Comparison of North and South Korea Nursing Workforce Training System and Integration Plan

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Abstract. This study provides a literature review and investigates the nursing workforce training system of North Korea with a focus on nurses in that system and presents more specific measures for the integration of then nursing workforce training systems of the two countries. North Korea’s nursing education system and case studies of integration were analyzed based on publicly accessible statistics and reports. And the interview subjects were eight North Korean defectors contacted and the interviews were carried out over two to three sessions. There are significant differences in the nursing workforce training system of North and South Korea. Therefore the gradual integration of the nursing workforce training systems must embrace the advantages of each country while maintaining the South’s training system. Integration should begin with non-ideological and non-political fields to minimize adverse effects, and universal values of nursing education must be followed.

Keywords: Nursing Workforce training System, Integration Plan, North and South Korea

1 Introduction

The nursing staff can have a significant influence on the establishment of a stable medical system in any entity. However, research on the public healthcare system and medical workforce in preparation for the unification of Korea has not focused on nursing staff. Studies of nursing systems have also been based on the experiences of other medical staff instead of nurses themselves. For this reason, these studies are limited in terms of their usefulness to those analyzing the nursing system of North Korea. This study provides a literature review and investigates the nursing workforce training system of North Korea with a focus on nurses in that system and presents more specific measures for the integration of then nursing workforce training systems of the two countries.
2 Method

2.1 Literature review

This study establishes basic directions for the integration of nursing workforce training systems based on an analysis of reunification theory and South Korea’s unification policies. In addition to analyzing publicly accessible materials and framework of the analysis, North Korea’s nursing workforce training system and case studies of integration were analyzed based on publicly accessible statistics and reports, and a questionnaire to be used in interviews with North Korean defectors was designed.

2.2 Interview

The interview subjects were eight North Korean defectors contacted through the Settlement Support Center for North Korean Refugees (Hanawon) and found to satisfy the requirements of this study. The interviews were carried out over two to three sessions, and the recorded interviews were transcribed and then summarized. In the third session, consisting of a job survey of the nursing staff and an interview, the differences between the practice of nursing in North and South Korea were analyzed under a less statistical approach.

Fig. 1. Framework of the analysis
3 Results

3.1 Status of North Korea’s nursing workforce training system

Educational institutions for nursing in North Korea operate programs lasting from six months to two years, aiming to nurture nurses into skilled communists under the Juche ideology. Greater priority is given to political ideology classes than to nursing. Such programs are characterized by mandatory Korean medicine classes, terminology with Latin root words, the absence of electives, course names derived from medical classifications, and a period of forced labor. They are similar to those in South Korea in that the curriculum consists of both theoretical and clinical components. However, the academic schedule is more fluid, and nursing is considered as an area of job training rather than a discipline. Textbooks and other learning materials are standardized, and school buildings and facilities are poor compared to those of South Korea. Nursing courses are taught by those educated in medicine, not nursing. North Korea’s nursing education administrative system is centered on the labor party, and general administration and educational administration are integrated under the regional education administrative system. The training system is teacher-oriented and tends to emphasize rote learning. North Korea’s nurses are issued a certificate instead of a license from the Ministry of Public Health. The duties of nurses differ from those of South Korean nurses in terms of a lack of an independent system of thinking, as in the nursing process; a lack of ethical consciousness; non-participation in patient training; and house calls by nurses in acute-care hospitals. In fact, the duties undertaken by nurses in North Korea were more similar to those of nursing assistants in South Korea.

3.2 Basic directions for the integration of nursing workforce training system

This study presents a good-neighborly relations model with the basic directions of integration established as mutual understanding, support, exchange and cooperation. This implies that the two Koreas are headed beyond unification to genuine integration by becoming good neighbors who help each other based on respect and honor. The gradual integration of the nursing workforce training system must embrace the advantages of each country while maintaining the South’s educational system. Integration should begin with non-ideological and non-political fields to minimize adverse effects, and universal values of nursing education must be followed.

3.3 Integration plans for nursing workforce training system

Measures for gradual integration are presented according to the three-stage integration process pursued by the current administration. The reconciliation and cooperation stage should focus on the establishment of a stage for exchanges between the two Koreas, the fostering of competency in nursing education, budget and infrastructure acquisitions, and material support. At the same time, expert groups should be organized for various fields of nursing education to develop related policies, programs and teaching materials. During the North-South alliance stage, gradual integration is initiated with classification into examples of partial alliance and full alliance. Educational and
administrative institutions are transitionally introduced, and continuously corrected to minimize opposition from North Koreans who are becoming acquainted with the North Korean training system. The developed programs and policies should be modified based on trial results before being widely adopted, and a stable supply of human and material resources should be ensured. During the unification completion stage, the integrated nursing workforce training system should be maintained in educational and administrative institutions. The academic development of nursing must be pursued through continuous cooperation between North and South Korea.

4 Conclusions

There are significant differences in the nursing workforce training system of North and South Korea. Due to the limitations encountered when attempting to acquire accurate data on North Korea, it is difficult to determine the extent of the difference between the two systems. Further research on the integration of the two systems should be conducted based on more extensive exchanges and updated information about the nursing workforce training system in North Korea.

References