

THE TRAINING OF NURSES AND MIDWIVES IN BELGIUM

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S u m m a r y. The aim of professional training of nurses and midwives in Belgium is to provide higher education at the undergraduate and graduate level. For nursing there are two systems of higher education: the Flemish and the Walloon. According to the European WHO Strategy, the curriculum for midwifery should be based on developing competencies. The aim of the study is a brief presentation of the principles governing the system of training of nurses and midwives in Belgium. The method used in the study was the analysis of documentation and literature of the subject.

K e y w o r d s: education, nurse, midwife.

INTRODUCTION

One of the European Union directives is addressed to professional education of nurses and midwives. The role of nurses and midwives is becoming increasingly important, so it is essential that they are well educated, and have learned how to adapt to current changes and work in interpersonal and multi-sectoral environment.

In Belgium, there are two systems of higher education: the Flemish and the Walloon one. In Wallonia, education is divided into two sectors: the university system (six universities affiliated in three academies), and out-of- university (21 high schools and 17 academies of art) [1]. In Flanders, students can study a chosen major at one of the six universities and 21 other affiliated high schools. The universities implement a 3-year vocational study (professional bachelor's programs). Moreover, there is also an opportunity to complete one-year diploma (advanced bachelor's programs). If one plans to

complete master's degree program, they must have a bachelor's degree (B). Master's degree (master or advanced master programs) lasts at least 2 years, PhD minimum 3 years. In Wallonia, it is possible to obtain bachelor's degree (B) after a 3-year undergraduate degree and master's degree (M) after another year or two years of study. In Belgium, the academic year is divided into three semesters: from September till the end of December, from February to May, the holiday period, and the examination session.

In Belgium, the conditions of admission are the same for all universities, both in Flanders and in Wallonia. Applicants must present a high school diploma, which reflects 12 years of education in primary and secondary school. Students are required to pay for college tuition. In the academic year 2012/2013, a year of university education in Wallonia cost 835 euros. In Flanders, the tuition for a year of education at the University of Gent was 596.3 euros (2012). Students can apply for scholarships and social services, which are granted by the Ministry of Education of Flanders and Wallonia, after the student has presented the documents reflecting family income and tax returns [2]. In Wallonia, social grants are awarded by the French Community, and in Flanders by the Ministry of Education [3].

Education of Midwives

According to the WHO European Strategy, the curriculum for midwifery course is based on developing competencies. The tasks set by the

professional role of midwife can be implemented only if the student has gained required knowledge, skills and attitudes. These values are within the competence of a professional midwife and provide guidance to develop a program of the courses in midwifery. The duration of midwifery course and subjects implemented during the training are determined by the directives of the European Community [4].

The main tasks of training as a midwife are:

- to prepare the graduate to take responsibility for their own actions and shift management;
- to develop skills related to interpersonal communication, formulating opinions, views and assessments;
- to prepare midwives to work in an interdisciplinary team;
- to motivate for life-long learning.

Studies of midwifery are mainly based on medical sciences, in particular the art of nursing and midwifery, and auxiliary sciences like biological sciences and social studies. The study period may not be shorter than three years. The education time is 4,600 hours of study, including 2,300 hours of practical training. In many European countries, training as a midwife takes into account the traditions and local conditions [5].

There are two systems of education of midwives in Belgium:

- The Flemish system— three-year long, in which students begin learning midwifery right from the start.
- The Walloon system – four- year long, in which the first year of education is studying nursing, the second is a mixed midwifery and nursing, and the last two years include teaching only midwifery.

In Flanders, the students must complete 1,025 hours of theoretical training and practical classes out of the total number of 1,575 hours. In Wallonia, 1,185 hours of specialized practical classes are required.

In Wallonia, there are 11, and in Flanders 12 midwifery schools within the system of postgraduate education. It is very difficult to determine the number of female students and students taking education because the system of Walloon midwifery studies is considered to be the part of general nursing education. Studying midwifery in Belgium is not easy. The statistics show that more than half of the students do not succeed in passing the second year of studies. Practical training in midwifery is an important stage of learning the profession. Belgian

students gain work experience under the supervision of medical staff at various wards. Students have the option of doing 24-hour shifts, and on the ward they are monitored by the entire medical team. Each student is tutored by one midwife who is a hospital employee. She assesses the daily work and progress in seminars which are a summing-up of the shift. The work and progress of students is evaluated on the basis of the guidelines contained in the Individual Assessment Sheet [6]. Each school obligatorily prepares such a document for each individual student. The evaluation sheet includes an assessment of the student with account for his/her:

- social behavior, teamwork skills;
- professional approach to patient, stimulating their activity and motivating them;
- the ability to transfer knowledge and conduct health education;
- recognition of pathology;
- execution of comprehensive care, the ability to run documentation.

The training of midwives in Belgium has an impact on increasing the rank of midwifery as a profession. Graduates have professional knowledge and skills that help them carry out independent activities within the scope of care of the woman and her family in every period of her life [7].

Education of Nurses

Belgium is one of the countries which suffers great shortage of nursing staff. Nursing is a very important profession in medicine which requires continuous adaptation of nurses to the changing environment. In Belgium, the key concept for the training of nurses is subject learning and modular learning.

The training is based on 4 pillars, i.e. modules in which there is no division into years, and after getting credit in the module, student receives a partial certificate. Each module consists of a specific number of topics. The material is presented in the integrated form, and there is no division into separate subjects, but into varied content relevant to the topic.

After the module has been completed, a certificate is issued by the Flemish Community [8].

Admission conditions for the first module of the fourth degree include:

- a certificate of completion of the second year of the third grade vocational training,
- diploma certifying secondary education,
- passing the preliminary exam for the fourth grade,

- diploma obtained abroad and recognized by the Department of Science of the Ministry of the Flemish Community,
- passed entrance test for students who are at least 21 years of age and do not meet the above conditions.

The duration of the module is 18 weeks.:

- the first two modules: 2/3 theory + 1/3 practice
- the next two modules: 1/2 theory and 1/2 practice,
- the last module: 1/3 theory and 2/3 practice.

At the final stage of the modular training, the student can choose one of the following fields of nursing, in which he/she is going to undertake work:

- general health care,
- psychiatric health care,
- care for the elderly.

After completing five modules, student receives a diploma in nursing.

The European SEDOC system (Système Européen de Diffusion des Offres et demandes d'emploi en Compensation) developed by the European Commission, and the International Standard Classification of Education System (ISCED) provide organizational framework for nursing education. The main issues include:

1. The level of occupational functioning. European SEDOC system enables approximation to the level which we aspire. It includes 5 levels on the basis of the following criteria:

- competence and professional expertise,
- complexity and standards,
- responsibility,
- transferability of matching expertise to a given situation,
- possession of specialization.

2. Level of education. ISCED (1997) outnumbers 6 levels:

- Level 1, 2, 3 is in the training of basic and secondary education.
- Level 4 applies to the education after secondary education. It is located between the average education and higher education. Level 3 intensifies the knowledge of level 3 (category 4B). Preparation for studies at level 5 (category 4A) the duration of studies 6 months -2 years.
- Level 5 - the first phase of a higher level is offered by universities and colleges. It must be at least level 3 or 4A. The curriculum must last min. 2 years from the beginning of level 5. There are 2 categories of Level 5:

- Level 5B - applies to specific practical skills and professional knowledge, it is addressed directly to the hospital work. Criteria: directed at practice and specificity of the profession, the obtained level 3B or 4A, the learning period is 2 years, immediate access to the profession.
- Level 5A (BA)- a strong theoretical base, leading to a qualification required to start further study research or a profession that requires greater skills. Criteria: science lasting min. 3 years, teachers with higher academic degrees, writing a thesis or research project.
- Level 6: Master / PhD.

In the years of 2004/2005 in Belgium a 3-year education for bachelor's degree was introduced, for which student obtains 180 ECTS. The first two years are common for all students, in the third year students choose a field of nursing. After three years of study the student obtains Bachelor's degree in nursing in the chosen field: hospital nursing, geriatric nursing, psychiatric nursing, social nursing, pediatric nursing. It is possible to obtain Bachelor's degree in the field of nursing care, geriatric care, pediatric care, social care, environmental care, health care, intensive care and emergency care, and the operating theatre care, after obtaining a degree in another field of nursing [9].

Registered nurses who wish to obtain Bachelor's degree in nursing can choose bridging studies, where the number of hours of study is determined by working experience. Bachelor studies prepare to master studies lasting two years. With Bachelor's degree in nursing, it is possible to obtain Bachelor's degree in midwifery, Master's degree in nursing or Master's degree in midwifery within two years. In Belgium, Bachelor's degree and Master's degree in nursing are awarded by universities and high schools [10]. One becomes a nurse after 4-year high school, or a school operating in the hospital (extramural system - IN SERVICE). Graduates can continue their education for 2 years at university faculties of nursing. These educate in:

- clinical nursing,
- organization and management in health care,
- management of the process of teaching.

Graduates are awarded the title 'DOCTOR-ANTUS', which is an equivalent of Polish Master's degree.

'IN SERVICE- education' is learning in school, belonging to the hospital, and is associated with having a contract of employment with a hospital for the period of training.

CONCLUSIONS

Basing on this brief review, we can conclude that secondary education is the minimum requirement for starting education in the profession of nurse and midwife. The training of nurses and midwives usually lasts 3 years in high schools, the completion of which conditions acquiring skills to practice nursing or midwifery.

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