

Nursing Shortage in Pakistan: A Looming Crisis

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The cornerstone of every healthcare system is nursing, which performs a variety of tasks including treating patients and their families emotionally in addition to providing patient care and treatment administration.¹ However, despite their indispensable role, Pakistan is facing a severe shortage of qualified nurses. According to the Pakistan Economic Survey 2021-2022, Pakistan had only 121,245 registered nurses in 2021 for a population of about 231 million people.² This shortage, if left unaddressed, has the potential to evolve into a full-blown crisis with dire consequences for our healthcare system.

This nursing shortage is a complex issue driven by various factors. Despite a growing population, there aren't enough nurses due to societal norms that undervalue women and their professions. Nurses face tough conditions, low pay, and little respect, while the healthcare system struggles with problems like poor governance and lack of resources. Many nurses leave for better opportunities abroad. Unsafe working conditions and high patient loads add to the problem. Additionally, the attrition rate among nursing students is alarmingly high due to a lack of incentives and challenging working conditions.³

The consequences of nursing shortages are manifold. Overworked nurses are at risk of burnout, which can compromise patient safety and the quality of care provided.⁴ Longer working hours and increased stress levels among nurses also contribute to higher attrition rates, exacerbating the problem. Furthermore, the shortage of nurses results in delayed care, longer hospital stays, and increased healthcare costs.⁵

To tackle this crisis, steps must be taken urgently. Increasing nursing school capacities nationwide is paramount, necessitating significant investments in infrastructure and faculty development. Making nursing more appealing with competitive salaries, career advancement opportunities and better working conditions is crucial. Incentive programs, scholarships, and student support systems can aid in retaining and attracting talent. Close collaboration among policymakers, healthcare institutions, and educational bodies is essential to formulate and implement an effective strategy to alleviate the nursing shortage.

In conclusion, the nursing shortage in Pakistan is a pressing crisis that requires urgent attention. It is crucial to take decisive action to address this issue before it worsens and jeopardizes the health of our citizens.

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