

Research Article

Knowledge and involvement of nurses regarding health policy development in Thailand

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Abstract

The purpose of this descriptive study was to explain the levels of knowledge about and involvement in national health policy development by nurses in Thailand. The study used quantitative and qualitative means to gather data about the topic from two groups of professional nurses: 2121 nurses who worked in hospitals around the country and 26 nurse leaders who were members of steering committees in nursing professional organizations. A self-administered questionnaire and an interview guide regarding knowledge and involvement in national health policy were used for collecting the data. The content validity and reliability of the questionnaire were assured. The results showed that almost two-thirds of the sample had a high level of knowledge about national health policy development but that almost three-quarters of the sample had no involvement in national health policy development. The interviews of the nurse leaders showed that some of them had been involved directly in formulating health policy but most of them thought that they had not been involved directly. The results demonstrated that it is essential that nurses understand and be actively involved in national health policy development.

Key words

nurse leaders, nurses, health policy, policy involvement, policy processes, Thailand.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of “policy” relates to the principles that govern action that is directed towards given ends (Titmus, 1974), while the concept of “health policy” relates to the decisions that are made to promote the welfare of the public (Mason *et al.*, 2007). Nurses make up the majority group of health-care personnel in most countries around the globe, with the main responsibility of providing quality care to people. The World Health Organization (2002) encourages nurses and midwives to be involved in policy formulation for three main reasons. First, nurses and midwives are those that are closest to patients and their family; therefore, the recommendations from nurses and midwives are important sources of opinions for policy development. Second, various health policies have a direct effect on nurses and midwives. Lastly, nurses and midwives have an important role in professional development and are able to work well together in a multidisciplinary

setting. Moreover, the International Council of Nurses (ICN) also proposed that nurses can make an important contribution to the development of appropriate and effective health policy (International Council of Nurses, 2008). The ICN strongly promotes and supports efforts to improve the preparation of nurses for policy development.

Literature review

Thailand is a South-East Asian country with a population of 63 million people (Ministry of Public Health, 2008). The development of the nation’s health-care system and the improvement of the health of Thai people are the country’s highest goals. Thus, there are many public and public health policies that affect health services and nursing practice. The intention of the Ninth National Health Development Plan (NNHDP) for 2002–2006 was to guide the development of the desired health-care system by linking it to the 5 year Ninth National Social and Economic Development Plan (Steering Committee of the Ninth National Health Development Plan, 2001). The implementation of the NNHDP led to many changes in Thailand. One of its goals was to improve the role, mission, and structure of governmental

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