



Commonwealth Health Ministers Meeting

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Theme – ‘E-Health: Challenges and Opportunities’

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REPORT FROM THE COMMONWEALTH STEERING COMMITTEE FOR NURSING AND MIDWIFERY

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Background

A request from Health Ministers in 1989 led to a meeting to consider the challenges and opportunities facing nursing and midwifery services across the Commonwealth, which in turn led to the formation of a Commonwealth Health Ministers’ Steering Committee for Nursing and Midwifery.

2. Progress reports have been presented, and the mandate of the Steering Committee renewed, at subsequent Commonwealth Health Ministers Meetings (CHMMs). The reports have summarised the Steering Committee’s work over the previous twelve months. Additionally, after the Steering Committee has carried out one of its regular surveys of nursing and midwifery in all Commonwealth countries, the reports have included the findings, and provided a wider overview of the Steering Committee’s work. The Steering Committee last provided a fuller report of that sort to 15 CHMM (paper HMM(G)(05)(INF1). This report covers the Steering Committee’s work since May 2007.

Membership

3. Members of the Steering Committee are appointed by the Commonwealth Secretariat. They include representatives of international nursing and midwifery organisations, and a number of national chief nursing officers (CNOs). CNO membership is reviewed regularly, and the new appointments made over the years, coupled with changes in organisations’ representatives, have given different countries and individuals the opportunity to contribute to the Steering Committee’s work, and bring different insights to it.

Achievements in past year

4. Since its last report in May 2007, the Steering Committee have again delivered the programme of work it had planned in order to support and develop the contribution of nurses

and midwives to the achievement of Ministerial objectives, the Millennium Development Goals, and to the health of the peoples of the Commonwealth.

Resource materials

5. In October 2007, the Steering Committee produced a further resource in its series of practical materials to support nurses and midwives across the Commonwealth "Patient matters: a resource on patient-centred care for Commonwealth nurses and midwives". This was distributed to the Health Ministers, Chief Nursing Officers and Presidents of National Nursing Associations of all Commonwealth countries.

6. This resource focuses on matters which are central to experience of the patients who nurses and midwives care for, other than their treatment itself -- for example communication, diversity issues, the patient environment and patient rights. It includes a number of very practical items such as posters, checklists and activities, alongside policy and guidance materials from a range of organisations and settings. Several letters of commendation and appreciation have been received, highlighting the value countries placed on the materials.

Regional workshops

7. As part of its on-going series of regional workshops, the Steering Committee - assisted by the Commonwealth Nurses Federation, in handling bookings from National Nursing Associations and requests for financial help - organised workshops for the nurses and midwives from Africa in Ghana in February 2008. The workshops focussed on improving working lives and on presentation, proposal writing and influencing skills for senior nurses and midwives.

8. The expert speakers - Mrs Margaret Phiri, Regional Advisor, Human Resources for N & M, WHO Regional Office for Africa, Dr Marla Salmon, Director of the Lillian Carter Center for International Nursing & Midwifery in Atlanta, USA and Mrs Dorica Sakala Mwewa, Chief Policy Analyst - Nursing Services, Zambia all kindly gave their services free of charge. The workshop sessions were conducted as informally as possible, with opportunities for participants to discuss issues in groups, as well as in the plenary sessions, and to practice skills taught.

9. About 90 delegates, from 10 Commonwealth African countries in the region took part - some only being able to do so because help towards their costs was made available through the grant funding kindly provided by the Commonwealth Secretariat, and Commonwealth Foundation. Delegates were given copies of relevant Commonwealth and WHO resource materials to take away with them. They were encouraged to complete action plans provided at the end of the workshops to help them apply and share what they had learnt on return to their places of work. Countries in the region which had been unable to send representatives to the workshops were included in the distribution of the workshop report, including the presentations.

10. Preliminary preparations are now in hand for workshops for the South Asia Region, to be held in India, in early 2009.

Global Health Worker Policy Advisory Council

11. In spring 2007 I was honoured to be invited to serve on the Global Health Worker Policy Advisory Council, chaired jointly by Mary Robinson and Francis Omaswa. drawing on the insights and experience gained as Chair of the Commonwealth Steering Committee, as well as in my work for the Department of Health, England.

12. I have taken part in the Council first two full meetings, held in May 2007 and October 2007, and will continue to contribute to the efforts to propose effective responses to health-worker migration, support implementation of the WHA resolutions on workforce matters/migration, and produce a framework for global code of practice for consideration at WHA 2009.

Survey - 2008

13. The Steering Committee is undertaking a further survey of nursing and midwifery in all Commonwealth countries in 2008, with a view to including the findings in our report to 2009 CHMM, and to informing future work programmes. The questionnaires have been sent out to national chief nursing officers and presidents of national nursing associations for completion, with copies to Health Ministers for information. We would be grateful if Health Ministers would encourage completion and return of the questionnaires, so that the picture presented by the results of the survey is as comprehensive as possible. We have tried to keep the number of questions to a minimum, so that completing the questionnaire is not too heavy a demand on respondents time.

Conclusion

14. Despite having no regular funding or staff resources of its own, the Steering Committee has in the last year maintained its programme of work, through the good offices of individual members of the Steering Committee, the support of their employing organisations, and the kind assistance of other partners (eg as speakers at workshops or contributors to its resource materials). We also greatly appreciate the kind support which Commonwealth Health Ministers have continued to show for our work.

15. Our aim has been to support the contribution of nursing and midwifery to the health of the people of the Commonwealth, and to the achievement of Health Ministers' objectives. The Steering Committee has once again received expressions of thanks for its work, underlining its practical value to the countries served. The positive benefits of the regional workshops have been confirmed by comments in the evaluation questionnaires now completed after each workshop. Feedback on the 2007 workshops in Singapore (the last for which feedback is available) included examples of activities undertaken as a follow-up to the workshops, and widespread sharing of knowledge gained there, which would impact on the services provided. The survey in progress this year will also provide insights into the impact of the Steering Committee's work.

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