



Student's Name

Professor's Name

Course Title

Due Date

Nurses vs Doctors

When we think about the healthcare delivery system, doctors and nurses are often the first stakeholders that come to mind. The importance and demand for doctors and nurses will continue to grow over time due to the aging population issue, especially in the developed countries where advancements in medical science have been helping people live longer. While doctors and nurses work closely with each other in the healthcare system, they often perform quite different roles though some differences have become less pronounced lately. In light of the emerging trends, doctors and nurses will continue to see their responsibilities expand in both scope and depth.

One of the tasks doctors primarily perform is diagnosing the patient and recommending a treatment plan. Nurses on the other hand are tasked with making sure doctors' recommendations are followed and the right information reaches the right professionals. While doctors spend limited time with patients, nurses are expected to continuously observe the progress of the patients (Krogstad, Hofoss and Hjortdahl). Doctors' priority is to help the patients get well while the nurses' priority is to maximize the wellness of the patients. Nurses are in a position to enhance patients' wellness because they spend significantly more time with the patients. Thus, they do not only focus on following on with the doctors' instructions but also making sure that



the patients are comfortable and their morale is high. Doctors may be the one who prescribe medication but it is usually nurses who educate patients on medications (Halligan).

Doctors may have greater knowledge of medical science and patients' conditions but nurses usually possess greater soft skills such as people and communication skills. Because nurses spend significantly more time with patients as opposed to doctors, they have to be more patient and understanding. As a result of spending time, they also become better at communicating with a wide range of patient groups as well as understanding their needs. Nurses also become better communicators because one component of their job is to educate the patients (Halligan).

Doctors are usually limited to their specialized fields but nurses can work across different units because their skills have wide applications. In other words, doctors are trained in one specific field and expected to be really good at it while nurses are trained not to be an expert in one particular field but be able to provide healthcare services in a wide range of healthcare areas. This may also be why nurses sometimes find it easier to make transitions into other healthcare areas such as becoming homecare providers.

As far as education requirements are concerned, both aspiring doctors and nurses usually obtain 4-years undergraduate degree. While aspiring nurses may choose to pursue the graduate degree to advance their professional credentials and which may take somewhere between 1.5 to 3 years, it is not a requirement to practice the profession. Doctors on the other hand are not only expected to complete a 4-years doctoral program but are also required to complete a residency of minimum 3 years. While aspiring nurses can practice their profession usually after four years, aspiring doctors invest about 11 years in education and training before becoming full-fledged



professionals (American Academy of Family Physicians). The significantly higher time and financial investments that aspiring doctors make in their education and training as compared to aspiring nurses also helps explain why doctors enjoy significantly higher incomes. According to U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Licensed Practical and Licensed Vocational Nurses earned slightly more than 40K per year in 2010 while physicians and surgeons earned slightly more than 166K per year during the same period (Bureau of Labor Statistics).

Doctors and nurses' roles are becoming more and more alike due to changes in the external environment. People are now living longer and the number of specialist healthcare providers such as doctors has not been keeping up pace with the population trends. As a result more and more nurses are providing services that have historically been provided by primary care physicians such as diagnosis and management of chronic health diseases (Reeves, Braspenning and Hermens). Nurses are now even prescribing tests to patients such as ultrasonography, computed tomography, and magnetic resonance imaging (Hemani, Rastegar and Hill). Nurses' job description will also expand because the recent healthcare law is expected to bring in 36 million more people into the healthcare system which may create a shortage of 62,000 physicians by 2015 (Drake).

Doctors and nurses have historically rarely breached each other's territory in terms of roles and responsibilities but things have been changing. Nurses are now investing more in education and training and they are also performing some of the tasks that have been historically limited to doctors. In addition, the number of private players in the healthcare sector has been growing and their emphasis on profitability has forced doctors and nurses to work even more closely to improve operations.