



LETTER TO EDITOR

## The Necessity of a New Look at Nurses with Postgraduate Education; Challenges and Opportunities

Fatemeh Zarezadeh Mehrizi<sup>1</sup>, Adel Eftekhari<sup>2\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Meybod School of Nursing, Shahid Sadoughi University of Medical Sciences, Yazd, Iran

<sup>2</sup> Department of Nursing, Meybod School of Medical Sciences, Shahid Sadoughi University of Medical Sciences, Yazd, Iran

### ABSTRACT

Postgraduate education in nursing is a valuable investment in the professional and personal development of nurses. This level of education not only improves the quality of patient care, but also contributes to the development and advancement of the nursing profession. Inadequate use of knowledge and lack of support in the workplace, inadequate compensation for educational qualifications, and lack of use in leadership and management roles are among the most important challenges facing nursing graduates. Personal and professional development, higher job satisfaction, and greater prestige are among the benefits that can be noted in nursing graduate studies.

**Keywords:** Postgraduate nursing education, Clinical challenges, Iran, Healthcare workforce

### Dear Editor

Today, providing quality care is a primary goal for healthcare organizations, and achieving safe, efficient, and person-centered healthcare requires the collaboration of all healthcare professions (1). As a demanding and dynamic profession, nursing requires clinical experts and researchers to broaden the scope and scientific foundation of patient care. Doctoral and master's degree programs prepare nurses for advanced clinical roles, research-based skills, and practices that ensure the best possible care for patients and their families, as well as leadership roles and scientific inquiry (2).

Following the establishment of the nursing bachelor's degree in Iran in 1964, postgraduate nursing master's education began in 1975 and is currently continuing in 11 specialized fields. The approval of specialized doctoral nursing education commenced in 2014 at Tabriz University of Medical Sciences, with the admission of three

students (3). There is a growing trend among nurses to pursue postgraduate studies, reflecting their desire for professional growth, skill enhancement, and improved job prospects (4). Postgraduate nursing education strengthens critical thinking skills and fosters connections between everyday practice and policy development, enabling nurses to keep pace with rapid changes and maintain high standards of care. Consequently, postgraduate nurses play an important role in influencing organizational processes, thereby improving patient care outcomes (5). A recent international study clearly demonstrated that increasing the number of graduate nurses in the workplace significantly reduced patient mortality (6). The role of postgraduate education in fostering greater self-confidence and self-esteem among nurses is highlighted in postgraduate education and its impact on patient care (7). Additionally, postgraduate training has the potential to enhance

Corresponding Author: Adel Eftekhari  
Email: [Adel.eftekhari.66@gmail.com](mailto:Adel.eftekhari.66@gmail.com)  
Tel: +98 9130710565

Department of Nursing, Meybod School of Nursing, Shahid Sadoughi University of Medical Sciences, Yazd, Iran

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employee satisfaction and optimize the use of organizational resources. Employees who receive support in their training efforts exhibit a higher commitment to their employers, which can lower recruitment and training costs for new hires (8). The philosophy of graduate nursing education in Iran emphasizes the need to respect human dignity and rights, as well as social justice. Therefore, it is essential to cultivate and reinforce professional ethics through applied research and comprehensive theoretical studies, promoting lifelong learning and interaction with other fields of knowledge to realize this philosophical approach (9). On the other hand, despite the recognized benefits of postgraduate education and the demand for nurses with higher qualifications in Iran, graduates face numerous challenges that may deter other nurses from pursuing postgraduate studies and diminish motivation for academic and professional advancement (10). Addressing these challenges and implementing effective solutions is crucial, especially given the declining motivation and desire among graduate-educated nurses to remain in clinical roles, along with increasing job burnout and a heightened inclination to leave their positions. Among the challenges faced by nursing graduates in the clinical environment are the following:

A) Mismatch between job position and educational orientation: If there is a lack of job opportunities for graduates, people are forced to accept jobs with a lower quality level, which ultimately leads to a decrease in motivation. There is a positive correlation between job adaptability and the desire to stay with a coefficient of 0.43 at the  $P < 0.05$  level, and with the increase of job adaptability, the desire to stay increases (11). Therefore, it is suggested that postgraduate graduates be used as clinical professors for the education and specialized practice of other nurses. Educational administrators can also use the expertise of clinical nurses with postgraduate education to improve nursing education.

B) Underutilization of knowledge acquired in postgraduate education: A lack of application of

new and updated knowledge in clinical settings can result in disconnection with scientific and technological advancements in healthcare. If the work environment does not foster innovation and the use of new knowledge, nurses may lack the motivation to apply their expertise. Hiring nursing faculty members as clinical science staff can effectively bridge the gap between academic and clinical environments.

C) Inadequate compensation relative to academic qualifications: If nurses perceive that postgraduate education does not enhance their financial situation, they may lack the motivation to continue their education and upgrade their skills. For example, a nurse with a PhD degree who is assigned high responsibilities in the system may receive a salary that is not much different from the salary of a nurse with a bachelor's degree, and this reduces motivation. Given the inappropriateness of nurses' salaries compared to their educational qualifications, there is an urgent need for supportive policies, a review of the salary structure, and improved cooperation between the Ministry of Health and medical universities. Also, increasing the allocation of job qualification coefficient in calculating performance-based pay to a greater extent compared with the current level also has an impact on increasing motivation and utilizing capabilities.

D) Failure to utilize postgraduates in management and leadership roles: Creating an opportunity for new nurses to participate in clinical and management decision-making can create a sense of belonging and value in them, and failure to apply competencies can lead to suboptimal use of their expertise. For example, a nursing management graduate may not be able to use his abilities properly due to the lack of a support program for leadership and management.

E) Lack of support for graduates in the workplace: Managers may, for various reasons, including insufficient knowledge of the abilities and skills of academic nursing graduates, lack of time, etc. They do not have enough support for graduates in the workplace, which leads to a decrease in motivation

and job satisfaction and limits career promotion. In conclusion, the researchers believe that valuing nursing graduates in the clinical setting is essential not only as a moral and human duty, but also as a necessity for promoting the health and hygiene of the community. Therefore, the authors request all officials and decision-makers in the health field to pay special attention to this important issue and hope that the grounds will be provided for the growth and development of nursing graduates.

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