

Manpower Requirements for Practical Nurses in Five Southern Border Provinces of Thailand

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Abstract. In the past, the practical nurse was filled in the healthcare system for fixing the nursing shortage. The practical nurse assists nursing with a variety of patient care activities and related services necessary in caring for personal needs as well as comfort of patients without applying of clinical decision making while assisting registered nurses (RN) with medical equipment maintenance. A large number of the practical nurse is trained per year; however, some of the workforce of the practical nurse left the health service system. Thus, the health service system is still facing with the shortage of the practical nurse. This cross-sectional descriptive study was designed to investigate 1) the manpower requirements for the practical nurse in five southern border provinces based on the workload and 2) the practical nurse job description, problems and barriers in the workplaces, and professional expectation and other benefit. Data were gathered from the registered nurses and the practical nurses of 54 health service units of five southern border provinces including Yala, Pattani, Narathiwat, Songkhla, and Satun province. Three research instruments were constructed by the researchers including: checklist for the workload of the practical nurse, the questionnaire of the manpower requirements for the practical nurse based on the workload adjusted from the questionnaire of the health manpower requirements of Thailand Nursing and Midwifery Council and the focus group interview guideline for the working practices among the practical nurse.

The findings have revealed as follow as: 1. The workload of the practical nurse was assessed with questionnaire of 30 items by registered nurses who were supervisors and colleagues. Then, the workload was analyzed for needs of the practical nurses. The results have indicated that the five southern border provinces needed the 401 practical nurses. The ratio between the registered nurse and the practical nurse was 2.12:1 while the ratio of whole country was 9.26:1. 2. The results of the focus group interviews found that most of the practical nurses satisfied with their roles while they didn't satisfy with their salary. For the professional expectation, the practical nurses needed the secured job, high salary and welfare, and the continuous competency development.

The findings have suggested that the health service system still needs the practical nurse as the registered nurse. The practical nurse would work with the registered nurse as a skill mixed team for fixing the nursing shortage. However, the supply of the practical nurse should consider the demand for employment after graduation.

Keywords: Manpower Requirements for Practical Nurse, Five Southern Border Provinces

1. Introduction

The target of the human resource planning is quantity and quality of health personnel in the health system. According to the survey of health manpower requirements for allied health professionals in 2006, healthcare service units of Ministry of Public Health of Thailand within regional hospital, general hospital, and community hospital still required allied health professionals, especially nurse aid. The survey of health manpower requirements between 2008 and 2012 indicated that the registered nurse was accountable for the most requirements for the healthcare service units of Ministry of Public Health and local administrative organization, following by the nurse aid and the practical nurse. For the practical nurse, all types of hospitals required 550-700 practical nurses each year.

Thus, Praboromarajchanok Institute for Health Workforce Development, Ministry of Public Health of Thailand set the target of the practical nurse supply between 2010 and 2013. The practical nurse supply will be 1,000, 2,000, 3,000, and 4,000 between 2010 and 2013, respectively. Healthcare services of Thailand still need the large number of the practical nurses because the practical nurse assists the registered nurse with a variety of patient care activities and related services necessary in caring for personal needs as well as comfort of patients without applying of clinical decision making while assisting registered nurse with medical maintenance. The assistant of the practical nurse would provide more time for the registered nurse to take care patients.

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Because of the ethnic separatist insurgency of the south of Thailand, the researchers were interested to study the manpower requirements of the practical nurse in the five southern border provinces. The results of this study would provide the useful information for the good quality healthcare services in the five southern border provinces.

2. Objective

1. To study the manpower requirements for the practical nurse in five southern border provinces based on the workload.
2. To study job description for the practical nurse, problems and barrier in the workplaces, and professional expectation and other benefits.

3. Methodology

This study was the cross-sectional descriptive study to collect both quantitative and qualitative data.

3.1. Samples

- The manpower requirements for the practical nurses among five southern border provinces, Yala, Pattani, Narathiwat, Songkhla, and Satun province, were gathered from 54 head nurses working at the community, general and regional hospitals.
- The qualitative data of the working practices for the practical nurses were gathered by focus group interview from 20 practical nurses graduated from Borommarajonani College of Nursing, Yala working in Yala and Pattani province.

3.2. Research Instruments

Three research instruments were constructed by the researchers including:

- Checklist for the workload of the practical nurse
- Questionnaire of the manpower requirements for the practical nurse based on the workload adjusted from the questionnaire of the health manpower requirements of Thailand Nursing and Midwifery Council
- The focus group interview guideline for the working practices among the practical nurse.

3.3. Quality of Research Instrument

Content Validity was used to evaluate the quality of the research instrument.

3.4. Data Analysis

- The manpower requirement of the practical nurse based on the workload were analyzed with descriptive statistics including frequency, percentage, and proportion.
- The qualitative data were analyzed by content analysis with flexible conceptual framework. The content analysis provided information of the real and current working practices of the practical nurse.

4. Results

4.1. The five year projection of manpower requirements for the practical nurses among the healthcare service units of five southern border provinces

Both the regional and community hospitals in five southern border provinces were facing with the shortage of the practical nurses in 50 percentages. At that time, 2,398 registered nurses were available in the healthcare service units of five southern border provinces while manpower requirements for the registered nurse in these areas were only 850. Two hundred fifty nine practical nurses were available in healthcare service units while the manpower requirements for the practical nurse were 401. Narathiwat province was accountable for the most manpower requirements for the practical nurse, following by Yala, Pattani, Songkhla, and Satun province as shown in Table 1 and 2.

Table 1: Number of Available Registered and Practical Nurse and Manpower Requirements for Registered and Practical Nurse

Province	Hospital (N)	Available registered nurse	Requirements for registered nurse	Available practical nurse	Requirements for practical nurse
Pattani	10	422	215	42	87
Yala	7	704	354	63	129
Narathiwat	12	768	195	139	139
Satun	5	286	46	9	10
Songkhla	7	218	40	6	36
Total	41	2,398	850	259	401

Table 2: Ratio Manpower Requirements between Registered Nurse and Practical Nurse in Five Southern Border Provinces

Items	Number (n)	Ratio
Available registered nurse: Requirements for registered nurse	2,398: 850	2.82: 1
Available practical nurse: Requirements for practical nurse	259: 401	1: 1.55
Available registered nurse: Available practical nurse	2,398: 259	9.26: 1
Requirements for registered nurse: Requirements for practical nurse	850: 401	2.12: 1

4.2. Role, responsibility, problems and barriers in working, professional expectations, and other benefits among the practical nurses in five southern border provinces The results of interviews were shown as follow as:

4.2.1. Working role and responsibility of the practical nurse

The practical nurses worked in the out-patient and in-patient departments including medical department, delivery department, and critical pediatric care department. So the practical nurse provided many basic bedside cares as this information: “To do every things such as measure and record patients' vital signs including weight, height, temperature, blood pressure, pulse, and respiratory rate, also feed patients who need help eating as well as dress wounds. I also perform several additional jobs such as clerk jobs, medical equipment supplies, and medical equipment maintenances.” “It should increase more number of the practical nurse because some jobs can not be taken place by the nurse aids.” The health service system was still facing with the shortages of the practical nurse. Moreover, the practical nurses needed additional training after graduation.

4.2.2. The Satisfactions in working roles and responsibilities, salary, and Retention

The practical nurses satisfied with their works, even though; the practical nurse sometimes had to work the additional jobs. Because of the shortages of the registered nurse, the practical nurses were asked to assist the nursing care beside the routine of the practical nurse works. Most of the practical nurses did not satisfy to their salary and the payments were different by the hospital.

“The financial future is not secured because the practical nurses were hired as the temporary employee. The hiring contact is signed year by year and the working performance is evaluated every 6 month.”

4.2.3. Working problems and barriers

There was a few of the practical nurses who had the experience of conflict with the registered nurse.

“If I can not work as they need, I will be threatened to sue the boss. They always said that if 3,000 nursing students for fixing the shortages of the registered nurse in southern Thailand will graduate in the near future, the healthcare service units will not need the practical nurse any more. It makes me neglected.”

4.2.4. Professional expectation and career path

Most of the practical nurses expected that they would be hired as the yearly temporary employee or the permanent employee. "I need the clear of the professional position. I need to be hired as the employee of the state. I need to get the secured finance in the future. I need the occupational standards for the practical nurse."

5. Conclusions and Discussions

Manpower requirements for the practical nurse of the healthcare service units in five southern provinces according to the workload. Most regional hospitals were facing with the shortages of the practical nurses at the out-patient department while the community hospitals were facing with the shortages of the practical nurses at the emergency and in-patient departments. According to the ratio of manpower requirements between the registered nurse and the practical nurse in five southern provinces, the present study indicated that the healthcare settings needed approximately 2 registered nurses and 1 practical nurse (2.12: 1). The result of the present study was consistent with the result conducted by the Nursing Research Committee of Thailand Nursing and Midwifery Council in 2006. The study of the Nursing Research Committee of Thailand Nursing and Midwifery Council in 2006 revealed that the appropriate ratio between the registered nurse and the practical nurse should be 2: 1. However, the ratio between the available registered nurse and the available practical nurse was 9.26: 1. In addition, the present study indicated that the healthcare settings in five southern border provinces still needed the practical nurse. The result of the present study was consistent with the studies of Songwattana et.al (2007), Nunsupawat et.al (2007), and Suteerasarn & Wannarat (2007). These three studies supported that the healthcare system of Thailand needed the practical nursing one-year career program. The health manpower supply planning should be considered the skilled mixed team for adequate quantity of health manpower in the healthcare service system.

According to the follow up study for the graduates of the practical nursing one-year career program from Borommarajonani College of Nursing, Yala, it indicated that most graduates were unemployed. There was not available position of the practical nurse in healthcare service units, thus; there was no policy to hire the practical nurse. At that time, the practical nurses who were working in the healthcare service units were employed by their own budgets. Thus, the only healthcare service units where had extra and enough budgets could hire the practical nurse for fixing the nursing shortages. Thus, the demands for hiring the practical nurse were inconsistent with the supply.

Working roles and responsibilities, working problems and barriers, professional expectation and career development in the future. At that time, most practical nurses worked at in-patient departments depending on the shortages of the nursing manpower at each healthcare service unit. However, the practical nurses also worked at out-patient departments and intensive care units. The knowledge gained from the practical nursing one-year career program were considered to be enough in working career. For the additional jobs, the practical nurses were trained by the hospitals. The day shift jobs and night shift jobs in the practical nurse were indifference in job descriptions. The difference was considered in number of nursing personnel between day shift and night shift. For the morning, afternoon and night shift, the ratio between the registered nurse and the practical nurse were 4-5: 1, 3-4: 1 and 2-3: 1, respectively.

The salary of the practical nurse was considered based on the Bachelor's degree ranged between 5,760-6,200 Bahts per month (approximately 192- 207 U.S dollars per month). Some hospitals increased salary after working performance evaluation. Some hospitals provided overtime jobs and allowance for the practical nurses, however; most practical nurse did not satisfy with their salary.

For working problems and barriers, most practical nurses were able to work with other health personnel teams both in Yala and Pattani province. A few practical nurses did not satisfy for working with the registered nurse related to the conversations or communications. Most practical nurses were proud of their achievements and job opportunity. Some practical nurses got compliments from their clients and some got several awards, for examples good services, good relationships, and good employee etc.

For the professional expectations and career paths, most practical nurses needed to be employed with the secured position. They needed to get increase in salary every year and needed to get opportunity in career developments. Only a few practical nurses needed to change their career because they needed to work in freedom career, high salary and good welfare.

The present results of this study provided manpower requirements for the practical nurses in five southern border provinces between 2009 and 2013. This information was useful for health manpower planning consisting with the area requirements and this information was useful for the development of educational program for the practical nurse.

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