budgetary Allocation for Health
- Lack of Equipment & Supplies
4.3.5.4. Summary - Factors to Inadequate Nurse Staffing & Other Work Conditions

4.3.6. The Nurses’ Working Hours & Coping Mechanism
4.3.6.1. Extended Working Hours
4.3.6.2. No Overtime Pay
4.3.6.3. Nurses’ Coping Mechanism
4.3.6.3. Summary - Working Hours & Coping Mechanism

5.1. Introduction

5.2. Implementation
5.2.1. Salary Increase
5.2.1.1. Processes Done
5.2.1.2. Reasons for Non-Implementation
- Differing Nurse Salary Schemes
- Salary Increase for Other Health Care Professionals
- DOH Reorganization
5.2.2. Nurse Specialty Program
5.2.2.1. Processes Done
5.2.2.2. Reasons for Non-Implementation

5.2.3. Other Provisions
5.2.3.1. Health Care Benefits
5.2.3.2. Training & Scholarship Grants
5.2.3.3. Health Human Resource Development Plan

5.2.4. Summary- Implementation

5.3. What Do Nurses Want?
5.3.1. Salary Increase
5.3.1.1. Intentions to Migrate
5.3.1.2. Salary as a Form of Recognition

5.3.2. Professional Advancement Opportunities:
Additional Income

5.3.3. Alleviating the Heavy Workload
5.3.3.1. Effect on the Nurses’ Well-being
5.3.3.2. Effect on the Quality of Care
5.3.3.3. Effect on Patient Safety

5.3.4. Full Implementation of the Magna Carta
for Public Health Workers

5.3.5. Funds for the Health Sector

5.3.6. Summary - ‘What Do Nurses Want?’

CHAPTER SIX CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS — 163-174

6.1. Introduction

6.2. Conclusion

6.3. Recommendation for Policy Directions
6.2.1. Create Additional Nurse Positions in Government Hospitals
6.2.2. Mix of Financial and Non-Financial Incentives
6.2.3. Review of the Magna Carta for Public Health Workers
# LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure/Table</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page no.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1.</td>
<td>Organizational Structure - LGU Hospital</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2.</td>
<td>Organizational Structure - National Hospital</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3.</td>
<td>Nursing Service Organization – LGU Hospital</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4.</td>
<td>Nursing Service Organization – National Hospital</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5.</td>
<td>Number of Nurses Resigning from LGU Hospital (1998-2006)</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 1.</td>
<td>Nurse Positions in the National and LGU Hospitals</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2.</td>
<td>Adequate vs. Actual Number of Nurses &amp; Nursing Attendants – LGU Hospital (Jan – Dec 2006)</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3.</td>
<td>Nursing Human Resources – LGU Hospital (March 2007)</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4.</td>
<td>Nursing Staff Detailed to Other Offices – LGU Hospital (March 2007)</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5.</td>
<td>Nurse Staffing By Clinical Departments – LGU Hospital (May 2007)</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 6.</td>
<td>Nursing Service Distribution – National Hospital - (June 2007)</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 7.</td>
<td>LGU Hospital Daily Patient Census (June 1-20, 2007)</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 8.</td>
<td>Daily &amp; Monthly Census of Patients – National Hospital (Jan – Sept. 2007)</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 9.</td>
<td>Resigned &amp; Retired Nursing Staff - National Hospital (2005 &amp; 2006)</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 10.</td>
<td>Current Salary Grades of the Nursing Personnel - LGU &amp; National Hospitals</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 11.</td>
<td>Proposed Salary Scale Upgrading of - Nurses’ Salaries</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ACRONYMS

DBM - Department of Budget and Management
DOH – Department of Health
DR – Delivery Room
ER – Emergency Room
EVP – Exchange Visitor Program
FGI - Focus Group Interview
GAA – General Appropriations Act
HHRDB – Health Human Resources Development Bureau
ICN – International Council of Nurses
ICU – Intensive Care Unit
ILO – International Labor Organization
IOM – International Organization for Migration
LGU – Local Government Unit
NLPGN – National League of Philippine Government Nurses
OB-Gyne – Obstetrics-Gynecology
OECD – Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PNA – Philippine Nurses Association
POEA – Philippine Overseas Employment Agency
PRC – Professional Regulation Commission
RA – Republic Act
US – United States
UK – United Kingdom
WHO – World Health Organization