

## ARAŞTIRMA

### OPINIONS OF HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS REGARDING NURSING PROFESSION

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#### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** This study was conducted to determine the opinions of health care professionals about the nursing profession.

**Methods:** Descriptive design was used. The sample consisted of 370 health care professionals. Of the health care professionals that participated in the study, 38.2% were nurses (n=141), 24.6% physicians (n=91), 28.6% pharmacists (n=53), 28.6% dentists (n=53), 5.1% dietitians (n=19), and 3.5% physiotherapists (n=13). Data was collected by a questionnaire.

**Results:** Some of nurses (21.7%), 60% of physicians, 68.6% of pharmacists, 94.3% of dentists, 73.7% of dietitians and 76.9% of physical therapists agreed with the statement "Nurses are the physician's assistant". Most of the health care professionals (77% to 95%) except nurses said they disagreed with the statement "I would like to be a nurse".

**Conclusions:** This study found that most of the health care professionals evaluate the status of nursing profession as low, approximately half of them evaluate nursing as an independent profession and more than half of them evaluate nursing as physician's assistant.

**Keywords:** Nursing profession, health professionals, dentists, pharmacists, dietitians, physiotherapists, opinion

#### ÖZET

##### Sağlık Profesyonellerinin Hemşirelik Mesleğine İlişkin Görüşleri

**Amaç:** Araştırma sağlık profesyonellerinin hemşirelik mesleğine ilişkin görüşleri belirlemek amacıyla yapılmıştır.

**Yöntem:** Tanımlayıcı tipte yapılan araştırmanın örneklemi 370 sağlık profesyonelinde oluşmuştur. Araştırmaya katılan sağlık profesyonellerinin % 38.2'si hemşire (n=141), % 24.6'sı hekim (n=91), % 28.6'sı eczacı (n=53) ve diş hekimi (n=53), % 5.1'i diyetisyen (n=19) ve % 3.5'i fizyoterapisttir (n=13). Araştırmanın verileri anket formu ile toplanmıştır.

**Bulgular:** Hemşirelerin % 21.7'si, hekimlerin % 60'ı, eczacıların % 68.6'sı, diş hekimlerinin % 94.3'ü, diyetisyenlerin % 73.7'si, fizyoterapistlerin % 76.9'u "Hemşireler doktorun yardımcısıdır" ifadesine katıldıklarını belirtmişlerdir. Hemşireler hariç sağlık profesyonellerinin çoğu (% 77- %95) "Hemşire olmak isterdim" ifadesine katılmadıklarını ifade etmişlerdir.

**Sonuç:** Bu çalışmada sağlık profesyonellerinin çoğunluğunun hemşirelik mesleğinin statüsünü düşük olarak, yaklaşık yarısının hemşireliği bağımsız bir meslek olarak ve yarıdan fazlasının hemşireleri hekimin yardımcısı olarak değerlendirdikleri bulunmuştur.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Hemşirelik mesleği, sağlık profesyonelleri, diş hekimi, eczacı, diyetisyen, fizyoterapist, görüş

#### INTRODUCTION

Health care services are provided by health care professionals involved in the health care system. Nursing is now considered to be an important factor in the health care system. Nursing as a health discipline consists of a group of professionals helping individuals, family and society to protect and improve their health and is involved in the recovery and rehabilitation of disease processes (Birol 2010).

Activities performed to maintain the health of the individual and to ensure the patient is healthy once again constitute the basis of nursing. These activities vary in a wide range from contributing to the care of the individual to diagnostic and therapeutic procedures.

In Turkey, nurses carry out number of tasks including assessing the health related necessities of the individual, family and the

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society; planning, implementing, evaluation and auditing the nursing care according to evidence based rules; evaluating the quality and outcomes of the given nursing care; implementing the treatments ordered by the physician; monitoring the effects of medical diagnostic and treatment interventions on the patients; keeping the records and taking necessary precautions when met with unwished situations; performing training, consultancy, research tasks related with nursing; participating scientific activities about their profession; supporting the education of the society, nursing students; health professionals and health professional candidates (Ministry of Health, 2011).

Nurses perform most of the mentioned functions independently, but they need to fulfill some functions together with other members of the health care team (Nahçıvan 2012). In addition to providing health care, nurses fulfill many professional functions such as conducting research, developing theories, and participating in professional organizations and political activities (Vicdan 2009). Nurses comprise the largest group among health professionals by means of number in Turkey. According to the records of Turkish Ministry of Health approximately 142 thousand nurses are employed (Ministry of Health; Health Statistics Yearbook 2014). Nurses are among the important elements of the healthcare team but they do not receive the value they deserve. Other members of the health care team perceive the profession nursing differently. This stems from lack of knowledge of the role and the duties of nursing as a profession. Despite the studies conducted in Turkey towards determining the opinions of the society, nurses and students on the nursing profession (Emiroğlu 2000; Korkmaz ve Görgülü 2010; Özpancar, Aydın ve Akansel 2008), no studies were found on determining the opinions of health care professionals such as dentists, pharmacists, dietitians, physiotherapists about the profession of nursing. This study was conducted to determine the opinions of health care professionals about the nursing profession.

## METHODS

**Design and Participants:** The population of this descriptive study consisted of health care professionals who work at the Gazi University Faculties of Medicine, Pharmacy, Dentistry, and Health Sciences and the Health Care Practice and Research Center. The sample consisted of 370 subjects who agreed to participate in the study. Of the health care

professionals that participated in the study, 38.2% were nurses (n:141), 24.6% physicians (n:91), 28.6% pharmacists (n:53), 28.6% dentists (n:53), 5.1% dietitians (n: 19), and 3.5% physiotherapists (n:13).

**Instrument:** The data were collected through a questionnaire prepared by the researchers. The questionnaire consisted of two parts. Questions about socio-demographic characteristics of health care professionals such as age, gender, education level were present in the first section while the second section contained 15 statements on their opinions on the profession of nursing prepared according to literature (Akeroyd et al. 2009; Emiroğlu 2000; Korkmaz and Görgülü 2010; Özpancar, Aydın and Akansel 2008; Takaze, Maude and Manias 2006; Włodarczyk and Tobolska 2011). The statements related to the social status of nursing were that “The status of the nursing profession is high in Turkey”, “I would like to be a nurse” and “Nurses are often tense and nervous”; the statements related to professionalism were that “Nurses should do research for professional development”, “Associate professor and professors should be present in the nursing profession”, “Nurses should have responsibilities in constituting health policy”, “I find high school graduate nurses at the same level as university graduates”, “Nurses' level of knowledge is sufficient” and “Nurses should have a say in decision-making in health care settings”; the statements related to roles of nurses were that “The nurse has independent roles”, “Nursing is an independent profession”, “Other health care providers can also do nurses' tasks”, “Nurses can implement the decisions taken on their own within their own mandates”, “Nurses are the physician's assistant”, “The care that the nurses provide their patients is sufficient”.

**Data Collection:** Data were collected between April and May, 2013. A face-to-face interview technique was used and lasted 15 minutes. Health professionals who were agreed to participate were included in the study.

**Data Analysis:** Data were evaluated using the SPSS 13.0 (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) statistical software package. Descriptive characteristics and the opinions about the nursing profession were stated using frequencies and percentages.

**Ethical Consideration:** This study was conducted according to Principles of Helsinki. Written permissions were obtained from the relevant faculties and health care center before

the study. Informed consent form was read to the health care professionals were interviewed before the application to explain the aim of the study and the written and verbal consents of health care professionals were obtained after the informed consent form was read.

**Limitations of the Study:** This study had several limitations. This study was conducted in a university located in Ankara, Turkey. So, these findings cannot be generalised to Turkey. Health care professionals who agreed to participate were included in the study.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Socio-demographic characteristics

Among the health care professionals, 30.8% were in the 26-30 years age group, 75.7% were female, 38.1% had a bachelor's degree, and 45.7% had been working for 1-5 years (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Socio-demographic characteristics of health professionals

Socio-demographic characteristics	n	%
<b>Age group</b>		
20-25	67	18.1
26-30	114	30.8
31-35	71	19.2
36-40	60	16.2
41 and over	58	15.7
<b>Sex</b>		
Female	280	75.7
Male	90	24.3
<b>Educational status</b>		
High school graduate	31	8.4
Associate degree	12	3.2
Bachelor's degree	141	38.1
Master's degree	109	29.5
Doctorate	77	20.8
<b>Year of service</b>		
1-5 years	169	45.7
6-15 years	124	33.5
16 years and over	77	20.8

When the health care professionals were asked their opinions on nursing training 92.9% of nurses and 91.7% of the others said the education period should be 4 years after high school, while 93.6% of nurses and 90% of the others stated that master's and doctoral programs contribute to the nursing profession.

### The opinions about the nursing profession

#### *The social status of nursing*

Image is part of a profession. It is the way a person appears to others, or in the case of a profession, the way that profession appears to other disciplines and to the general public-consumers of health care (White 2013). The image of nursing is determined by how nurses themselves and others (the public) perceive nursing. Earlier studies have indicated that the public image of nurses often differs from nurses' own image of nursing (ten Hoeve, Jansen and Roodbol 2014). A poor public image of nursing may affect not only nursing recruitment, but also nurses' attitudes towards work (Takaze, Maude and Manias 2006). In this study, most of the dietitians (94.7%), 65.9% of nurses, 70% of physicians, 77.4% of dentists, 69.2% of physical therapists said they did not agree with the statement "The status of the nursing profession is high in Turkey". Most of the health care professionals (77% to 95%) except nurses said they disagreed with the statement "I would like to be a nurse" (Table 2). This is thought to stem from the perception of nursing as an occupation but not a profession. In the study of Özpancar, Aydın and Akansel (2008), 58.2% of nursing students' stated that they agree with the statement "The nursing profession has an important status in the society". The nursing profession does not bring prestige to its members in Turkey, and on the contrary the individual prestige the nurses obtain elevates the status of the profession. The "commitment to the profession" in the nursing profession is therefore insufficient and nurses making a transition to other occupations are commonly seen. Similarly, Włodarczyk and Tobolska (2011) determined that nurses perceived their professional position in the society and medical profession as the lowest. The characteristics were appraised lower by doctors than by nurses, which indicates a more negative attitude of the former.

Nurses face a lot of stress factors in the working environment such as role uncertainties, shift work, long working hours, and excessive workload. Stress creates symptoms such as restlessness, tension, dissatisfaction or excitement in the individual and negatively affects the nursing service provided. More than half of health care professionals (73.7% of dietitians, 56.9% pharmacist, 53.8% of physiotherapists, 49.1% of dentists) other than nurses (32.2%) in this study agreed with the

statement "Nurses are often tense and nervous". Similarly, 49% of nursing students disagreed with the statement "Nurses are polite and patient people" (Özpancar, Aydın and Akansel 2008). Despite topics such as coping with stress and communication being included in nursing education, more than half of health care professionals still evaluate nurses as individuals providing services while tense and nervous. This situation shows nurses not being able to cope adequately with the stress they are experiencing and this stress being reflected in the provided service.

### **Professionalism**

Professionalism is defined as a service being carried out by experts who are trained in the field and supported by the relevant professional organizations. Some features such as having knowledge continuously updated and improved with research, conducting researches, having a bachelor's degree, and retaining control over policies and actions must be present in order to gain professionalism (Korkmaz 2010). The majority of health care professionals in this study expressed agreeing with statements on professionalism such as "Nurses should do research for professional development (all physiotherapists, 96.7% of physicians, 94.7% of dietitians, 92.2% of pharmacist, 90.6% of dentists)", "Associate professor and professors should be present in the nursing profession (from 66.0% to 94.2%)" and "Nurses should have responsibilities in constituting health policy (between 90.6% and 100.0%)" (Table 2). This finding shows that health care professionals think of nursing as a profession. However, as mentioned earlier, health care professionals also did not think of nursing as a profession due to the practice of nursing as employment and not fulfilling the criteria for being a profession.

Nursing education provided in higher education institutions (bachelor's degree) is part of professionalism. Around the world, nursing baccalaureate, master and doctoral degree programs prepare nurses for a variety of nursing roles. As a result, nursing is becoming more scholarly (ten Hoeve, Jansen and Roodbol 2014). Despite that, all of the physiotherapists, 96.1% of pharmacist, 91.1% of physicians, 84.2% of dietitians and 79.2% of dentists in this study stated that they disagreed with the expression "I find high school graduate nurses at the same level as university graduates" (Table 2). However, the fact that one in four nurses (23.2%) agreed with this statement shows that no

difference is thought to be present between nurses in terms of nursing education, with all nurses being at the same level after graduation. This finding is thought to stem from 19.1% of nurses in the sample group being vocational high school graduates. Indeed, while nurses having a bachelor's degree stated that the nursing education should be at the master's level in the study of Emiroglu (2000), high school graduate nurses stated that high school education was adequate. Korkmaz and Görgülü (2010) found only 5% of nurses to state that nursing education should be at the high school and associate degree level. According to the United States Department of Health and Human Services, 62% of staff registered nurses practice with associate degrees or diplomas. The plurality of respondents (46%) said they didn't think having a bachelor's degree affects the image of nursing (United States Department of Health and Human Services 2004). Nurses with different educational levels (high school, undergraduate, master's degree) are employed in health care institutions to fulfill the same role and functions in Turkey. Although the education is different, possession of the same roles and functions causes the high school graduate nurses to see a bachelor's degree unnecessary. This situation negatively affects the nursing services and the development process of the nursing profession in Turkey.

### **Roles of nurses**

Nurses develop a professional identity through the skills, knowledge and values inherent in their profession. Nursing roles are divided into three categories as dependent, semi-dependent and independent. The independent roles of nurses are related to the problems that can be solved with specific knowledge and skills particular to the profession and are the most important indicator of professional nursing. We found that 30-60% of health care professionals in this study did not agree with statements about the autonomy of nursing such as "The nurse has independent roles (that she can perform without the physician's request) (from 26.3% to 49.1%)", "Nursing is an independent profession (35.3% to 57.9%)", "Other health care providers can also do nurses' tasks (from 78.9% to 89.9%)" and "Nurses can implement the decisions taken on their own within their own mandates (27.8%-47.4%)". It was surprising that one in 10 nurses supported these opinions (Table 2). Similarly, Emiroglu (2000) reported that the majority of physicians and some of the nurses did not have information on the independent role of the nurse.

**Table 2.** The Opinions of Health Professionals about The Nursing Profession

The opinions about the nursing profession	Nurse		Physician		Pharmacist		Dentist		Dietitian		Physiotherapist	
	Yes (%)	No (%)	Yes (%)	No (%)	Yes (%)	No (%)	Yes (%)	No (%)	Yes (%)	No (%)	Yes (%)	No (%)
Other health care providers can also do nurses' tasks	10.1	89.9	16.7	83.3	13.7	86.3	18.9	81.1	21.1	78.9	15.4	84.6
Nurses should have a say in decision-making in health care settings	95.7	4.3	80.0	20.0	86.3	13.7	73.6	26.4	94.7	5.3	76.9	23.1
Nurses are the physician's assistant	21.7	78.3	60.0	40.0	68.6	31.4	94.3	5.7	73.7	26.3	76.9	23.1
I find high school graduate nurses at the same level as university graduates	23.2	76.8	8.9	91.1	3.9	96.1	20.8	79.2	15.8	84.2	0.0	100.0
The care that the nurses provide their patients is sufficient	56.5	43.5	47.8	52.2	35.3	64.7	45.3	54.7	31.6	64.8	23.1	76.9
Nurses are often tense and nervous	23.2	76.8	37.8	62.2	56.9	43.1	49.1	50.9	73.7	26.3	53.8	46.2
The nurse has independent roles (that she can perform without the physician's request)	89.1	10.9	65.6	34.4	64.7	35.3	50.9	49.1	73.7	26.3	61.5	38.5
Nursing is an independent profession	65.2	34.8	52.2	47.8	64.7	35.3	62.3	37.7	42.1	57.9	61.5	38.5
Nurses can implement the decisions taken on their own within their own mandates	87.7	12.3	72.2	27.8	52.9	47.1	52.8	47.2	52.6	47.4	61.5	38.5
The status of the nursing profession is high in Turkey	34.1	65.9	30.0	70.0	11.8	88.2	22.6	77.4	5.3	94.7	30.8	69.2
I would like to be a nurse	63.8	36.2	20.0	80.0	13.7	86.3	11.6	88.7	5.3	94.7	23.1	76.9
Nurses' level of knowledge is sufficient	51.4	48.6	48.9	51.1	27.5	72.5	41.5	58.5	42.1	57.9	61.5	38.5
Nurses should have responsibilities in constituting health policy	98.6	1.4	93.3	6.7	94.1	5.9	90.6	9.4	94.7	5.3	100.0	0.0
Associate professor and professors should be present in the nursing profession	94.2	5.8	81.1	18.9	76.5	23.5	66.0	34.0	89.5	10.5	92.3	7.7
Nurses should do research for professional development	98.6	1.4	96.7	3.3	92.2	7.8	90.6	9.4	94.7	5.3	100.0	0.0

The nurses are thought to fail to fulfill their independent roles such as trainer, consultant, researcher and advocate, leading to other health care professionals not being aware of these roles. In the qualitative study of Akeroyd et al. (2009), Canadian family practitioners struggled to find a common description of the registered nurse's role, often admitting that it is poorly defined, largely defined by tasks and blurred with other health professionals' roles. They stated that "nurses work up patients for physicals and things like that", "Basically nurses can do anything to do with vital signs".

Almost all dentists (94.3%), 76.9% of physical therapists, 73.7% of dieticians, 68.6% of pharmacists and 60% of physicians agreed with the statement "Nurses are the physician's assistant" (Table 2). This finding shows the nursing profession to be evaluated as an extension of physician work and not a separate profession. The provisions of the former Nursing Law in Turkey did not support independence in nursing practices and restricted the nursing roles with the orders of the physicians. However, additional changes in the relevant law in 2007 and the nursing regulation released on March 8, 2010 clarified the task description of nurses and the independent practice of nursing became more visible.

One of the essential conditions of providing high quality and safe health care is to employ skilled nursing manpower correctly (International Council of Nurses 2006). Studies have found nurses to allow more time for indirect

care applications such as providing drugs and materials, responding to phone calls, prescribing the recommended medications, and controlling the units input and output than direct health care and spending approximately 1/3 of their time on indirect care practices (Yıldırım 2006). Half of the physicians (52.2%) and dentists (54.7%) and the majority of other health care professionals (64.7% to 76.9%) in this study said they disagreed with the opinion "The care that the nurses provide their patients is sufficient". We believe the nurses were unable to allow enough time to the care they provide and to demonstrate the stated tasks to other health care professionals adequately.

### CONCLUSION

This study found that most of the health care professionals evaluate the status of nursing profession as low, approximately half of them evaluate nursing as an independent profession and more than half of them evaluate nursing as physician's assistant. In this context, making the required arrangements for the nursing education to consist of at least a bachelor's degree, preventing the indirect health care applications of nurses in health care institutions and enabling the nurses to work in their independent roles are recommended to provide the nursing profession a professional identity.

### Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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