

‘Men in Nursing’

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### **Introduction**

Men have always played a vital role in the profession of nursing. In the third century, male nurses were the primary caregivers. As far as we know, the original nursing school was started by men in India around 200 BC. In 300 AD, the Parabola brothers established a hospital and started providing nursing care. In fact, the word nosocomial meaning “hospital acquired” came from ‘nosocomi,’ the men who provided nursing care in the ancient Rome. St. Benedict founded the Benedictine nursing order which is still around today. St. Camellias (1510-1614) is noted to have started the first ambulance service. The symbol of his order, the Red Cross remains the primary symbol of health care today. During the civil war men served as nurses on both sides (Lynn & Tranbarger, 2007).

Today, male nurses make up to 5.4 percent of the 2.1 million registered and professional nurses in the United States. However, now men are coming back into nursing for the same reasons as women, to care for the sick, receive better pay, find job security, and flexibility. While there is an influx of men coming back into the nursing profession today, I will discuss some of the challenges these men face as they migrate back into a women dominated profession, and the need for changes in the perception of male nurses. I will also discuss what nursing schools, hospitals, and nursing organizations can do to make the transition of men into nursing more beneficial to them.

## Discussion

### Challenges that Male Nurses Face in the Profession

One of the challenges male nurses face today is stereotyping. The nursing profession today is viewed as best suited for females. Females are associated with caring and nurturing. Many males entering the nursing profession are viewed as low achievers, having feminine like qualities or are usually perceived as homosexuals. Men nurses often find themselves being barred from obstetrics and gynecology. Many doctors, patients, and hospital staff in these areas feel uncomfortable with male nurses. Some female patients refuse to have male nurses take care of them which puts the nurse in an awkward position when staffing has to be rearranged to meet the needs of the patient.

Female nurses often see male nurses as a muscle to be used for their convenience. If there is one male nurse on the unit, then he will be called to help out with all the patients. Male nurses are perceived as more deviant than women in nursing. Male nurses feel that they have to prove themselves more than female nurses. Critics of the male nurse question their motives for choosing the profession, some feel the male nurses want to be near females for easy availability. Florence Nightingale did not approve of male nurses, and has been noted to have said that they have “honey hands.” Male nurses are also afraid of lawsuits by female patients who may get the wrong impression when a male nurse touches sensitive areas of their bodies for medical purposes. Many female patients may feel that a male nurse touching certain parts of the female body is inappropriate. These stereotypes may cause embarrassment and role strain in the work place and in public for male nurses and may account for the low number and retention of male nurses (Journal of Nursing, 2008).

To address stereotyping in nursing schools, hospitals, and nursing organizations have to take a more active role towards understanding the difficulties that male nurses face in the workplace. Sticking one's head in the sand is not going to get the problem solved. When male nurses know they have support of the organization they work for, they will feel more empowered and satisfied in their role as nurses.

Another challenge male nurses have to face is gender discrimination. Discrimination of male nurses starts in nursing school. Most nursing literature uses the pronoun "she" which refers to females, indicating all nurses are females. Males are mentioned only as doctors or patients. They as nurses are usually assigned to male patients only which puts them in a minority status. Many male nurses feel isolated and misunderstood. In addition, male nurses are seen as aggressive and power-oriented, and are most likely to be passed over for promotion and leadership roles.

To change this perception of male nurses, nursing literature needs to use more gender neutral pronouns and nursing has to be seen as a professional role, and not a gender oriented one. For men to feel welcome in nursing, more has to be done to change the society's perception of what males are. The ideal male in this society is exemplified by celebrities like Arnold Schwarzenegger, Sylvester Stallone, John Wayne, and Clint Eastwood, who portray men as rough and tough, so those who demonstrate an ability to be tender and caring are viewed as effeminate, and so many men who may want to enter the profession may not do so to avoid this negative image.

One way of making nursing more lucrative to men is to put posters of male nurses in junior and high schools, on billboards, and release more media showing males as nurses.

Teachers, doctors and organizations need to advocate for the male nurse to do more clinical rotation in areas like OB/GYN, as well as mother and children specialties. The patients in these areas don't have any problems with male doctors, so they should not have a problem with male nurses, as this is only a negative perception caused by generations of seeing nurses as females. To solve the nursing shortage we all have to work together, both males and females.

### **'The Power Struggle'**

Many men face power struggle in a women dominated environment. Men see themselves as leaders and commanders in most situations, but in nursing they have to take directions most of the time from women. Men are more comfortable around other men; in nursing men have to condition themselves to be comfortable around women. Many make the transition easily, because men in the last decade have refused to accept the perception society has of them.

More men are now staying at home while the women go out to work, we see men carrying babies on their chest in pouches while walking or pushing a baby stroller in the park. To make nursing work for them, men have to know who they are, and what they want. The perception society has of men has been there for generations and is not going to go away over night. Men need patience and perseverance as they enter nursing. Some avenues that males nurses can take to reduce anxiety in the work place is by joining male nursing groups where they can voice their opinions and concerns.

The American Academy of Man in NURSING "AAMN" is one such group. The group objectives are to encourage men in the United to join the nursing profession in order to strengthen and humanize health care for Americans citizens. Male nurses are now encouraged to

grow professionally and demonstrate to each other and society the increasing contribution being made by them in the nursing profession (AMNN, 2011).

### **The Changing Environment of Nursing**

‘Men in Nursing’ has been launched as the first professional journal devoted towards addressing the issues and topics faced by a growing number of men who work in the nursing field. Lippincott Williams & Wilkins, part of Walters Kluwer Health, and publisher of some of the nation's most popular nursing journals, including American Journal of Nursing (AJN) and Nursing 2006 saw the social and professional need for a resource that spoke directly to the minority in a conventionally female oriented profession (Medical News Today, 2006).

Many organizations have begun to look forward to changes in the health care sector, and male nurses are one of those changes. More males are being enrolled in nursing school than ever before because male are most often the bread providers of the family. Organizations like the American Assembly for Men in Nursing offer a variety of scholarships to male nurses. Hospitals are more aware of the male presence in the work place today, and are stepping up with strategies to improve satisfaction and retention of the male nurse (AAMN, 2011).

More male nurses are joining support groups and are using the changing process to make their voices be heard. Many male nurses are leaving the old stereotype and perception behind of what a man should be like, and are embracing the new man – one who is caring, nurturing and wants to show this quality not only in private, but also in the work place. As health care reform is inevitable, and shortage of nurses is still a major concern, male nurses may be our only hope of providing our patients with quality care and patient outcome that is needed not only in the

hospitals also in the community as well. We cannot afford to let old stereotypes and perceptions keep the nursing profession from progressing. Nursing schools, hospitals, and nursing organizations need to all work together to make the male transition into the work place as pleasant as the female nurse transition into the work place is.

### **Conclusion**

To conclude male nurses are not new to nursing. The first nurses were originally men however, after the 1900s nursing became predominately female, because men started finding more lucrative jobs opportunities. Many men are migrating back into the nursing profession partly due to the economic conditions, steady employment, and better salaries. Many men experience stereotype and gender discrimination, and dissolution in a women dominated environment .Due to the drastic need for nurses, and the pending healthcare reforms, nursing schools, hospitals, and nursing organizations should do what is necessary to make the male transition into the nursing profession more lucrative and lasting.

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