

Increasing quantity and relevance of nursing and midwifery education: Zambia implements a combined nursing and midwifery education and training program

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The Health of the Nation

Between 2006 and 2010, the health sector recorded significant progress in most of the key areas of health service delivery and health support systems, leading to major improvements in most of the key health performance indicators. According to the 2007 Zambia Demographic and Health Survey (ZDHS 2007):

- Maternal mortality ratio declined from 729 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2002, to 591 per 100,000 in 2007
- Under-five mortality rate declined from 168 per 1,000 live births in 2002, to 119 per 1,000 in 2007
- Infant mortality rate declined from 95 per 1,000 live births in 2002, to 70 per 1,000 in 2007
- Neonatal mortality rate declined from 37 per 1,000 live births in 2002 to 34 per 1,000 live births in 2007
- HIV prevalence in adults aged 15 to 49 years declined from 16.1% in 2002 to 14.3% in 2007.¹
- Despite this progress made, these figures remain unacceptably high.

Zambia's Nursing Health Workforce & Nursing Education

The most recent resolution, WHA 64.7, gives the World Health Organization (WHO) the mandate to strengthen the capacity of the nursing and midwifery workforce through the provision of support to Member States on a number of strategies including participating in the ongoing work of WHO's initiatives on scaling up transformative education and training in nursing and midwifery. This is in recognition of the crucial contribution of the nursing and midwifery professions to strengthening health systems, to increasing access to comprehensive health services for the people they serve, and to the efforts to achieve the internationally agreed health-related development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals and those of the WHO.²

Zambia, like many sub-Saharan countries, is experiencing a critical shortage of human resources for health. It is estimated that the country is operating at 41% of the clinical healthcare workforce target. Nurses and midwives constitute 63% of this workforce and are the highest-skilled clinical worker in 47% of public health facilities, often serving as the sole health provider in many rural services. The country's 9,932 nurse midwives are fairly evenly distributed between urban and rural areas, with 52% of professional nurse midwives based in rural facilities and 49% in urban facilities.³

Recognizing the role nurses and midwives play in strengthening health systems, increasing access to comprehensive health services and achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, the Ministry of Health (MoH) supported the expansion of this training platform, increasing the number of nursing and midwifery graduates by 65% from 953 in 2007 to 1576 in 2010. While many factors contribute to this health workforce crisis, the country's National Training Operational Plans (NTOP) for 2008³ and the 2011 Nursing and Midwifery Assessment Report indicate that the key driver to closing the nurse/midwife gap is the outputs from the country's training institutions.⁴ The Government in 2008, together with development partners, resolved to introduce midwifery pre-service programs that would increase the output of midwives in the country. Training Institutions were asked to scale up their annual enrolment and in addition a two year direct entry midwifery program was implemented in three newly opened training institutions.

In spite of this growth, the country is currently operating at 47% of the 22,332 nurse/midwife target, with an anticipated nurse/midwife gap of 20% (4,474) by 2020. In 2012, the MoH working with the General Nursing Council of Zambia (GNC) and ICAP developed a workplan proposal to introduce a three and half year Combined Nursing and Midwifery Training at pre-service level. Graduates from the program will graduate with competencies for both nursing and midwifery. This program has reduced the period of training as a midwife from minimum of six years to three-and-a-half years because it has cut down on the two years of work experience as a Registered Nurse currently required to become a midwife.

The evaluation of the 2008 NTOP report⁶ has recommended that given the in-service funding constraints and the high demand for nurse-midwives in Zambia, the MoH considers scaling up the combined nursing and midwifery program after the evaluation as the only way to increase the output of midwives in the country.

Program Implementation

Under the combined nursing and midwifery intervention, the major focus included institutional capacity strengthening at Lusaka and Monze Schools of Nursing, upgrading the skills and computer laboratories and the establishment of the Virtual Library and e-Learning infrastructure. The program was implemented in 2012 :

- LSN increased enrolment from 75 to 112 per year (33% increase)
- MSN increased enrolment from 35 to 50 per year (36% increase).
- MSN was converted from offering a 2 year program to a 3½ years registered Nurse Midwife.

References

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4. Ministry of Health. Zambia Nursing and Midwifery Education Assessment Report. 2011.
5. Tjoa et al. Doubling the number of health graduates in Zambia: estimating feasibility and costs. Human Resources for Health 2010, 8:22. <http://www.human-resources-health.com/content/8/1/22>
6. Ministry of Health, 2012 Zambia Training Operational Plan 2013 – 2016 Report

Figure 1: 2012 cohort at LSN



Figure 2: Nurses and midwives shortage in Zambia

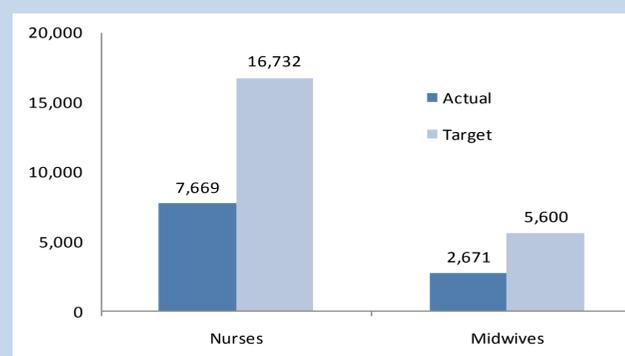


Figure 3: 2012 cohort at MSN



Accomplishments

- Development of a competency-based curriculum for combined nursing and midwifery training program.
- Implementation of an accredited competency-based combined nursing and midwifery curriculum to prepare students for primary care practice in lower-resourced, rural and remote settings.
- Accreditation of additional areas for students' clinical placement by the General Nursing Council of Zambia.
- Procurement of:
 - ✓ Equipment for clinical skills labs and clinical supplies
 - ✓ Electronic teaching/learning materials and equipment – LCDs, laptops and screens
 - ✓ Transport (buses and utility vehicle)
 - ✓ Computers/printers for faculties and computers labs for students
- Expansion of internet access
- Tuition support to students
- Installation of PA systems to enhance learning of students
- Faculty development:
 - ✓ Training in innovative teaching methods –LSN 10 and MSN 6
 - ✓ M&E training – LSN 4 and MSN 3

Desired Impact

Midwives are trained and deployed bringing Zambia closer to its health workforce needs, enabling quality medical services for the population via:

- Increased production of competent nurses and midwives at pre-service level
- Cost-effective training - reduction of training period to attain midwifery skill from 6 years (minimum) to 3½ years
- Availability of comprehensively trained nurses and midwives at all levels of service delivery