Advanced Nursing Practice in Switzerland

The Leadership Role of the Institute of Nursing Science, University of Basel in Launching Advanced Practice Nursing in the German Speaking European Countries

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The Institute of Nursing Science (INS) at the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Basel was started in 2000 and as such, was the first nursing science institute at a Swiss university. This officially put Advanced Nursing Practice (ANP) “on the map” in the German speaking European countries in general, and in Switzerland in particular. The INS curriculum was the first with a Master of Science degree leading to ANP as the professional credential in the German speaking part of Europe.

From its inception, the Master in Nursing Science (ANP) curriculum has been firmly embedded in the core mission of the INS to be clinically focused. It has been guided by the healthcare needs of the community, in particular, chronic illnesses and an aging population. The INS has a particular focus on self-management of people living with chronic illness, patient safety and quality, and new models of care (see www.nursing.unibas.ch). The goal is to strengthen nursing practice and improve clinical outcomes by means of academic education, research, and clinical practice within an interdisciplinary healthcare context. In Switzerland, the development of the ANP was influenced by the INS curriculum that was driven by the healthcare needs of the population rather than by policy decisions, workforce issues, or practice patterns (De Geest, Callens, Gut, Lindpaintner, & Spirig, 2008). At present, Advanced Practice Nurses (APNs) are working in an increasing number of inpatient, outpatient, and long-term care facilities, exploring and developing roles that match the Swiss nursing and healthcare environment (Spirig, Nicca, Werder, Voggensperger, & Unger, 2004). Still, a legal and policy framework that regulates the education, competencies, responsibilities, and remuneration for APNs in Switzerland has not been established.

The Master in Nursing Science curriculum at the INS spans two years and was developed based on ANP competencies (Hamric, Spross, & Hanson, 2004) and the IOM and WHO competencies for healthcare workers of the 21st century (WHO, 2005, IOM, 2008). Of the 76 nurses who have graduated from the Master’s program, most work in tertiary care settings in clinical practice or a variety of leadership positions. Graduates of the program that assume APN roles work primarily as clinical nurse specialists to optimize clinical processes for specific groups of patients or to lead nurse run clinics (ambulatory care settings, transitional care, and so on). While being engaged in frontline clinical care, they also fulfill roles as educators, researchers, or contribute to policy development and implementation.

The INS program accepts a maximum of 25 full time equivalent students per year. Entry requirements are: (1) Matura (Swiss university entry exam); (2) Swiss degree in nursing or midwifery (diploma level) or equivalent foreign degree; (3) a minimum of 2 years of professional experience in clinical nursing care; and (4) English proficiency. The educational program consists of 6 full-time semesters; a student can also complete the program part-time over a maximum of 12 semesters. In addition, in 2004 the INS implemented a PhD program from which four students have graduated. An additional five doctoral students are currently matriculated.

At the time the INS started in 2000, there was no option for Baccalaureate education for nurses. Because of this, the INS has implemented a one year Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) transition program (60 ECTS) for nurses who are well prepared for further study through their prior education, training, and practice experiences. A 2 year Master’s program (120 ECTS) follows the BSN transition program. In 2006, the Swiss universities of applied sciences started offering 3 year undergraduate nursing programs that will lead to a Bachelor of Science in Nursing. As a result, it is expected that in the coming years, a growing number of graduates from universities of applied sciences holding a BSN will apply for the INS Master’s program.
The ANP curriculum (see www.nursing.unibas.ch) requires access to appropriate clinical settings for the students’ education. In order to guarantee this access and further implement APN roles in clinical settings and support APN preceptors and role models, Academic-Service-Partnerships (ASP) were launched with the University Hospital Basel (see www.kpw.dcn-uhbs.ch) and the Inselspital University Hospital Bern (see www.insel.ch). ASPs are defined as an officially structured partnership for the university and practice setting with a shared vision that builds on strength, demonstrates collaboration and cooperation, and supports change for the sake of improvement (Bleich, Hewlett, Miller, & Bender, 2004; Fralic, 2004). These partnerships are the key to guaranteeing innovative developments in healthcare. They stand in stark contrast with the traditional “silo culture” that has characterized academic nursing education in the past. The ongoing goal is to expand these ASPs to primary care settings and long-term care facilities.

In order to facilitate the introduction of the APNs into the clinical setting and enhance their role development, so-called “clinical career ladders” have been launched by that ASPs. These ladders define the roles, responsibilities, and required competencies in clinical nursing care for each level, including that of APNs, allowing for differentiation in clinical nursing positions (Torstad & Bjork, 2007). The University Hospital Basel is currently in the process of implementing a clinical career ladder which will further support the development of ANP.

The INS builds on strong national and international collaborations. This includes established contacts with US and European universities (see www.nursing.unibas.ch) who have adopted the ANP model in education, research, and clinical field development. These collaborations foster the exposure of students and faculty to international experts to strengthen their scientific and professional development. In addition, the INS has become an attractive location for sabbaticals by leading international scientists in the fields of healthcare and nursing, which in turns nurtures our own development within the institute.

In 2003, all INS programs, including the curriculum, were reviewed by an international evaluation commission which provided a positive evaluation. The Master’s Degree in Nursing Science at the University of Basel is currently in the process of accreditation by the Center of Accreditation and Quality Assurance of the Swiss Universities (OAQ) (add granting Swiss University conference)

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