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LETTER TO EDITORS

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NURSING AND MEN: A GENDER BIAS

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Dear Editor,

Although the number of men in nursing continues to rise, but they have been a minority group within the nursing profession until today. It seems negative gender stereotypes still exist in nursing, exacerbated by the media. Careers in nursing, administration or beauty are often viewed as jobs for females, while mechanics, sports or construction industry are seen as jobs for males.¹ Recent literature about men in nursing also claimed that nursing remained the realm of women² and that the path for men to nursing continued to be difficult; with the nursing culture dominated by women.³

Ironically, this gender bias stereotyping also occurs in nursing educational programs because nursing faculties are often composed mainly of women.⁴ Nursing has been identified with feminine ways of caring. In Florence Nightingale's time, men were considered

to lack the capacity to provide mothering and caring because "their horny hands were detrimental to caring," so they were excluded from nursing.⁵ Not infrequently, the image of nursing is seen with a female with a white cap and dress, not a male in a white two-piece. In addition, male nurses are generally assumed to be gay.³ These reasons identified for why more men are not attracted to the nursing profession.

This gender stereotype however will result in a reduction of men in nursing, while the demand for nurses to cope the global nursing shortage is on the rise. More new nurses are actually needed to graduate into a job marketplace and many hospitals desire a mix of genders among their staff.

Male nurses offer the physical strength needed for tasks like moving patients and heavy equipment. But these, of course, men also have as great a capacity for caring like woman do. Being

an excellent nurse requires both resilience and empathy, and having those skills is not a matter of gender.

In addition, having male nurses actually ensures that male patients are well represented, and all their needs will be fully understood. In other words, men provide unique perspectives and skills that are important to the profession. It is also becoming continuously recognized that men, like women, have care-giving strengths and skills that can make nursing an excellent choice for them.

So, it is a great time for men to begin a career in nursing. The United States Bureau of Labor predicts that a job growth rate will be much faster than average, the employment for nurses will grow 16 percent by the year 2024.⁶ There is no doubt that there is a growing demand for and acceptance of male nurses in the nursing profession.

The nursing profession, in this regard, needs to place a greater emphasis on growing understanding that men have an important role in health care as the strategy to recruit more of them to play in the field. As that understanding continues to grow, so will the demand for male nurses.

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