30 YEAR FOLLOW-UP ON NURSES RESPONDING TO LOCAL AND GLOBAL VULNERABILITIES

Background Information

From its very inception, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement has worked towards assisting vulnerable people, and as long as their profession has existed, nurses – as health care professionals – have been ready to respond to public health threats in different settings. Today, more than 150 years after the birth of the Red Cross, health and care for the most vulnerable is still a key concern. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), through its guiding document Strategy 2020, carries out its responsibility towards improving the global health situation. 30 years after its ground-breaking 1979 nursing survey, the IFRC is asking all member National Societies about their nursing activities, including training of nurses, nursing and community health, nursing and disaster situations, nursing and blood transfusions, Red Cross Principles and the Geneva Conventions, and the utilization of nurses’ competence within the National Society.

Aims

The aims of this research study were:

- to perform a 30-year follow-up of the International Federation’s 1979 data and to compare the results in order to investigate to what extent nurses’ competences are utilized within the Red Cross/Red Crescent Societies

- to identify National Societies who are running nursing education programmes and, by sending a questionnaire to these teaching institutions, investigate in what way and to what extent the different nursing education programmes contribute to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the International Federation’s Global Agenda. This report covers the first aim of the research project.

Material and method

The questionnaire from 1979 was slightly adapted to reflect the current health situation of the National Societies; e.g. questions about HIV/AIDS were added and sent to all 186 National Societies. The questionnaire was translated into all four of the IFRC’s official
languages. After two reminders, 84/186 replies were received, giving a response rate of 45.2%. Among the 79 National Societies that responded to the 1979 survey, 43 (54.4%) responded to the 2009 survey.

Nurses’ added value

Most National Societies consider that nurses are important in responding to humanitarian needs and health threats in the community. A further utilization of nurses’ competence should be considered as one vehicle to reach the goals set for the IFRC Strategy 2020.

To reach these aims, nursing institutions within the IFRC are in a unique position to give an added value to the nurses they are educating:

- As nurses are active, visible and respected in civil society, they hold an important role in recognizing vulnerability as well as providing a voice for vulnerable people.
- Nurses also constitute an important profession that will assist within their National Societies in terms of providing education and guidance to volunteers and informal care givers in health and care work.
- Nursing is an important profession in terms of advocacy work.
- The IFRC should automatically provide nursing institutions with materials and publications for inclusion by the libraries of these institutions and to some of the individuals on their mailing list.
- The International Federation should encourage Red Cross Red Crescent nursing institutions to build a partnership network by further facilitating an in-depth survey focusing on nursing education institutions, and supporting the organization of regular international meetings.

Key Findings

The overall results show that:

- Nurses’ competence is regarded as important by a majority (76%) of the National Societies.
- More than 50 per cent of the National Societies consider nurses’ competence to be specifically important for the IFRC’s four core areas: humanitarian values, disaster preparedness, disaster response, and health and care in the community.
- Yet, a quarter of respondent National Societies do not consider nurses’ competence key in achieving their mission.
- The survey demonstrates that there are approximately the same number of nursing education institutions throughout the world today, as compared with 30 years ago.
- At some institutions a higher level of education (up to PhD) is now offered.