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“WHY PRESIDENT BENIGNO C. SIMEON AQUINO III MUST SIGN THE COMPREHENSIVE NURSING BILL”

Nurses deserve a decent life, decent pay and decent work conditions in order to render safe high-quality healthcare to the Filipino people. As a signatory to the ILO Nursing Personnel Convention 149 in Geneva, Switzerland in 1977, the Philippines is duty-bound to implement its provisions in practice. The Convention recognizes the vital role of nursing personnel in the promotion and maintenance of health and wellbeing of the populations. It sets minimum labour standards specifically designed to highlight the special conditions in which nursing is carried out.

According to WHO's Global Strategy on Human Resources for Health Workforce 2030, health systems can only function with health workers; improving health service coverage and health outcomes is dependent on their availability, accessibility, and capacity to deliver accepted and quality services. Mere availability of health workers is not sufficient: only when they are equitably distributed and accessible by the population, when they possess the required competency, and are motivated and empowered to deliver quality care that is appropriate and acceptable to the sociocultural expectations of the population, can theoretical coverage translate into effective service coverage.

Article IV, Sec. 29 of Senate Bill clearly defines the Scope of Nursing Practice:

“The Administration of nursing care through utilization of the nursing process: assessment, nursing diagnosis, planning, implementation and evaluation. Nursing practice encompasses various stages of development towards the promotion of health, prevention of illness, health care techniques and procedures, restoration of health, alleviation of suffering, and end-of-life care, may it be performed independently or collaboratively”.

Hence, Nurses deserve to be compensated justly. Salary Grade 15 for government nurses has been mandated since 2002 through RA 9173. The intent of the present nursing bill is to broaden and expand it for non-government nurses. In response to the issues raised by the Philippine Hospital Association, we would like to invite your attention to the following:

- A. Increased cost of health care should not deprive patients from accessing vital hospital services.** We urge hospital owners to look into their processes and not cut cost in terms of expenses from human resource salaries. Giving additional benefits in the form of increase pay will motivate more to work hard thus improve efficiency resulting to better services to patients.

On the contrary, a satisfied cadre of nursing personnel would increase morale and ensure clients' safety, and high quality nursing services. The ILO Convention 147 noted that:

“The relationship between poor conditions of employment and work of nursing personnel and shortages is complex. Consequences may include: increased patient

morbidity and mortality; greater levels of violence in the workplace; reduced occupational safety and health for remaining personnel; high levels of job dissatisfaction with intention to quit; and unsustainable patterns of health worker migration from developing countries. The Nursing Personnel Convention articulates the kinds of provisions needed to address many of the identified problems. It must be implemented in the greatest number of countries in order to set decent standards of work, boost the professional and political profile of nursing personnel, and provide incentive for nursing personnel to remain in their jobs.”

- B. While implementation of the law would foment widespread discontent in the hospital workforce due to salary distortions**, it should compel the hospitals to review their budget and operations in order to provide just salaries for all personnel.

The purpose of the Comprehensive Nursing Law is to set SG15 as a benchmark for the base pay of all health workers. This is the inevitable consequence of Sec. 47 in order to prevent wage distortion.

- C. Affect the implementation of universal healthcare program.** On the contrary properly compensated nurses could positively promote the delivery of the UHP. Better paid nurses can choose to stay thereby more nurses will be available to serve more Filipinos and improve the healthcare delivery system. Likewise, these nurses are the vital human resource that will propel universal health program to greater height by being the implementer/agent that brings UHP to target underprivileged recipients in far flung areas.
- D. Set back the hospital modernization.** Hospital modernization is not just on equipment acquisition but also investments on human resources wherein nurses are included. Nurses deserve to be compensated justly in consideration of her legal responsibilities and the risks she is exposed to (radiation, HIV, hepatitis, patient/employers' harassments, etc.) because of that innovation.
- E. Overlap with the provisions and intent of RA 6758, RA 7305 AND PD 442 as amended, all of which provide salary schemes in public and private workers.** Yes, but these could be complemented and be match in line with these Salary Grade 15 as the entry level of nurses.

Therefore Mr. President, we beg and appeal to you to take a look to the plight of the Filipino Nurses and sign the Comprehensive Nursing Law as your legacy to us and the nation.

The Philippine Nurses Association (PNA)

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