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Creating Positive Practice Environments for the International Nurse

Over the past decades, multifaceted demographic, economic, political and social transformations have had a significant impact on the patterns and dynamics of migration and the movement of international nurses across the globe. Health systems throughout the world have been under mounting pressure to balance increasing service demands within the resources available while ensuring patient safety and quality of care. Already, internationally educated physicians and nurses make up twenty-five percent of the health workforce in industrialised countries like the United Kingdom and the United States. This number may yet rise in the near future as health demands of an ageing and better informed population increase and international nurse mobility continues to be facilitated.

The enriched cultural background of the nurse workforce help provide culturally competent care for increasingly diverse patient groups. Once registered and employed as professionals, international nurses need to be fully integrated members of the health team. Their work environments must support excellence in health care delivery and make the most of their knowledge, skills and potential. Employment policies and the social dynamics within health systems must guarantee international nurses fair treatment. The fundamental framework required to ensure positive practice environments is based upon treating everyone with respect and dignity. Building positive practice environments recognise and reward the skills and abilities of all nurses, increasing their job satisfaction and retention rates while supporting comprehensive and consistent quality patient care.

By consensus the conference agrees on a shared agenda to support the development of positive practice environments for the international nurse, which includes the following areas for intervention:

1. International Policy

- Maintain or establish human rights standards, legislation, regulation and national and international agreements that underpin all policies and practice in the work environment.
- Implement these instruments to the highest possible standard – monitor and evaluate to ensure compliance and effectiveness.
- Review and revise immigration policy so that human rights standards are upheld and family-friendly policies are established.

2. Migration

- Collect reliable data and assess sound trend analysis on migration patterns to inform and reform employment practices and human resources planning.
- Identify motivations for migration to provide evidence and highlight issues that need to be addressed to ensure long-term integration.
- Support initiatives by national nurses' organisations and others to provide factual information and advice to nurses considering migration as a career move.
- Create employment practices and a learning environment in destination countries that supports return migration favouring brain circulation thus reducing the threat of brain drain.
- Create employment practices and reward structures in the source countries that will encourage return migration and facilitate the integration of international nurses in their homeland health systems.

3. Workforce Planning

- Develop national workforce planning strategies in every country, seeking a balance between self-sufficiency and the integration of international nurses.
- Observe the demographic changes and long-term trends for the future planning of services and develop a workforce that meets patient needs and service demands.
- Create positive practice environments through effective human resources management, professional practice investment, adequate staffing and organisational support.
- Proactively address the underlying challenges of recruitment and retention amongst existing staff and international nurses to ensure a more stable workforce for the future, emphasizing team work, reducing turnover and supporting high quality nursing care.

4. Society and Diversity

- Act on the legal and moral responsibility to implement, monitor and evaluate diversity or equal opportunity legislation.
- Develop leadership capacity to accommodate and value diversity throughout society and at all levels of organisational structures, keeping in mind that equality of opportunity goes beyond a focus on legislation compliance. Develop policies to establish strategy, infrastructure, organisational climate, sanctions/rewards and maintain a long-term commitment to education and training as fundamental strategies for equality outcomes.
- Implement integration policies that take into consideration the social costs of migration.
- Develop partnerships with consumer groups, professional organisations, special interest groups, communities and local services to build relationships and social structures in order to integrate international nurses.

5. Patient Care and Cultural Competency

- Ensure competencies and skills of international nurses are valued, maintained and developed.
- Provide education and training to ensure cultural competence of all staff in support of patient safety and team effectiveness.
- Provide support in adjusting to variations in care systems, language competency, knowledge of medications and proficiency in technology.
- Ensure that work assignments make the most of the knowledge, skills and potential brought to health systems by international nurses.

6. International Nurses in Employment

- Implement ethical employment policies.
- Promote awareness of all employees in regard to their individual responsibility to adhere to diversity legislation and policies.
- Implement a zero tolerance policy on racism amongst colleagues and between health care workers, patients, and society.
- Create personal development plans and mentor schemes to support professional development and guard against the threat of deskilling.

International nurses make a considerable contribution through their commitment and enthusiasm to working within health systems and providing high quality care to patients throughout the world. Therefore, governments, key stakeholders and employers must commit to supporting health services that are investing in education and training development, implementing positive practice environments and effective human resources management, tackling discrimination and harassment, improving diversity, and enhancing the working lives of health care professionals in a way that directly contributes to better patient care.

We believe that the development of positive practice environments will deliver benefits to patients, individual nurses, health care teams and health services and ultimately the delivery of quality health care.

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