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## Phasing out diploma in nursing: Merits and implications on nursing education in Pakistan

Hussain Maqbool Ahmed Khuwaja

*Madam*, On 8th August 2019, Pakistan Nursing Council (PNC) announced the ceasing of the three-year Diploma in Nursing which heralds a new era of the Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BScN) as the entry point for the nursing profession in Pakistan. This brings Pakistan in line with most developed and many developing countries.

This letter discusses the merits and implications of phasing out the three-year diploma in the nursing programme. The majority of practicing nurses who have completed Diploma in Nursing have been hampered in their challenges of going back to school and continuing their studies while being financially responsible for their families, as well as managing the demands of full-time nursing. The current evidence on health safety in hospitals reveals that a balanced ratio of bachelor prepared registered nurses to patients improves mortality and morbidity.<sup>1-3</sup> The nurse to patient ratio in Pakistan is 1:50 against the standard benchmark of 1:5.<sup>4</sup> According to the World Health Organization, Pakistan has 5 nurses and midwives (combined) as compared to 10 medical doctors per 10,000 population.<sup>5</sup> The globally recommended ratio of doctors to nurses is 4:1, which is almost reverse in Pakistan (1:3).<sup>4</sup>

With the phasing out of the Diploma in Nursing, approximately 138 Nursing Institutes will be forced to cease Diploma enrollments from 2020 and will be encouraged to enrol four-year BScN students only.<sup>6</sup> With the government's desire to increase nursing numbers seven-fold by 2030 there is a dire need to promote conversion programme for these diploma graduates. However, the entrance criteria regulated by PNC for the diploma programme was 'matric' in science in the secondary school certificate exams, while the entrance criteria for the BScN programme is 'intermediate' in science (pre-medical).

To ease the nursing shortage, PNC and Higher Education Commission (HEC), must be flexible about entrance criteria for BScN degree programmes across Pakistan. Also, the PNC should actively plan to improve the standards of nursing schools across Pakistan so that these institutes could provide the standard of education required for

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**Table:** Distribution of Nursing Institutes offering Diploma in Nursing across four provinces of Pakistan.

Province	Type of Nursing Institute	No. of Schools	No. of Seats
Punjab	Government	45	4717
	Private	6	135
	Army	2	60
	Missionary	5	5237
Sindh	Government	23	1430
	Private	33	1523
	Army	2	130
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	Government	10	1195
	Private	4	1355
Baluchistan	Government	5	190
	Private	2	70
	Army	1	15
Total		138	16057

undergraduate degree programmes. In short, flexible bridging programmes; innovations such as encouraging mature and second-degree applicants into nursing programmes, and progressive seamless career pathways are vital. The author propose that PNC and HEC have to consider candidates from non-science background for admission into BScN programmes, is one such innovation, and lessons can be learned from several developed countries who have taken this route.

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