



PHILIPPINE NURSES ASSOCIATION, INC.

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PNA's Position on the Contractualization of Nurses in the Philippines

What makes nurses distinct from any other healthcare professions is that they provide hands-on care to patients. The focus of the nurse is providing patients a safe care, thus, they spend a great deal of time caring for the patients, both well and unwell. They provide other health care professionals and even physicians the needed information to make decisions on managing the care and treatment of patients. On top of it, nurses are primarily responsible for the execution of care plan formulated for their patients reference.

Despite their significance, nurses feel that they are not being valued. For years, they have been clamoring as victims of unfair labor practices and deprivation of unjust compensation, undignified treatment at work, and poor working environment. Yet, reported incidents of exploitation and unfair labor practices among nurses persist and are increasing. There are documented cases that nurses went on duty beyond their health capacity as humans, forcing them to work for a straight 48 hours. This is already considered as unsafe healthcare practice. PNA also documented some reported cases wherein nurses are still being paid below the prescribed minimum wage. Just last month, despite the very meager salary that nurses are receiving, PNA received requests for help from four (4) nurses who did not receive their salaries for straight four (4) months, yet were still forced to render clinical duty of up to 36 hours.

Why do you think these abuses continue among nurses if refusing to do so can be an option? It is the code of ethics of the nursing profession--- patient safety is more important than anything else. Nurses are trained not only in adhering to these ideals but also to own it as their life's purpose of what it means to be a nurse. Sadly, it is the very same code of ethics that non-compliant health care facility employees make use of, thus, exploitation among nurses continues to exist. Nurses are held hostage to the very purpose and nature of their profession, the very reason that when hospitals are understaffed, and nobody receives the next shift endorsement, poor nurses had no choice but to attend to their patients safety.

This month, there were reported incidents in Cebu, wherein out of 89 nurses under cost of service contract, 64 were no longer renewed. This is very alarming, and is detrimental not only to patients who are at the hospital during the time these nurses were dismissed, but also to public safety. In the Philippines, the ideal nurse to patient ratio is 1:12 according to the Department of Health (DOH). But in reality, the average ratio based on actual data in one public hospital today, is 1:60. Imagine the impact of massive and outright removal of these nurses from the health care facility? In place of these nurses who were removed, who will carry out the doctors order? Who will prepare the treatment plan and document what had been done to patients? Who administers the medications and monitor the patients response and progress?

This mirrors the worsening scenario of our health care system today. Current laws and labor practices and even hospital policies are insufficient to protect not just the rights of our nurses, but also that of the ordinary citizens whose right to quality health and even to safety were deprived.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), nurses are the keys to the successful implementation of the Universal health Care System (UHC). The UHC even requires hiring more nurses to improve the access to care and services among patients. With the current practices however, coupled with the negative experiences of nurses, how can we encourage nurses to support this plan.

Since 2016, contractualization had been at the forefront when President Rodrigo Duterte promised to end it. Nurses are one of the hopefuls, thus hold their reigns and endured staying where they are, refusing the lucrative offers abroad in exchange of an improved living condition for their family. As of the moment, we have around 17,000 nurses in the government who are under cost of service contract. Although House Bill 5707 states that the LGU may exclude allied and health professionals through right-sizing, still these group of professionals including nurses are at the discretion of the Local Chief Executive (LCE) and has therefore no security of tenure.

Now, even the President himself vetoed the passage of law against contractualization and this was confirmed last July 26, 2019. With this, what reasons beyond human comprehension can we give our nurses as an encouragement to stay and choose to serve our countrymen, over foreign nationals who can provide them a just compensation, a better living condition, and above all, make them feel that they are highly valued as a professionals?

There was a remedial measure proposed by Sen. Christopher Bong Go by amending RA 6758, with an SSL 5 adjustment. Senator Richard Gordon authored a separate Resolution and Senate Bill. Senate Bill 562 is the closest we have, but it aims to revise Republic Act 9173. It recognizes that nurses provide safe, humane, quality and holistic care to individuals of varying age, gender and health status, population groups and communities, and that they render professional services in various health facilities and institutions, including hospitals, in shifts and irregular hours for so long as their services are needed. A provision is found reiterating that nurses will have a Salary Grade 15, entry level. It guarantees a decent and living wage. Yet, even with a higher salary grade as a provision, it has no other proposal that prefers regularization over contractualization.

Still, these are not sufficient to keep our nurses from going abroad. The current law provides for nurses an SG 11 rate, equivalent to P 20,754. Should government nurses be included in the proposition of Sen. Go and if it gets an approval, the maximum increase that the nurses can get is only around P4,000 which is still way far from what PNA is pushing since 2002, for nurses to be given at least an SG15 rate equivalent to P30,531. That of Senator Gordon is more promising.

PNA further stands against cost of service, job orders, project-based, consultancy service and any forms of contractualization particularly among nurses. Health care is a basic necessity, the demand for quality health care is growing, and the health care system is becoming more complex thus requiring a more efficient coordination among health care professionals with nurses primarily responsible for implementing the health care management plans. With the UHC implementation, we need to bring back our nurses to where they should be - here, taking care of every Filipino, providing safe and quality health care, and as primary partners in promoting primary health care. We can only do that if we will show them how valuable they are through giving them a competitive pay with a well-deserved security of tenure, providing better working condition primarily by treating them with respect, and by upholding their dignity as valued professionals. These should be translated into laws, policies, and implementing guidelines that health care institutions adhere to. Otherwise, it is but inhuman to compel them to stay in workplaces that do not uphold their dignity as professionals and deprive them of their rights to a just compensation and fair treatment, free from exploitation and intimidation.