

Challenges and Opportunities of Advance Practice Nursing in Hong Kong

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Abstract—Advanced Practice Nurse (APN) demonstrates the future frontier of professional nursing practice and development. it is necessary to clarify and define APN to prevent confusion about professional boundaries. Although APN roles are increasing internationally, the uncertainty of role clarity still exists. If their functions could not be clearly expressed, the valuable contribution of nursing roles is lost. Meanwhile, the process for implementing and evaluating APN roles is as complex and dynamic as the roles themselves.

Keywords—Advanced Practice Nurse, roles

INTRODUCTION

Advanced practice nursing (APN) demonstrates the future frontier of professional nursing practice and development. It enables the questioning of present nursing practices, creation of nursing knowledge and the provision of nursing and health care services. APN is featured as responsibility and competence in making autonomous judgments according to their expanded clinical competence ^[1]. Clinical competence includes not only the advanced skills for assessing and reaching the needs of patients but also the initiation of safe and trustful relationship with patients and collaboration with colleagues ^[2]. As a result, sustained development of APN is foremost for society and the nursing profession.

Nowadays, there is restructuring of health care system continuously in Hong Kong. A significant increase the number of advanced practice nurses was noted. However, the roles of advanced practice nurses are complex and lead to the confusion about their scope of practice and newly emerging positions, which have not been clearly defined ^[3,4]. APN have to encounter different challenges and grasp the opportunities during the development. Thus, the development of APN, the challenges and opportunities confronted by APN will discuss in afterward.

GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT OF APN

The progression of advanced practice occurred with the first nursing practice program in 1965 in the United States ^[5]. The development of APN has become a global trend in the last few decades. It is developing in these places including America (Canada, Latin America and the United States); Africa, Asia (China, Japan, Korea, Singapore, and Thailand); Australia, New Zealand and Europe (Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Nordic countries and the United Kingdom) ^[5].

According to the International Council of Nurses (2002), APN is defined as “Advanced practice registered nurses who has acquired the expert knowledge base, complex decision making skills and clinical competencies for expanded practice, the characteristics of which are shaped by the content in which she is credentialed to practice. A master degree is recommended for entry level”. It seems that APN has been used as an umbrella term signifying nurses practicing at a higher level than traditional nurses. The roles of APN include nurse practitioner, clinical nurse specialist, nurse anesthetist, nurse midwife, and case manager. The United States is probably the only country that has all five roles developed and in practice in the healthcare system ^[5].

REASON OF EMERGENCE OF APN IN GLOBAL

There are several factors influenced the emergence of APN, it included the growing numbers of elderly patients, increased complexity of illness, severity of illness in hospitalized patients, renewed pressures to reduce medical resident's clinical hours and a major nursing shortage. These events have fostered opportunities for the development of new advance practice nurse roles in nursing ^[6].

APN IN A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

The emergence of advanced practice nurses is one of the facilitators. Being an advanced practice nurse, she or he must possess a master degree, master the expert knowledge base, and have clinical competence and skills. International

supportive of advanced practice nurses is increasing. In many states—Botswana, Western Africa, Canada, Bahrain, Iran, Finland, France, Ireland, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, Australia, Singapore, and Hong Kong, the governments and nursing councils set a list of policy to show support on the development of advanced practice nurses. Different researches claimed that advanced practice nurses do have an independent practice with the autonomy of prescriptive authority now. Advanced practice nurses and doctors' collaboration is seen within the clinical setting when they work together as a team. It allows the advanced practice nurses to function independently and autonomously while providing routine nurse-physician consultation. Their collaboration represents an interaction that focuses not only on high quality of care, better patient outcomes and lower mortality rate, but also on a relationship that enhances professionalism and mutual understanding. In the sense of sharing valued skills and experience with doctor colleagues, collaboration will serve to higher job satisfaction, higher staff retention and lower level burnout. The contribution of the nurses is receiving more recognition.

DEVELOPMENT OF APN IN HONG KONG

In the early 80 decades, nursing officers had greater power than register nurses in the traditional pyramid pattern of government bureaucracy. APN role was first introduced as the role of clinical nurse specialist in 1993. Postgraduate education for APN was introduced in 1995 at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. In 2003, APN Pilot Program was implemented by Hospital Authority. The post and duty of nursing officers were replaced by advanced practice nurse. Preparatory Committee is establishing an Academy of Nursing with goals to establish regulations and accreditation of APN [7]. In 2004, master degree has been offered to advanced practice nurse in different categories. Although, the APN has implemented thought out the last decade, unclear roles and unclear scope under advanced practice concept were still found.

CRITERIA OF APN IN GLOBAL

To be a competency advanced practice nurse, some criteria should meet. In the international aspect, an advanced practice nurse should hold at least a bachelor degree and acquired the expert knowledge base, complex decision-making skills and clinical competencies for expanded practice. A master degree is also recommended for entry level. Nurse may be required to have a license or certificate or both for advance practice and the practice which should focused on patient or their family [8].

Internationally, advanced practice nurse should hold the following core competencies. Firstly, advanced practice nurse should focus on direct clinical practice and provide expert guidance and counseling to patients and their families [9]. Secondly, consultation skills are highlight in core competencies. Advanced practice nurse should make a

consultation with health care providers and decision-makers [10]. Thirdly, research critique, utilization and conduct skills are also important to an advanced practice nurse. Nevertheless, the increasing complexity of care and the provision of care in multiple settings require that advanced practice nurse should collaborate with other health professionals, patients and their families in planning for the most acceptable treatments [9]. Also, ethical decision-making is another area, which includes the core competencies for advanced practice nurse. They need to provide supports to patients and families in making ethical decisions related to treatment options [10]. At last, health promotion is needed in our society. Implementation of care that focuses on health promotion also has been shown to be cost effective [11].

In Hong Kong, there are seven key domains of the competence framework for advanced practice nurse. First of all, the advanced practice nurse should manage patients with complex health conditions and provides case management services to meet multiple client health care needs [12]. The advanced practice nurse should enhance therapeutic nurse patient relationship in order to effect patients' change in health behavior [13]. In addition, the advanced practice nurse should demonstrate effective leadership and team work. Thus, they may coordinate human and environmental resources necessary to manage rapidly changing situations. With the aim to enhancing health quality assurance and improvement [12], advanced practice nurse should monitors peers, self and delivery system through Quality Assurance, Total Quality management, as part of Continuous Quality Improvement. On the other hand, advanced practice nurse should manage and negotiate innovative and effective approaches to care delivery through evidenced based practice [12]. Also, advanced practice nurse should participates in legislative and policy making activities which influence advanced nursing practice so as to enhance professional attributes of general and enhance personal attributes. The similarities of Hong Kong and international core competencies can be found on the ground that advanced practice nurse can provide better health services to catch up the changing health situations. In conclusion, the APN criteria and core competencies demonstrates the complexity and depth of the APN preparation and practice. The challenges and the opportunities of APN will be discussed as follows.

CHALLENGES OF ADVANCED PRACTICE NURSING

There are four challenges obstruct the development of APN in Hong Kong. They are unclear roles under APN concept, unclear scope and standard of advanced practice, shortage of nurses and inconsistent educational standards.

The roles under APN concept were defined globally as Nurse Practitioner (NP), Clinical Nurse Specialist (CNS), Certified Nurse Midwife (CNM) and Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetist (CRNA) according to The American Association of Colleges of Nursing in 1996 [14]. Also,

International Council of Nurses (2010) defined advanced practice roles in similar way. The United States had incorporated the above four roles and Case Manager into APN concept ^[5].

Nevertheless, the advanced practice roles were not explicitly stated in Hong Kong, unlike United States. Based on the career path of Hospital Authority, different roles and their entry requirement could be found. It showed that Advanced Practice Nurse, Department Operations Manager (DOM) and Nurse Consultant (NC) all these roles have the entry requirement-“qualification in advanced nursing specialty”. With the limited information available, the public might only able to identify the roles of APN as advanced practice nurse, DOM and NC via interpreting the aforementioned entry requirement. In Hong Kong, the advanced practice roles are unclear and inconsistent. It is difficult to provide evidence of the APN roles, functions and efficiency ^[15]. This might in turn hinder to gain support from nurses, other professions and the public for the development of APN in the future.

The International Nurse Practitioner or APN Network (INP/APNN) in 2002 identified unclear scope or standards of practice as one of the challenges encountered by every country during the development of APN ^[5]. In Hong Kong, the scope and standard of advanced practice were unclear. The scope of professional nursing practice for all qualified nurses was derived by The Nursing Council of Hong Kong in 2001 under the consideration of different aspects. These aspects included the legislation of Hong Kong, the health care and social policies, the education of nurses and the current professional health care practice ^[16]. Nevertheless, the above scope of nursing practices without the specific scope of practice of nurses in advanced practice positions; it described the duties and responsibilities of qualified nurses only.

Furthermore, only limited information vaguely stated out the practice of advanced practice positions. For instance, Hospital Authority suggested that nurses in advanced practice positions were expected to carry out a specialist role in a clinical specialty, provide advanced nursing care to patients, engage in research work and promote evidence-based practice for the betterment of health care service. In 2001, The Nursing Council of Hong Kong described the practice of advanced practice nurses in an even more simple way. It stated that nurses who take part in APN specialize their practice or expand their practice overlapping other health care traditional practice. Without clearly addressing the scope of practice for various advanced practice roles, advanced practice nurses might overload with work due to excessive and unexpected demand on their practice from other nurses, other discipline or the public ^[1]. Because of the work overload, nurses engaging in APN might possibly overlook the research component of their practice ^[1]. With the unclear scope of practice of APN roles and underutilization of research aspect of APN, the potential outcome and impact of APN might not be identified or evaluated; others may suspect the value and importance of APN ^[15].

Shortage of nurses will hinder the development of APN. According to the Hospital Authority, the overall shortage of nurses was found to be increased from 3.2% in 2006/07 to 5.3% in 2010/11 as well as the shortage of advanced practice nurses was found to be increased from 2.3% in 2006/07 to 3.7% in 2010/11. Due to the increasing elderly service was offered, the increasing demand of manpower was needed as well ^[17]. Because of the ageing population, the demand for community nurses is continuously increasing and the Health and Medical Development Advisory Committee had strongly advocated for the enhancement of community nursing services (Health and Medical Development Advisory Committee, 2005). A research indicated that there were 50 vacancies of Nurse Consultant and 300 vacancies of advanced practice nurse in Hong Kong ^[18]. Hence, Hospital Authority has been under pressure in the past few years.

New staff recruitment is the main strategy used for shortage of nurses ^[19]. However, the loss of manpower had not been filled immediately although the remuneration had been offered more attractive. According to Ms Sylvia Fung Yuk-kuen, Hospital Authority's Chief Manager of Nursing, she indicated that there would be only 800 nursing graduates from university in the coming year. Also, if about 90 per cent of them were hired, it means that 720 nurses will work for Hospital Authority. It could not compensate for the 961 of the hired nurses. It would be difficult to move forward. Hospital Authority needed to hire student nurses who were not yet registered nurses to share some of the workloads in wards. However, the recruitment of new staff could partially address the problem of nursing shortages, the retention of experienced professional nursing practitioners was found to be cheaper, less disruptive and more beneficial. According to Lee (2011), he had some recommendations for Hospital Authority and Government. For Hospital Authority, it should adjust the remuneration of contract nurses, increase the opportunities for promotion, and postpone developing new services. For Government, it should formulate a long-term planning for nursing staff and should train nurses systematically and gradually.

Inconsistent education standard of nurses is one of the challenges that APN is facing in Hong Kong. In 2002, the ICN-NP/APNN had identified educational standard as one of the challenges that advanced practice nurses are facing in every nation. Nurses should acquire the expert knowledge base to perform APN ^[5]. For example, the need of performing a specialist role in a clinical specialty, providing advanced nursing care, engage in research activities and promote evidence-based practice. Therefore educational standard of nurses is very important in APN, so that they have enough knowledge to carry out the above practice.

However, the educational standard of nurses in Hong Kong was inconsistent. According to The Nursing Council of

Hong Kong (2012), students might study different training courses holding by different authorized organizations in order to become registered nurses in Hong Kong. For instance, students can study the Bachelor of Science (Honors) Degree in Nursing held by The Hong Kong Polytechnic University and Hospital Authority Higher Diploma in Nursing Program held by The Queen Elizabeth Hospital. When students finished the courses, they can register from the Nursing Council of Hong Kong to become a registered nurse. Although all of graduates can become registered nurses, the educational standard of them are different. Some of them are at a degree level while some of them are at the level of higher diploma.

This inconsistent educational standard might hinder the progression of APN development since a degree in nursing is a basic requirement to entry APN level ^[8]. According to the figure from Association of Hong Kong Nursing Staff (2011), there were about 1700 nurse graduates in 2011 but only about 800 of them were trained in the university. Furthermore, not all the 1700 graduates were bachelor degree holders. In other words, less than half of the nurse graduates could fulfill the basic requirement to engage and fill up the vacancies in the APN. Therefore, there is not enough supply of nurses, which up to the educational standard to engage in APN. This might in turn negatively affect the readiness of the APN development.

OPPORTUNITIES OF ADVANCED PRACTICE NURSING

There are four opportunities facilitate the development of APN in Hong Kong. They are training available for post-graduated nurses in Hong Kong, organizations promoting APN, development of research and advocate of health policy.

Nowadays, post-graduated trainings and post-registration certification courses are the two main kinds of courses for nurses. Post-graduated trainings can be also divided into three main categories, included Master degree of Nursing, research post-graduated studies and Master degree related in Nursing management, whereas post-registration certification courses equip nurses with a foundation for beginning the advance practice in specialty nursing.

Master of Nursing courses provide the opportunities for nurses to develop the necessary knowledge and understanding in an advance level of specialty areas. The training programmes enhance the competency in nursing practice that lead them entry into the APN. The courses mainly are Master of Science in Nursing, Master in Nursing, Master or Graduate Diploma in Primary Health Care, Advanced Diploma Programme in Specialty Nursing and Master of Philosophy. The training shows the competency of nurses to achieve the advanced practices roles which will be developed.

Research studies in post-graduated level provide an academic scholarship and research expertise in nursing

practice. It allows nurses to conduct research based on specialty practice on advanced level. The related courses are included Master of Philosophy (HKU), Master of Nursing (CUHK) and Master of Philosophy in Nursing (CUHK). Besides, master degree related to nursing management, such as Master of Nursing (Clinical Leadership) (HKBU-SCE), facilitate nurses to develop the leadership capacity and become excellent leaders with high qualities and attributes in the clinical field. Nurses can make their own choice in order to develop the knowledge of advance specialty areas.

Apart from the master of nursing courses, the post-registration certificate course (PRCC) is also the other way for nurses in continuous education. PRCC is mainly provided by Hospital Authority Institute of Health Care. It focuses on the clinical specialty areas in an advanced level, such as intensive care nursing, haematological and bone marrow transplant nursing and enhancement program on management of critically ill patients in haemodialysis therapy. Some of the PRCC courses are organized by Institute of Advanced Nursing Studies (IANS) and conducted by different clusters in Hospital Authority such as Kowloon East Cluster, New Territories West Cluster and Hong Kong West Cluster. These training programs strive to elevate the standards and the quality of nursing practice by facilitating the professional development and also enhance nurses' ability to work within the multidisciplinary healthcare team. Thus, they will be well-equipped to provide a higher level of nursing care for patients and their families.

Both post-graduated studies and PRCC can provide various trainings for nurses to acquire continuous education. The development allows them to stay current with updated knowledge in their specialty areas; hence, their clinical knowledge and expertise would be increased. Apart from these educational trainings, nurses are encouraged to further continue their development by attending local or national conferences and workshops, joining national organizations and conducting research. For instance, nurses are allowed to participate workshops or continuing nursing education activities regarding evidence based practice for dementia care, healthy aging and wellness promotion or chronic disease management and end-of-life care. All of these the broadened experiences and knowledge would be their talent to improve the whole quality of patient outcomes and benefit the profession, when they come back into their specialty areas. Through the ongoing learning, nurses would be self-directed in their clinical practice ^[1].

CONCLUSION

To conclude, there are four challenges which were encountered by APN in Hong Kong, they are unclear roles under advance practice concept, unclear scope & standards of advanced practice, shortage of nurses and inconsistent educational standards respectively. In spite of the challenges, there are still four opportunities shared by APN in Hong Kong.

They are more training available for APN & prospective APN, the organization of promoting APN, opportunities of research and advocacy of health policies. Although the development of APN in Hong Kong is facing several challenges, they still have to strengthen their opportunities for improving the future introduction of APN roles. If the APN would be an essential part to develop the cost-effective, high quality, patient-centered health care, thus the roles must represent a certain standard of care, level of ability and purpose which is more meaningful to nurses, allied healthcare professionals and patients alike.

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