



Canadian Nursing Students' Association
Association des étudiant(e)s infirmier(ère)s du Canada

Position Statement

Global Health in Undergraduate Nursing Education- An Essential Component

Approved by: 2017 National Assembly, Canadian Nursing Students' Association

Submitted: December 2nd, 2016

Submitted to: CNSA Board of Directors

Submitted with revisions: January 4th, 2017

Submitted with revisions to: CNSA Board of Directors

Submitted by: Global Health Committee 2016-2017

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Introduction

Presently in Canada, the vast majority of nursing stakeholders at the provincial and territorial level have explicitly named global health as an entry-to-practice competency required by future nurses (Association of Registered Nurses of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2013; Association of Registered Nurses of Prince Edward Island, 2011; College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta, 2013; College of Registered Nurses of British Columbia, 2015; College of Registered Nurses of Manitoba, 2013; College of Registered Nurses of Nova Scotia, 2015; College of Nurses of Ontario, 2014; Registered Nurses Association of the Northwest Territories and Nunavut, 2014; Nurses Association of New Brunswick, 2013). However, there are two territorial and provincial stakeholders with notable absences of global health competencies in their entry-to-practice standards. Both the Saskatchewan Registered Nurses Association (SRNA) and Yukon Registered Nurses Association (YRNA) do not explicitly mention global health or global health research in their entry-to practice competencies (SRNA, 2013; YRNA, 2013).

Provincial nursing stakeholders often use terms including the need to possess “understanding” or “knowledge” about global health in their practice. These terms do not easily translate into action by nurses or working towards a goal of having nurses and nursing students truly engaged with global health at the local or international level. The Canadian Nurses



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Association's (CNA) (2009) position on global health asserts that nurses must possess *more* than knowledge (or understanding) of global health and related concepts. The Canadian Nursing Students' Association (CNSA) believes that knowledge and research in global health must lead to action, not merely an understanding. This will enable nurses to take an active role in promoting health for all, and advocating internationally and locally. Nursing students must learn to recognize, develop, and implement global health principles within their everyday practice in every all settings.

Background

Global health has many definitions but is 'an area for study, research, and practice that places a priority on improving health and achieving equity in health for all people worldwide' (Wilson et al., 2016). Nurses can play a critical role in the provision of global health, achieving health equity, and ensuring universal access to health care services worldwide (ibid). However, this requires nursing education to include global health content in order to educate and prepare nursing students to work in an increasingly globalized world. As a result, there has been an increased awareness regarding the importance of global health education for students in health care professions (ibid).

Nursing education needs to challenge future nurses to engage with communities outside the biomedical setting and prepare them to be global citizens (Turale, 2015). Nursing educators stress that nursing students not only need to be aware of global health issues, but must also learn strategies to facilitate health equity and tackle social justice issues (Wilson, 2016). Despite the call for more global health in entry-to-practice nursing education, the fundamentals of global health continue to be absent from nursing programs curricula across Canada (Chavez, Bendery, Hardiez, & Gastaldo, 2010). Most Canadian nursing students report little or no formal education regarding content necessary to developing a global health perspective (Chavez et al., 2010).

The CNA has developed a three-stage curricular reform approach to implementing global health content in nursing programs. Most Canadian nursing programs have already utilized "add-on," the first stage where global health content is added into the current curriculum without major changes (CNA, 2008). The second stage is "infusion," where global views are a core component of the course (ibid). The third stage is "transformation," often viewed as an immersion experience where nursing students participate in a global experience (ibid). Though the third stage is the most difficult to implement, the CNA notes it produces the greatest results in terms of global health education (ibid).

During the 2016 year, the CNSA completed a survey-based exploration of current academic global health opportunities available at current chapter schools. We received responses from 26 chapter schools from each CNSA region. These schools represent a great diversity in the nursing programs offered and populations of nursing program cohorts. We found that over 80% of respondents reported being dissatisfied with the academic global health opportunities



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available at their current institution for entry-to-practice nursing students. Additionally, over 95% of respondents reported that they were not aware of any formal recognition offered for involvement in academic global health at their institutions available to nursing students (i.e. independent or embedded certificates, minors).

Canadian Nursing Students' Association (CNSA) Position

The CNSA believes it is imperative for all Canadian nursing students to be exposed to academic global health within their entry-to-practice curriculum. CNSA supports the notion that global health content should be compulsory within nursing programs across Canada. Recognizing that global health is not only within an international context but also within our local environment, CNSA believes all nursing students should be learning about global health throughout their program beginning in the first year of their respective programs.

Mill, Astle, Ogilvie, and Gastaldo (2010) support this notion arguing that nursing in higher education has “shared responsibilities for examining global challenges,” (p. E2). In an increasingly globalized health care context, nursing students no longer only have the responsibility of learning about their immediate communities, but have a responsibility to be leaders, teachers, caregivers, and innovators in our global community (Mill et al., 2010).

CNSA aspires to be the primary resource for nursing students across Canada and thus will continue to promote global health opportunities for nursing students across Canada through regional and national conferences, and committee work. CNSA supports building strategic, ethical, and mutual partnerships with various global health organizations to better facilitate opportunities in global health for CNSA members. Such organizations with similar objectives include the Canadian Society for International Health (CSIH), the Canadian Coalition for Global Health Research (CCGHR), and the newly founded Global Association for Student and Novice Nurses (GASNN).

Relation to Curriculum

According to Canadian Association of Schools of Nursing (CASN, 2015), it is essential for nursing programs to prepare their students so that they can demonstrate an ability to conduct holistic and comprehensive assessments of various patients with unique healthcare needs. In particular, students should have adequate knowledge of the relationship between primary health care, health disparities, the social determinants of health, and the healthcare needs of equity seeking groups across the world (ibid).

Without the inclusion of global health in entry-to-practice nursing education, our profession could face barriers in the provision of culturally competent care that meets the unique needs of the Canadian population or within our global context (Lim et al., 2013). According to Gahagan (2016), nursing curricula in North America are lacking a true understanding of competent and effective action towards global health disparities across the world. Additionally,



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marginalized populations often experience discrimination and stigma within the healthcare system and from healthcare providers (ibid). The universities that do have active global health curricula within their nursing programs offer few opportunities, which usually consist of support courses, or electives.

Conclusion

Global health must be a priority in every educational nursing institution, integrated by all nursing educators, and understood and acted upon by all nursing students. Canada's nursing stakeholders have a general lack of harmonization in the practice standards that they expect nursing students to be exposed to in relation to global health through their entry-to-practice education. While Canadian nursing stakeholders mention and encourage global health knowledge and understanding, but this is not sufficient because this does not often translate into nurses taking action (CNA, 2009). As one examines the evidence that exists relating to nursing and global health, it seems irrational for Canadian nursing program curricula to not teach these concepts as global health and nursing as inextricably linked. CNSA believes that nursing students must receive comprehensive, culturally safe, and evidence-informed global health education throughout their nursing program, as well as opportunities to engage in global health on an international and local scale. CNSA believes that our health is the planet's health and that the nursing profession can no longer dissociate the health of our local and global communities in nursing education.

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