

FACULTY PERSPECTIVE

Nursing in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan

By Jane Schlickau

Over the past several years I have developed an interest in global health and nursing. In my travels to Central Asia, I have become acquainted with nurses who currently struggle with their professional identities in the developing countries of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

Nursing is a low status occupation. A license is not required; rather, the nurse is certified by his or her educational institution. Because all entry level nursing education is controlled by physicians (called “doctors”) in Kyrgyzstan, nursing is not recognized as a scientific specialty, and nurses in general are not allowed to pursue advanced degrees. Although a few nurse educators teach at the university level, doctors continue to control the nursing education system and teach in university nursing programs. They focus on specialty areas such as cardiology, dermatology, psychology, and pediatrics; but related nursing care information is not included. While there are now a few nurses who teach nursing foundations, all of the curriculum and teachers are under the control of doctors. Students are taught nursing from the perspective of a doctor.

Job positions in management do not exist due to control by doctors. The role of the nurse educator is uncommon and is also under the control of doctors. Because nursing is not recognized as a scientific specialty by doctors, research by nurses does not take place.

No masters or doctorate degrees are available due to lack of scientific specialty acceptance by doctors. No job positions or statutes exist for nurse researchers.

My friend and colleague, Guljahan Pirmazarova, is the first nurse in her country who has been allowed to pursue an advanced degree, and it was only approved because she also has a university degree in education. She applied originally to the Medical Academy for permission to pursue a master’s degree in nursing but was refused by the doctors and directed to apply to the school of education. While her advanced degree was to be in education, rather than nursing, she chose to concentrate her studies on both education and nursing. However, to date the Medical Academy has not granted her degree even though her research is finished and has been submitted.

Currently, nurses lack political power but are slowly gaining their voices within the rigid political system. Having Standards of Practice and a Nurse Practice Act would guide the profession as would increased numbers of nurse educators attaining advanced degrees. As Central Asia strives to improve health, a sense of optimism is possible that nursing will be recognized not only as a dignified profession but also as a scientific specialty.

Of course, currently the government in Kyrgyzstan is very unstable, and because wages in this former Soviet country are paid by the government, they remain low (\$50 per month). Guljahan relates that morale among nurses is also low because of supply shortages and lack of recognition for their hard work. They are nurses because they care about people. It is hoped that soon the government will care about the nurses.

