

LEARNING DISABILITY NURSING IN PAKISTAN; A WAY FORWARD

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INTRODUCTION

Person with disabilities in Pakistan are usually dehumanized, isolated and oppressed. There are little, if any, efforts to understand their health and social care needs. In developed nations; such as UK, USA, and European countries special facilities are provided for person with disabilities. United Nations estimates that there are about 650 million people with disabilities¹. However, accurate data regarding person with disabilities is not known in Pakistan. Limited evidence regarding the health and social care needs of person with disabilities in Pakistani context necessitates that this area should be focused in health education and research.

Post-earthquake 2005, in Pakistan, with the aid of international agencies the Physical therapy society tried their best to rehabilitate people and make their voice heard across the country. The annual disability day is also being celebrated to give person with disabilities a recognition in the mainstream society. However, the health and social care needs of people with disabilities are often neglected. Nursing profession in Pakistan is confronted to take lead and design training programmes to educate a special cadre of nursing professionals who can take care of

the unmet healthcare needs of person with disabilities.

The nursing profession in Pakistan has strived to keep its standard with international level. In the last two decades, the profession has witnessed a major transition from apprenticeship based associate diploma to the undergraduate degree BScN programme and the diploma programme will be phased out in 2018. Currently, three programmes are being offered to train nurses' i.e, Bachelor of Science in nursing (4 years), Post RN BSc N (2-years) and MSc N.

The BScN generic programme being currently offered across the country is an internationally recognized programme. The programme aims to train nurses to work in a variety of settings to cater the healthcare needs of clients, their families and communities. One weakness of the generic programme is that it does not focus on speciality areas. In United Kingdom, the undergraduate nursing programme is offered under four speciality areas that is Adult health nursing, Paediatric health nursing, Mental health nursing and Learning disability nursing. On the other hand, the current BSc N generic programme being offered in Pakistan mainly covers Adult health nursing and courses of Paediatric nursing

as well as Mental health nursing. However, the programme does not have specific modules that focus the healthcare needs of person with disabilities.

To meet the unmet needs of persons with learning disabilities there is a need to design special training programmes to prepare nurses with the required skills and knowledge in the field. One option may be to set up a BScN programme with sole focus on learning disability nursing. The programme might be offered in only a few nursing institute in the country. Other options may include post BScN speciality programmes to train nurses who aspire to work with people with learning disabilities.

At the moment, learning disability nursing is non-existent in Pakistan and nursing educators, leaders and policy makers are challenged to initiate and design programmes to tackle the diverse healthcare needs of people with learning disabilities, their families and carers.

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