



THE NURSING EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE

Supporting the Transformation of Nursing Education in South Africa

In recent years, South Africa has embarked on an ambitious endeavor to revitalize the nursing profession throughout the country. Nurses constitute the largest single group of health care providers in South Africa and ensuring that they are adequately educated and trained is critical as the country works to address the quadruple burden of disease resulting from the HIV and TB co-epidemic, high maternal and child mortality, high levels of violence and injuries, and an increasing prevalence of non-communicable diseases. As with the scale-up of HIV treatment, nurses will be central to increasing access to quality care as South Africa works to meet a complex matrix of public health challenges.



In 2014, the U.S. President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) began the Nursing Education Partnership Initiative (NEPI) in South Africa to support the Department of Health’s effort to revitalize nursing education. Implemented by ICAP at Columbia University through the U.S. Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), NEPI set out to support the development of three model nursing and midwifery education programs that could be scaled up nationally, producing a new generation of skilled nurses prepared to address South Africa’s most pressing health needs. NEPI’s cross-cutting approach also included supporting the development of a new national nursing education policy, enhancing infrastructure, building capacity of faculty and administrators, and strengthening nursing-related partnerships (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Core NEPI Components



KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

New National Nursing Education Policy

PEPFAR, through NEPI, supported South Africa’s newly appointed and first Chief Nursing Officer, bringing together stakeholders in a series of workshops to develop South Africa’s first National Nursing Education Policy. The Chief Nursing Officer’s vision to strengthen and professionalize nursing education within nursing colleges reflects the fact that approximately 80 percent of South Africa’s nurses are educated in colleges. While universities play a critical role in developing nursing leaders, educators, and researchers, it is within the widespread college system that nursing transformation will be seen and felt. The policy provides a single, integrated set of directives to guide the provision of nursing and midwifery education within the context of South Africa’s revitalized primary health care system. The policy reflects the country’s latest regulatory requirements and represents the fulfillment of a key recommendation made in the most recent National Strategic Plan for Nurse Education Training and Practice. The new national policy will, for the first time, create uniformity in the way nurses are educated across South Africa’s nine provinces.

New, Competency-Based Degree Programs

NEPI supported the development of model curricula for South Africa’s two foundational nursing degrees (Bachelor of Nursing and National Diploma in Nursing) and the post-basic midwifery qualification (Advanced Diploma in Midwifery). Each model curriculum was developed in partnership with one, carefully selected public college of nursing (see Table 1).

At each college, a small curriculum development team was established, led by the college principal. Each team received intensive training in competency-based methodologies and then used that training to develop a curriculum that fosters critical reflection over memorization and repetition. Responsiveness to South Africa’s health challenges was ensured through an initial

Table 1: Summary of Degree Programs and Partner Schools

Degree Program	Length of Study	NEPI Partner School for Curriculum Development
National Diploma in Nursing	Three years	Welkom Campus of the Free State School of Nursing
Bachelor of Nursing	Four years	Prince Mshiyeni Memorial Hospital Campus of the KwaZulu-Natal College of Nursing
Advanced Diploma in Midwifery	One year	Mpumalanga College of Nursing

The new generation of graduating nurses will be able to hit the ground running, entering clinical practice with the skills needed to treat patients in today’s South Africa.

situational assessment and a curriculum development process that incorporated HIV competencies in line with the most recent World Health Organization and South African national HIV care and treatment guidelines. Throughout the curriculum development process, teams at each school received technical support from a central Curriculum Technical Working Group made up of experts from three local universities and an HIV specialist from the Department of Health.

Robust Educational Infrastructure and Development of Lifelong Learners

Infrastructure was enhanced at the three NEPI partner schools to facilitate student learning and complement the new curricula. The development of a dynamic and stimulating learning environment equipped with relevant, up-to-date information is a key strategy to promote lifelong learning among both students and staff. Support included:

- Enhancing **classrooms** and installing **clinical simulation labs** that allow students to practice essential and lifesaving clinical skills on state-of-the-art electronic mannequins
- Enhancing **libraries** to ensure that faculty and students have easy access to the latest textbooks, and that library property is properly protected
- Establishing **internet-connected computer labs** to ensure that faculty and students have access to the latest electronic journals and are computer literate by the time they graduate

Capable Faculty and Administrators

Educational institutions are only as strong as their teachers, so, in addition to strengthening the learning environment, NEPI supported access to higher education and continuing professional development training for targeted faculty of each NEPI partner school. In addition, NEPI worked to foster stronger relationships between university departments of nursing and nursing colleges. This work included:

- Providing scholarships to **12** faculty to pursue a special, one-year Master’s Degree at the University of KwaZulu-Natal School of Nursing and Public Health
- Supporting **12** faculty to participate in a nurse-initiated and managed antiretroviral treatment (NIMART) course offered through the University of KwaZulu-Natal
- Supporting **eight** faculty to participate in an online HIV and TB management course offered by the University of Cape Town
- Working with the Centre for Teaching and Learning at the University of the Western Cape School of Nursing to develop a new training program for clinical preceptors. By 2017, **42** nurses had completed the training, which prepared them to support new nurses as they enter clinical practice for the first time.
- Providing a study tour for nurse educators to the University of the Free State to learn how clinical simulation laboratories are designed, organized, and operated

NEPI also provided targeted training in program management and evaluation to **15** faculty and administrators at NEPI partner schools, as well as support and guidance to manage foreign grant assistance sub-awards. Developing strong financial management systems and staff, as well as high-quality reporting, is central to this work.

Strong Partnerships

NEPI forged an extensive network of local, national, regional, and international organizations that are now working together to strengthen nursing education in South Africa (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: The NEPI Network of Partners



In addition to the NEPI network, the PEPFAR implementing partner, ICAP, has led a freely available webinar series on nursing leadership to strengthen nurses’ role in policy formation, public health, and patient-centered care. Most recently, the NEPI network and complementary Medical Education Partnership Initiative (MEPI) merged to create an inter-professional body, the newly named African Forum for Research and Education in Health (AFREhealth). The South African Chief Nursing Officer took part in the second AFREhealth conference and attended a leadership workshop with over 30 African colleagues that included chief nursing officers, deans of departments of nursing, and national nursing and midwifery registrars.

THE WAY FORWARD FOR NURSING EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

The three model curricula developed under NEPI are currently under review for national accreditation. Once fully accredited, they will be rolled out at nursing education institutions across South Africa. These new competency-based curricula replace outdated, content-based curricula, which are set to be phased out by 2019. The wholly participatory approach used in their development has maximized local ownership of the curricula and helped to ensure the content's responsiveness to local population and health system needs.

The redesigned curricula—combined with the model programs implemented at the three NEPI partner schools

and the new, underlying national nursing education policy—create a firm foundation for the revitalization of nursing education in South Africa. Like the saying, “a rising tide lifts all boats,” a hope of the NEPI project in South Africa is that all nursing education, which is predominately provided through colleges, will be strengthened. The new generation of graduating nurses will be able to hit the ground running, entering clinical practice with the skills needed to provide care and treatment to patients in today's South Africa. Nurses will also leave college on a path toward continuing education and lifelong learning.



Online at icap.columbia.edu

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