

TN's next expectation is a nursing university



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Tamil Nadu's educational development has been in the national limelight. Our achievements in medical education too have done the state proud. Tamil Nadu has 69 medical colleges, the highest in the country. So, by way of setting the next milestone, an expectation has been rising that a nursing university will be established in the state. According to the University Grants Commission's norms, a university can be established if there are 100 colleges in a state, from where 5,000 students graduate annually. In that respect, Tamil Nadu is fit to have a nursing university since a long time ago. So, the nursing university is a need of the hour.

TN and nursing

The bond between nurses and Tamil Nadu is very deep. The first nursing school in Southeast Asia was set up in Tamil Nadu way back in 1864. That is the majestically standing MMC Nursing College situated near the Central Railway station now. The first degree course in nursing was started in Vellore Christian Medical College in 1946.

Tamil Nadu stands first in the number of registered nurses and nurse-midwives in the country (2,87,897). The state also boasts nurses with doctorates (321). Moreover, Tamil Nadu is second next to Kerala in the number of nurses working abroad.

There are 241 nursing colleges, 193 nursing schools and 79 nursing assistant schools in both government and private sectors in Tamil Nadu. In all, the number of nursing students studying in all these institutions is 84,000. If the nursing university is set up, the students will get new courses to pursue and also job opportunities in keeping with their qualifications. The university will also help the nurses (1,60,000) working in government and private hospitals pursue higher studies and thereby increase their livelihood and lifestyle.

Need for nursing university

Medical experts have categorized the growth of the nursing sector into the pre-corona and the post-corona. The long-time concept that nursing is just a miscellaneous wing of the medical sector has changed drastically. The number of youth choosing nursing courses has, of late, been increasing nowadays. As per the World Health Organisation's norms, there should be one doctor for 1,000 patients. But as things have turned out, we have now gone several steps ahead of this rule, having one doctor for every 250 patients. But we are yet to meet the WHO norm that stipulates three nurses for every 1,000 patients as our present nurse-patient rate is just 1.5:1000. The major reason for this trend is that the universities do not give as much importance to nursing colleges as to medical colleges and Siddha colleges.

It is the governing council of Dr. MGR Medical University which is the authority that takes decisions on nursing courses. But nurses have not been given powers and responsibilities in the decision-making process. Out of the 14 members of the governing council, there are only two nurses. So, the present situation is one wherein decisions related to nurses and their education are taken only by doctors without consulting the nurses. As nurses in various categories such as nursing of elderly people, nursing of cancer patients etc. are much in demand, exclusive courses are also needed for the nurses in Tamil Nadu.

Nurse-midwives play a vital role in deliveries. But it is not that easy for a nurse to become a nurse-midwife in Tamil Nadu. First a

candidate has to get a BSc degree in nursing (four years) or a diploma in nursing (three years) and then two years' experience in obstetrics. So, only after around eight years, one can become a nurse-midwife. This has deterred several nurses from becoming nurse-midwives. As a result, there are fewer normal deliveries (46 per cent) in Tamil Nadu. This situation can be changed if the nursing university is set up and a direct three-year degree course (BSc) in midwifery introduced.

Meanwhile, several nursing institutions not properly recognised have mushroomed across Tamil Nadu. They allure wannabe nurses with offers of six-month or one-year training. But the fact is that only the nurses with B.Sc or diploma in nursing are given equally the status of 'recognised nurse'. Even in this, there are several complications.

Where to set up nursing varsity

It was British national Lady Lawley who donated a few acres of land near Egmore, Chennai, to the then government in Madras Presidency for the sake of Tamil Nadu nurses' development. Now on the site is functioning Lady Lawley Quarters for Nurses, purportedly commemorating the British lady. But the general opinion doing the rounds among nurses is that it is an initiative not in proportion to the selfless lady's lofty dream. So, in proper commemoration of the lady, the nursing university can be set up on the sprawling campus.

Tamil Nadu is a model state in taking care of the nurses' welfare. So, if the nursing university is set up, it will be a further leap in the state's medical sector and a feather to the state's cap.

Translated by V. Mariappan.