



Factors Influencing the Impact of Nurses on Health Care Policy

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ABSTRACT

Background: Health care policies directly affects the nursing profession. Given that nursing is a multifaceted, interactive, interdisciplinary, and complex profession, health policies are unavoidably necessary. In order to attain quality care, accessibility, and cost-effective care to improve the quality of life and welfare of society, nurses are expected to consciously recognize the challenges and collaborate with other decision makers to initiate, influence, create, and advance current health care policies.

Purpose: To identify the elements affecting nurses' influence on health care policy and offer the advice that nurses need to support choices about the creation and application of policies.

Methods: Desktop review was done on 18 articles published between January 2001 and May 2022. PubMed, Scopus, Google Scholar and the Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature (CINAHL) databases and internet engines were searched. The following phrases were used to search for the data: "nursing policy", "politics", "health care policy", "nurses influence on policy making/politics/health policy", "nurses challenges in policy making/politics/policy", and "importance of nursing policy making/politics/health policy"

Results: According to the analysis, nurses have the ability to influence health-related decisions and affairs through their political knowledge, effective communication, and teamwork with other members of the health team. This improves the work environment for nurses and improves patient outcomes.

Conclusion: In conclusion, the researcher observed that nurses' participation in policymaking has not increased over time. Majority of the authors in this study focused on the following issues as obstacles to the development of health policies: a lack of resources, a lack of enabling structures, a negative perception of nursing, and a lack of knowledge and skills in policy making.

Recommendation: Nurse leaders play a crucial role in mentoring, supporting, and developing future nurse policy makers because nurses must be active rather than passive agents who come out to influence and take the lead in policy development. The use of health policy in nursing discipline allows for career growth by providing a guiding and driving force, where the professional body of nurses is directed towards achieving their mission and vision through their set course values and beliefs.

Key words: Health Policy, Impact, Nursing, Nurses.

1.INTRODUCTION

The ability of nurses to influence health care decisions and affairs through advocacy, power, and policy competence—acquired through policy awareness, effective communication, teamwork, and enhancing their reputations—will improve the outcomes for both nurses and patients (Ahern, 2024). Health outcomes, which are a fundamental human need, are equivalent to this patient result.

Halirezah, *et al.*, (2021) stated that, nurses comprise the major group of health care personnel who are mainly responsible for providing people with qualitative care in the rapidly changing and developing health care systems. Nurses also, offer a unique and expert perspective on every aspect of the health care system, and have a key voice in ongoing efforts to improve the health of the public (Chiu, 2021).

A study conducted by Institute of Medicine, (2011) states that, above 3 million nurses globally, makes up the single largest segment of the health care work force, and that they spend the greatest amount of time in delivering care to the patients as professionals. Nurses have valuable insights and unique abilities through experience to contribute as partners with other health care professionals in improving the quality and safety of care (ibid). Because nurses work in the hospitals and the community, it makes them to hear and know how policy and politics affects their patients and the communities as a whole, but the initiation phase of health policy development becomes a problem (Alireza, *et al.*, 2021).

In addition, nursing professionals represent 56% of the total health workforce in the world and develop both specific actions for caring for people and complementary activities to other health areas, thus good evident of being in the possession of diverse competencies to support the processes of formulation of health care policy in nursing (Fernández, Giordano & Gutiérrez, 2022)

Despite the contributions made by nurses in health care setting, study by Donley, (2005), depicts that, nurse leaders in the 21st century, faces a lot of challenges to include: nursing workforce shortages; negative affectivity; generation workforce concerns; changing delivery systems and increasing clinical practice complexity impacting them in the key role of policy development. Also, barriers to the participation of nursing leaders include the lack of involvement, insufficient knowledge and skills, negative image about nursing, lack of dynamic structures and insufficient resources (...ibid).

The Institute of Medicine, (2011), also stated that, health systems are rapidly developing and changing, therefore, nurses, as a part of this system, should move forward along with these changes. This is because, nurses bring a unique perspective to health care policy development due to their educational training, professional values and ethics, advocacy skills, and experiential background (Ferguson, 2001) with the ultimate goal of health policies being to promote public welfare (University of North Carolina Wilmington, 2021). Since 2002, WHO periodically published the "Strategic directions for strengthening nursing and midwifery", making it explicit the need for the participation of Nursing professionals in the development of health care policy, to make them more efficient and effective in achieving global health goals (Fernández., Giordano & Gutiérrez, 2022)

Hence, Health policies affect the nursing profession and healthcare in general, therefore, nurses are expected to identify the issues deliberately and work with other decision makers to develop and advance existing health care policies.

2. HEALTH POLICY

According to Halirezah, et al., (2021), World Health Organization (WHO) defined, health policies as the decisions, plans, and actions undertaken to achieve specific health care goals within a society. It is a tool which nurses must utilize to improve the safety and quality of health care (University of North Carolina Wilmington, 2021). Health policy shapes the entire health care landscape, including both patients and providers. Nurses and nurse practitioners play a direct role in shaping, implementing and assessing the health policies in their communities (University of North Dakota, 2022). It defines a vision for the future which in turn helps to establish targets and points of reference for the short and medium term. They are policies which basically are directly associated with the governmental health sector in any country and are involved in areas such as healthcare services, costs, and healthcare quality and access. Quality provision, accessibility, and cost-effectiveness improve the quality of life and welfare of society (...ibid).

2.1 Health policy and the Nurses

Policy and politics in health systems, determines health and nursing practice (White & Salvage, 2019). According to University of North Carolina Wilmington, (2021) the nurses' influence in health polices protects patient safety, increases quality of care, and facilitates their access to the required resources and promotes quality health care. We are reminded in the Sustainable Development Goals that health is interdependent and interconnected, in that the policies that most affect health are often not health policies only cuts across multi-sectoral thus should be collaborative in nature (White & Salvage, 2019).

According to university of North Dakota, (2022) the health policy' is aspirational because it's designed to show health providers the kind of outcomes they're shooting for. Additionally, health policy helps to clarify priorities; it establishes roles and expectations for different groups, whether doctors, nurses or administrators. It also helps to build a consensus among the different participants in a community or a health system. The participation of nurses in health policies development, ensures patients safety, effectiveness, accessibility, and cost-effective services.

2.3 Nurses and health policy formulation

According to Halirezah, et al., (2021), nursing staff are encouraged to participate in health policy for three reasons.

- ❖ First, nurses closely deal with patients and their families in a variety of settings; therefore, their comments can be considered as valuable sources for policy development.
- ❖ Second, different health policies have direct effects on nurses. Thus, policies should ensure a supportive work setting.
- ❖ Third, nurses play key role in professional development and can highly contributed to the formation of appropriate and efficient health policies

In addition, nurses' influence on health policy protects the quality of care by access to required recourses and opportunities they have (Arabi, *et al.*, (2014).

More so, nurses bring in a unique perspective to health care policy development because of their educational training, professional values and ethics, advocacy skills, and experiential background (University of North Carolina Wilmington, 2021)

3. FACTORS AFFECTING HEALTH POLICY DEVELOPMENT BY NURSES

Many studies have come up with several reasons for the limited nursing participation in policy and politics, which deem to influence policy development. They include but not limited to: Lack of awareness, inadequate skills, and little opportunity for involvement. Another barrier is the limited formal health care policy education in nursing, time and resources. Additionally, studies show that nurses are not given sufficient support to generate the evidence needed to influence healthcare policy (Brokaw, 2022).

The political, environmental, technological and financial pressures in health care systems affect all practical settings. These changes can make opportunities for all personnel, especially nursing staff to enhance their position and role in health care policies and management (University of North Carolina Wilmington, 2021).

According to White & Salvage, (2019), nurse leaders were among the big obstacles of health policy developed, for they make it into the settings where profound decisions that have effects on our health and health care, they are neither heard nor heeded. Gender discrimination and social class to lack of status; many have little or no preparation for roles as government nurses, nurse directors, deans or heads of nursing associations; secondly, they do not know how to influence and shape policy, even within nursing. Lack of mentoring by nursing leaders could also negatively affect their involvement in health policies development.

Additionally, Shariff, (2014), identified the following factors that act as barriers and hinder nurse leaders' participation in health policy development. The categories identified included: lack of involvement (input called upon on an ad hoc basis; lack of opportunity; lack of opportunity at various levels; lack of forums; lack of experience; lack of active participation; top down approach to policy making and poor planning on the process of problem identification); lack of knowledge and skills (which included lack of tertiary education, lack of knowledge pertaining to health policy development process and throughout the stages of policy development, as well as lack of support and confidence).

Further, negative image of nursing also contributed as category of barrier to health policy development- nurses' contribution to the policy process is not being recognized as well as lack of opportunity to be involved in health policy development; lack of enabling structures and lack of resources (institutional structures and systems exclude nurse leaders; health policies are developed at national level and then rolled down to other levels; inadequate representation

of nurse leaders; policy making positions are given to doctors; and other health professionals including doctors represent nurses and nursing issues at health policy development forums) (.ibid).

4. FACTORS ENHANCING NURSING HEALTH POLICY

According to Shariff, (2014), facilitators of health policy development comprise of:

- ❖ Being involved
- ❖ Being knowledgeable and skilled
- ❖ Being supported
- ❖ Positive image of nursing
- ❖ Enabling structures
- ❖ Provided with available resources

Being involved; Involvement included having experience and exposure; being accorded opportunity; being present at all stages of policy development; seeking opportunity for participation and being active participants.

Being knowledgeable and skilled; These included being knowledgeable and skilled in health policy development; possessing a university education; and content related to health policy being covered in the curriculum.

Being supported; included benefiting from role models, supportive mentorship and networks for support and sharing experiences.

Positive image of nursing; Nursing must be considered a valuable partner in policy development, and nurses with potential must be appointed in policy making positions while they also must engage policy makers and engage the media to change the image of nursing.

Enabling structures; included a legislature which ensures that national nurse leaders are included in policy development; a directorate of nursing services; enhancing the numbers of nurses at policy development level; nurses with ability in health policy activity; and a gender balance.

Available resources; This included having resources; having business and financial skills; and being able to mobilize them for policy making activity.

5 WAYS NURSES CAN SHAPE POLICY

Burke, (2016), identified five ways nurses can shape policy. They include:

- Learning how policy is developed. Need to seek out areas of policy you want to influence.
- Learning who is participating in policy development and making contact with them.
- Exploring resources related to policy formulation.
- Investigating in health policy agendas that local legislators have established for their terms in office.
- Volunteering to participate in policy meetings or related activities. As well as, preparing a fact sheet, or assisting in preparing a report to inform policy decision-makers. Also, informing stakeholders of activities that offer opportunities to address policymakers.

Others ways according to University of North Dakota, (2022) included:

- Analyzing existing policies and pointing out inefficiencies, missing components, or opportunities to improve the delivery or affordability of care
- Proposing new policies based on needs encountered in day-to-day practice
- Meeting with policymakers, administrators and lobbyists to provide clinical insight into policy proposal

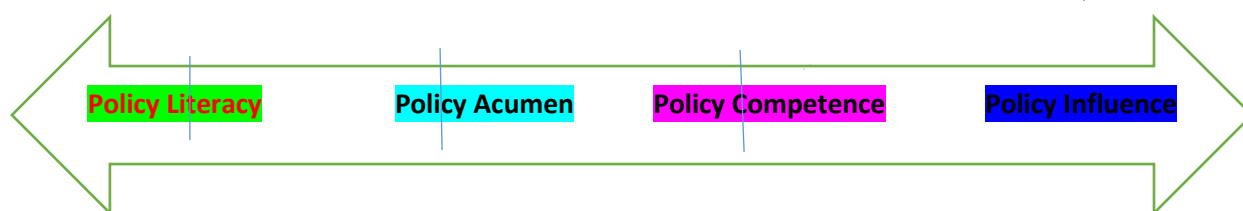
6. DESCRIPTION OF POLICY INFLUENCE

6.1 Process of policy influence

Policy influence is described as moving on a spectrum which begins from *policy literacy*, moves forward to *policy acumen*, and then continues to *policy competence* and finally to *policy influence*.

START

END



1. Policy literacy

Literacy was first introduced by malon in the 2005 and depicts that, for nurse beginners, there are two ways to practice policy literacy.

One way is referring to policy documents and asking questions, related to, What the problem is etc. and another way is to participate in especial political courses. When the abilities of beginners are developed, they can involve in *policy acumen*.

2. Policy Acumen

Policy acumen is the ability to analyze policies. When the nurses acquire *policy acumen*, they can actively analyze organizational process and health care services.

3. Policy Competence

Policy competence is mostly related to management in health care. It is believed that, managers who have acquired *policy competence* can direct their organizations in response to the challenges and opportunities related to political situations and also make policies which have desirable effects on their organizations.

4. Policy Influence

It is the final step, which refers to the nurses who are capable of giving special consultation to the governments about nursing issues and have important roles in development, implementation, and evaluation of government policies about health care.

It is important to note that, the second attribute of policy influence is *power*, which is the ability to achieve goals and also *power* is the inherent ability to influence others where the potential factors for maximum influence will be achieved by strengthening the basis of *power*.

Because *Power* is an essential aspect for leadership, nurses should acquire enough information about the presence and place of power fields, of which nurses need and should know about *power* “*power* with others” instead of “*power* on others.” This Indeed, nurses need *power* as one attribute of policy influence to protect the quality of care and to change organizations.

The third attribute of policy influence is *advocacy*, where nurses have long been known as patient *advocates*. Without involvement in health policies, *advocating* role of nurses will be ineffective and meaningless. Nurses as *advocates* should know that when they want to influence decision makers, they need to understand that they are working in an “open system,” so that they are affected by many factors. An *advocate* should ensure that everything influencing decision makers for developing a plan has been understood and considered as well as, the need to recognize conflicts as important components to success and manage them effectively.

7. SUMMARY

Therefore, it demands that nurses should be knowledgeable about all issues related to health system, and not just caring issues. It should be noted that, days of just carrying out the prescribed orders are over for nurses globally and now is the time for nurses to become health legislators and develop practical policies to be implemented at their work places.

The government both national and county government need to support the Ministry of Health in terms of proper fund to support senior nurse posts in government health sectors and elsewhere. In addition, to collaborate in producing and

implementing a national action plan for nursing as advocated by WHO, within a country's health strategy, which in turn can engage and motivate thousands of nurses and other stakeholders

Nurses' ability to be active in health policy development will help them to gain experience in policy development process, gain knowledge on health systems, policy research and developing leadership skills

7.1 WAY FORWARD

In order for the nurses to shape their present and future profession, they need to be active rather than passive agents coming out to influence and take a lead in policy development, meaning that they are required to understand not only the content related to a health issue, but also to be involved in the policy process taking into consideration the context, the stakeholders, the health of the public and their interests (White & Salvage, 2019).

It is only through well-educated and savvy nurse leaders who understand the political realities as well as the agenda-setting and policy formulation processes will health care change occur (University of North Carolina Wilmington, 2021).

Nurses need to understand the levels of power they have, and know who controls the resources of health services in their organizations, to be able to negotiate for their control those policy formulations since these policies affect their patients, families, themselves, and the whole health care system.

Nursing institutions and regulatory bodies should prepare and encourage nurses to work as policymakers rather than implementers and advocate for the rightful place of nurses at policy-making forums (Rasheed, Younas & Mehdi, 2020).

WHO emphasized that, health policy and practice require actions from multi-sectors, and decisions that are made in these sectors must be responsive and sensitive to the concern of health (University of North Carolina Wilmington, 2021). Also, they, reiterated that, the government and all health care stakeholders need to invest in nursing education, employment, and leadership, providing a vision and a plan for policies.

Because, studies pointed out that leaders play a key role in influencing policy development, they are therefore required to: Help other nurses, practice to speak in public and equip them with good communication skills so that they are comfortable participating in public discourse and boardroom discussions, as well as training other nurses how to write letters, participate in electoral office, aid in fundraise and to campaign for causes and issues and nursing policy important to them (Brokaw, 2022).

The truth is, any nurse can influence policy and politics at the local, state, and federal levels. Locally, nurses can become politically active by assuming leadership positions in the healthcare system or contacting elected officials about legislation affecting the industry. Nurses can obtain formal training in politics, become involved in city councils and committees, or even run for local office. And something as simple as exercising the right to vote can impact healthcare policy (...ibid).

According to Institute of Medicine, (2011), they pointed out that, for nurses to succeed in its policy development; they should ensure its members are well-prepared. The profession should institute residency training for nurses, increase the percentage of nurses who attain a bachelor's degree to 80 percent by the year 2020, and double the number of nurses who pursue doctoral degrees.

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