

The Nurse in Health Policy and Politics

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Dr. Carme Planas-Campmany
Fundamental Care and Medical-Surgical Nursing
Nursing School
Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences
Universitat de Barcelona

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The Nurse in Health Policy and Politics

Carme Planas-Campmany^{1, 2}, Roser Martínez Méndez³, Ingrid Bullich Marin⁴, Elena M. Calvo Valencia¹

¹Gabinet de Presidència, Institut Català de la Salut, ²Departament d'Infermeria Fonamental i Medicoquirúrgica, Universitat de Barcelona, Barcelona, ³Regió Sanitària Catalunya Central, Servei Català de la Salut, Manresa, ⁴Departament de Salut, Generalitat de Catalunya, Barcelona, Spain

Abstract Content: Demographic trends, population projections and emerging health problems have a direct impact on health systems. These changes happen immersed in a socioeconomic environment and a constant concern for sustainability and solvency of the health and social systems.

In this context, health promotion, preventive interventions and care for people with or at risk of chronic health problems gain relevance in public health policies. This suggests that nurses will have to assume an increasingly important role in the formulation of public policies, with particular emphasis on regulation, financing, provision and professional development.

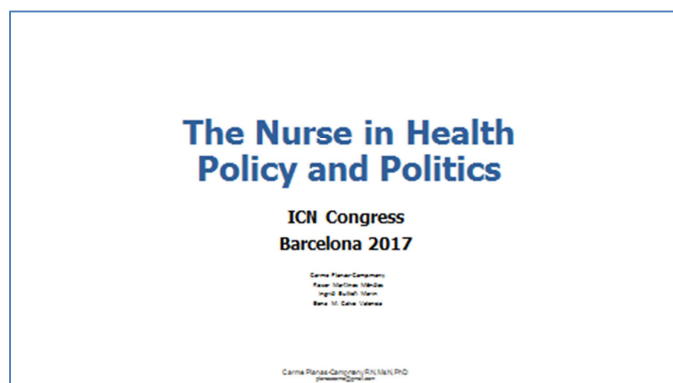
Governments must be aware of the contribution of nurses. Also, nurses have no choice but to position themselves. They have the ethical obligation to be involved in the highest level of decision making in order to improve population's health, reduce health inequalities and participate in the governance of the system.

Decision making and active participation in the design, formulation, implementation and evaluation of public policies necessarily implies understanding the context in which these decisions are taken, identifying stakeholders, their functions and the instruments they hold for the transformation of the health system.

In order to integrate their current role in public policies, nurses must: 1) consider changes in health and social care policies based on the model, the system and the available evidence; 2) know demand, provision and public policies; 3) master regulation, evaluation and payment systems; 4) propose sustainable and efficient interventions, being aware of the opportunity cost; and, 5) enhance the contribution of nursing research through innovative solutions.

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The Nurse in Health Policy and Politics

Bon dia, buenos días, good morning. Thank you for this opportunity because discussing the role of the Nurse in Health Policy and Politics is important and necessary...It is a challenge to discuss it from the Catalan perspective before an international audience, but it allows us to do our part in building awareness and positive attitudes towards participation of nurses in policy and politics.



1. Health Policy and Politics

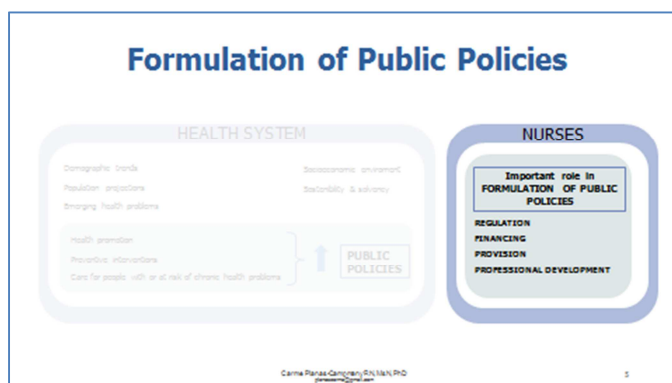
Focusing on basic concepts, and according to the World Health Organization (WHO):

Health policy refers to decisions, plans, and actions that are undertaken to achieve specific health care goals within a society at the international, national or local level.

1. It clarifies the values,
2. And defines a vision for the future;
3. It helps to establish objectives, priorities and the expected roles of different groups;
4. And, also, it builds consensus and informs people.



European countries and healthcare organizations have adopted WHO's European health policy framework (2012). Health 2020 gives policy-makers a vision, a strategic path, a set of priorities and a range of suggestions about what works to improve health and address health inequalities.



It is well known that demographic trends, population projections and emerging health problems have a direct impact on health systems. These changes happen immersed in a determined socioeconomic environment and a constant concern for sustainability and solvency of the health and social systems

In this context, health promotion, preventive interventions and care for people with or at risk of chronic health problems gain relevance in public health policies. This suggests (or should suggest) that nurses will have to assume an increasingly important role in the formulation of public policies, with particular emphasis on regulation, financing, provision and professional development.

So, how do we get from figure 1 to figure 2?



2. Policy and Political Participation

There is a general consensus on nurses having to be actively involved in shaping policy and political processes. Also, it is widely accepted that to participate, nurses must be able to demonstrate their value and convince others of the contribution they can make. In this line, in recent years we've heard innumerable references to how nurses contribute to health systems and health results, especially through nursing-sensitive indicators.



But, do nurses REALLY participate in politics and in shaping policies?

In general terms, based on published work focused on nurses' political competence and participation, the answer is NO, they DO NOT PARTICIPATE. This is particularly true when referred to REAL participation that cannot be done from a distance or after being consulted about initiatives, changes and transformations when decisions have already been taken and it is too late... PARTICIPATION means BEING INVOLVED WHEN DECISIONS ARE REALLY MADE... and not only being present.

Why?

Carma Planas-Gangran/SN/18/N/PHD
planas@ub.edu

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Why is it happening?

Researchers have published quite an amount of work focused in different aspects of nurses' participation... or LACK of IT:

1. Highlighting the need to develop Policy competence, influence and awareness,
2. Together with the development of Political astuteness, Political skill and Political action
3. Some have insisted of the need to pay especial attention to Professional advocacy
4. Also, some publications have focused on the social perception or the image of Nurses that can be decisive to establish their participation,
5. And some have even related it to a lack of power and also to a submissive attitude.

What?

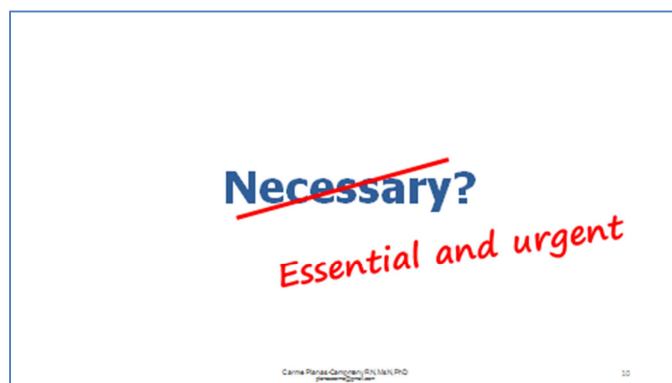
Carma Planas-Gangran/SN/18/N/PHD
planas@ub.edu

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What can be done?

When analysing participation and the relation with these concepts, researchers have identified several factors that should be addressed:

1. The need for educational preparation aimed at achieving Political and Policy Competence and strengthening communication skills.
2. Also, in enhancing the value of engagement and interest in political knowledge
3. Together with the value of collective influence, and
4. Also strengthening the public image of nurses and nursing.



Why is it essential and URGENT?

In Porter-O'Grady's¹ words: "...nurses at all levels need to see policy and politics as something that they should be obligated to shape rather than something that happens to them over which they have no control".



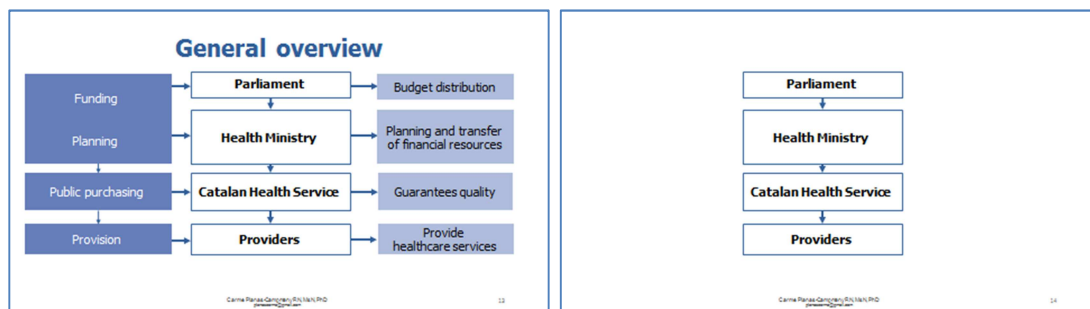
We have identified some specific opportunities for participation of nurses in policy and politics in the Catalan context.



¹ Porter-O'Grady T. Leadership at all levels. Nurs Manage. 2011;42(5):32-37. [On line]. Last accessed: 1 dec 2014. http://www.nursingcenter.com/Inc/journalarticle?Article_ID=1163290.

For a major comprehension, briefly say that in Catalunya we have the same National Health Service model as in the rest of Spain, funded by taxes and decentralized to regional autonomies, with:

- Universal coverage
- Free access to a very wide range of publicly covered services
- Co-payment in pharmaceutical products and some other services
- And services are provided mainly in public facilities



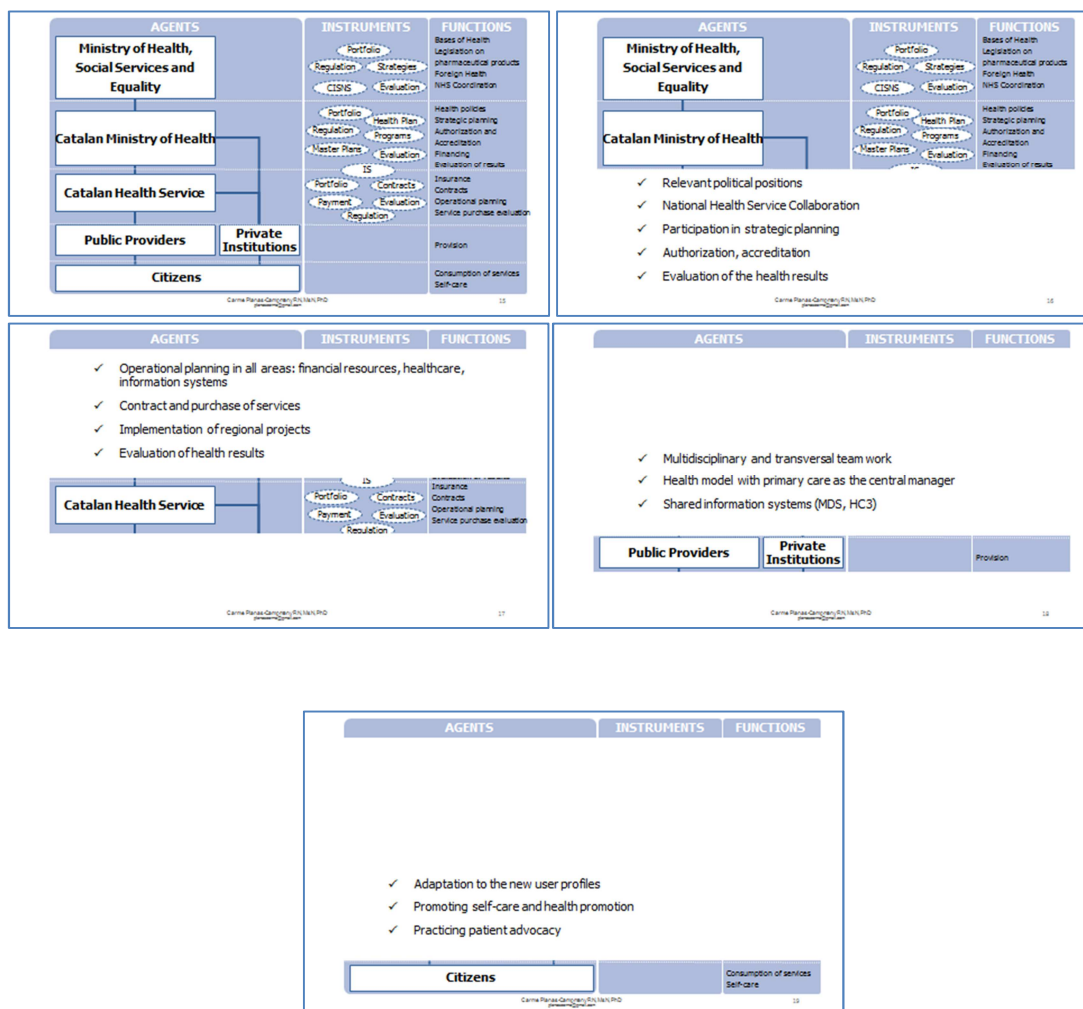
Are nurses involved in first-line decision-making of health policies and politics?

Focusing on WHERE the decisions are made and where policy makers are... We have roughly (and daringly) estimated the proportion of nurses present in the bodies where top-level decisions are made: the Catalan Parliament, the Catalan Ministry of Health and the Catalan Health Service...

- We know there are 2 nurses in Parliament
- Now, in the Catalan Ministry of Health, between the minister's offices, the secretaries and directorates generals we estimate that around 5% are nurses. None of them holding positions such as minister, secretary or director general... But 1 nurse has been recently appointed co-director of the National Strategy for Primary Health and Community care.
- And, in the Catalan Health Service headquarters, we estimate around 5-6% are nurses. In this case, there is 1 nurse manager in the area of citizen service.

Going back to the opportunities...

Today, an educated Nurse, who is willing and wants to, and is given the opportunity, can actively PARTICIPATE... It's ONLY about introducing variations in any aspect of legislation, financing, service delivery and resource generation to MAKE A DIFFERENCE in future scenarios...



Decision-making and active participation necessarily implies understanding the context in which these decisions are taken, identifying stakeholders, their functions and the available instruments, among which regulation and payment systems are considered the most powerful tools available.

Highlighting the roles and positions a Nurse could hold... Starting at the upper part of the figure (Spanish and Catalan Ministries of Health)...

- Of course, a Nurse could be appointed Minister, Secretary General or Director General, among other positions...
- But there is also room for participation in national, interdepartamental and intersectorial work groups, committees and commissions created to address important health issues that are frequently focused on keeping communities healthy and safe.
- Also, nurses today, with their knowledge and experience and expertise, can make a difference in the strategic planning of the Ministry... Deciding health priorities and leading Health Plans, Master Plans and Programs.

- And, their knowledge of the quality, patient security, accessibility, etc... prepares them to make decisions related to centers and services regulation and organization and to formulate realistic and equitable evaluation policies.

Their key role in providing health care services and in identifying needs of the people allows nurses to develop their role as interpreters between the needs and preferences of people and the policies, but also in:

- Operational Planning in all areas,
- In payment systems,
- In the implementation of projects, and
- In the evaluation of health results

At a Provider level... Nurses understand and know how to build bridges to and from the community and how to incorporate the new population concepts into new models of Service Provision.

The ability to influence policies is important to make a difference in the lives of individuals and their families. Nurses have the knowledge and ability to:

- Adapt health policies to the new user profiles
- Promote self-care and Health promotion
- And, advocate for the individuals and communities, particularly the most vulnerable and neglected communities and groups.

Conclusions

Carma Planas-Campmany (PhD)

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Governments must be aware of the contribution of nurses. Also, nurses have no choice but to position themselves. They have the responsibility and ethical obligation of political engagement. Nurses have to be involved in the highest level of decision making in order to improve population's health, reduce health inequalities and participate in the governance of the system.

The Nurse in Health Policy and Politics...

- Is necessary,
- Must be there

- Wants to be there, and
- Can be there

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Thank you for your
attention and enjoy
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Carma Planas-Gangany/EN/BA/PhD
carma@ub.edu

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Thank you very much for your attention.