

## Narrative of the Presence of Nurse Men in Iran: Historical Review

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### ABSTRACT

**Introduction :**The oldest medical course in Iran dates back to the Aryan period, 3000 BC. Nursing of patients and the injured was mostly the responsibility of women, and it was limited to the house and household. This study reviews the presence of Nurse Men in Iran over the last century.

**Method :**This is a historical study, using primary and secondary resources .

**Results :**The first recorded hospital in which the presence of physicians and nurses have been mentioned is a hospital in Sabzevar. Specifically, the presence of men who have been engaged in nursing has been mentioned. Male bimardars worked in the male's department and female bimardars worked in the female's department. In 1921, following the coup d'état by Reza Shah Pahlavi (King of Iran) many courses were provided to train patient care skills that was called Moeen Doctor (MoeenTabib or Moeenpezeshk). In the Mashhad army this course has begun since 1923 and in Tehran, since the year 1931. According to documents, the duration of the course was initially 8 months. Different courses that have been established to teach nursing with the attendance of the men. Medical assistant "Pezeshkyar", "Behyari"(Nursing Assistance), Gendarmerie Nursing Assistance Academy, Nursing Diploma, Behyar Assistant. During the war, there was a need for men to treat wounded warriors, as well there was a need for the male nurses to attend emergency care and serve injured people at the accidents, especially the battlefields. One of the most important achievements of nurses during the revolution and later in the onset of the imposed war was creating a positive incentive for men to orient nursing, which increased the number of nurses in the work .

**Discussion and conclusion:** In Iran, men are professionally practice nursing because they have the required scientific knowledge and clinical skills. The prevailing knowledge and skills, the cultural setting of Iran, and the role of programs arranged by the schools and faculties to change the public attitude and improve men's professional identity in nursing have well affected the entry of men into the nursing profession to an extent that currently we are witnessing equal presence of men and women at nursing schools of Iran.

**Keyword:** History of nursing, Men in nursing, nursing in Iran, History

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### INTRODUCTION

Regarding the emergence of nursing in the world, the artifacts found in the Indus Valley in India and Pakistan show that there was an advanced health system in the region as far back as 2000 BC<sup>1</sup>. With the emergence of Jesus Christ, a new religion came into being. It taught people altruism, which implies compassion toward people and helping them, taking care of people for the sake of God, providing ungrudging services for the satisfaction of God, and lowering the suffering of others without expecting rewards. With the spread of Christianity, the history of nursing began to change course to such an extent that the best type of care would be offered by the devotees of the faith. In the Bible, diaconia is the word referring to serving people. Therefore, the men and women who took care of people were called "one who serves" and an ensuing edict was issued under such title for them<sup>2</sup>. At the turn of the 12th century, men such as Francis of Assisi (1182-1226) converted to the Deaconess cult and took care of lepers in Italy; following in his footsteps, Anthony of Padua cared for the sick and the poor as a priest in Italy. In 1244, the

Misericordia Group consisting of religious men in Italy took charge of some activities such as the transfer of the needy and the sick to hospitals. They believed in the religious aspects of helping the needy, hiding their face in public. They used to wear long robes and put masks to cover their face, so they were called "Brothers in Mask". Alexian Brothers (1348) were another group consisting of men who used to serve the individuals stricken with plague and bury those who died. In 1469, a group led by AgustAntin established a hospital in Odyssey, Italy, to take care of patients<sup>3</sup>. It went on until 1850 when Nightingale began to work at a small hospital in London and train nurses upon a four-month period she spent studying at Kaiserswerth<sup>2</sup>.

Nightingale believed that every woman is a nurse by nature since she is in charge of taking care of her children and family; meanwhile, she does not need basic training to work in the hospital thanks to her experience of caring for her children and family<sup>4-7</sup>. On the other hand, the attitude that men are not good for the nursing profession was a reason to put a limitation on men's entry into the profession or make them leave it forever to such an extent that many nursing schools went so far as to deny admission to men<sup>8</sup>.

These behaviors led to a change in public attitudes toward nursing with a feminine nature attributed to the profession, and men began to distance themselves from it. As of the 19th century, men's participation in nursing was discouraged significantly. As of 1919, when the profession became independent and systematic, men were officially segregated from women in nursing in the UK. Upon women's admission to the Royal College of Nursing, the profession systematically became the first all-female job<sup>9</sup>. It came as the American Association for Men in Nursing officially began to support men's participation in the nursing profession<sup>10</sup>.

In Iran, the oldest medical course can be traced back to the Aryan period, 3000 BC.

What is known with certitude is that there had been no nursing school or nursing profession in Iran up until 1915. The first nursing school was established by Americans in 1915 in Urmia (Reza'iyeh). Tabriz (1916), Tehran (1918), Hamedan (1928), Rasht (1928), Kermanshah (1932), Mashhad (1936), and Abadan (1941) followed suit<sup>2</sup>. The researcher has found no comprehensive study investigating how men entered the nursing profession in Iran. This study reviews the historical of narrative of men's presence in the nursing profession in Iran over the last century.

## METHOD

This is a historical study, using primary and secondary resources. The resources include all documents available in the library of Astan-e Ghods-e Razavi in Mashhad, the National Library, the National Archive, the library of the Islamic Consultative Assembly, the Center for Newspaper Archive, and the library of nursing schools, the office for nursing of the Ministry of Health and Medical Education, and the Nursing Organization of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Primary resources include all documents and evidence of establishment, admission and simultaneous realization of men's participation in the nursing profession in Iran. The secondary resources include all the documents, evidence, books and articles based on the primary resources with a greater time interval over men's participation in the nursing profession in Iran. An ethical code numbered IR.AJUMS.REC.1395.385 was obtained from the research office of Ahvaz Jundishapur University of Medical Sciences. Then, relevant documents were prepared and coordination was made to visit the Division of Documents and Archives; thereafter, books and documents about men's entry into the nursing profession, rules and regulations of admission, and any relevant documents were studied. Finally, a historical account of findings was presented.

## RESULTS

**The history of nursing in Iran:** Prior to 1914, there had been no nursing school in Iran. Historical documents showed that men and women, called bimardar (nurse), used to work in Mashhad dar-al shafa', taking care of patients of the same gender from the Safavid to Qajar era, and they were also called servants of patients [11-13]. The first documents of cooperation date back to 1589. Male and female bimardars must have been next of kins. They were mostly husband and wife. The employees of dar-al shafa's

were required to observe Islamic codes of ethics, respect religious rules and revere the sanctity of family<sup>11,14,15</sup>. The structural organization of Mashhad dar-al shafa', from the Safavid to Qajar era, consisted of bimardarbashi (matron) and bimardar (nurse). In 1910, the term bimardar was changed to parastar (Persian word for nurse).

Bimardarbashi (matron) played the role of the modern day's matrons; they were in charge of planning the shifts of bimardars, reporting their day-to-day presence and duration of their services to the head of dar-al shafa's. They should be able to read and write. A bimardar was in charge with taking care of patients. Male bimardars works in the men's section and female bimardars worked in the women's section of dar-al shafa's. They were usually illiterate or poorly literate, learning nursing techniques from veteran nurses. They did not receive any training. A tabib (doctor) was required to confirm their skill for getting a wage. They were in charge of carrying out the tasks instructed by doctors including administration of medications at specified times, helping patients with a disability to eat and taking care of the patients who had fever. Bimardars were hired for their own vow of service, or the employment of their fathers and relatives at the dar-al shafa' gave them credit to work there<sup>16</sup>. Therefore, it is obvious that many individuals must have been taking charge of the tasks carried out by modern-day nurses before the establishment of nurse education in Iran. Because lack of nurses seems impossible due to the fact that several hospitals had been in operation in Iran. However, they were not required to take a special course, learning simply by experience. As implied by documents, it is impossible to specify the date on which modern nursing came into being in Iran.

**The beginning of formal nursing training by non-Iranian nurses:** For that purpose, a delegate of US missionaries was sent to Tehran, Isfahan, Shiraz and Urmia in 1832. The mission stated that it was a good idea to promote Christianity among the Assyrians living in Urmia. Therefore, Dr. Asahel Grant joined the Urmia-based missionary to provide medical services in the town<sup>17</sup>. The missionaries learned that if a missionary doctor accompanied them, they would be received warmly by the locals, so the policy was taken in Iran<sup>18</sup>. In addition to educational activities, they used to enhance people's health conditions and practice medicine<sup>19</sup>. The fact that some women were among them raised the missionaries' interest in nursing, since, regardless of their gender, the majority of those women were teachers or nurses. Their duties involved providing nurse education and medical services, preaching, and paying visits to people's houses; meanwhile, people paid more attention to teaching and nursing due to their needs. Since missionary work mainly took place in Tabriz and Urmia, it is obvious that the education of nursing began in those two cities. Involvement of these two cities in the World War I, an increase in the prevalence of diseases and fatalities, and the need for medical services were the excuse for the expansion of their activity<sup>20-22</sup>. They began to educate local nurses as soon as they found a hospital in the towns a missionary base had been established. As stated in some resources, the beginning of nurse education dates back to 1907, when a missionary hospital in Tehran started working with four girls

graduating from American Battle School[23]. After the World War I began and the American hospital of Tehran shut down, their training by the missionaries came to an end[19]. Due to the lack of details and inconsistencies in the documents, the accounts relating the beginning of nursing in Tehran hospital cannot be confirmed. Regarding the need for missionary hospitals, in cities where a hospital was operating probably some nurses were educated to help the doctors. However, any formal training program is under question. Therefore, the beginning of formal nursing training can be traced back to Urmia. The first nursing school was founded in Urmia, then called Reza'iyeh, in 1914 by a group of American missionaries. The school admitted the applicants of post-secondary education. The course took three years. The school was Madreseye Morsalin-e Reza'iyeh. In the first year, it had three applicants. At the end of the first year, the hospital staff and students of nursing school fled to Tabriz and began to work at its hospital due to the beginning of the WWII and the attack of the Turks. In 1915, the nursing school of Tabriz which was affiliated to the US missionaries was founded. A group of four students graduated from the school in 1919. They were considered the first Iranian nurses<sup>23,24</sup>.

**History of Admission of Men to Nursing in Iran:** About 550 BC, ancient Iranians took care of wounded enemies in wars like their own wounded soldiers. Therefore, nursing of wounded people in war and disable people has been common among Iranians since ancient times. Regarding the antiquity of the medical profession in ancient Iran and the construction of hospitals and centers for nursing of patients since the pre-Islamic period, it was evident that at the time of the practice of physicians, there were some people who helped them in the implementation of care and nursing of the patient. Unfortunately, however, they have not been mentioned in the documents. The first evidence of the existence of hospitals is referred to the post-Islamic period. The first recorded hospital in which the presence of physicians and nurses have been mentioned is a hospital in Sabzevar. Specifically, the presence of men who have been engaged in nursing has been mentioned. Ibn Yemin Feryumdi (d. 722 AH) has mentioned a physician named Shams- Eddin Bousahel and a nurse named "Baba Ali" in the early eighth century AH in Sabzevar<sup>11</sup>. Dar-alshafa in Mashhad was also built in 931 AH for the treatment of patients. The treatment has been free of charge at the period from the Safavid to Qajar era. The hospitalization part of women and men was separate. Among the positions and occupations of Dar-alshafa were "bimardarbashi", (sarparastar, Persian equivalent to the word head Nurse) and "bimardar" or "parastar" ( Persian word for the nurse). Male bimardars worked in the males department and female bimardars worked in the females department. These nurses were usually fairly educated or even illiterate, who acquired their nursing skills from senior bimardars and did not receive any special training courses. The physician's assurance of their work and skills was enough to make their wages. The main tasks of the bimardars were performing the recommendations of the physician about each patient, including giving the medicines to the patients at a specified time, helping the patients with eating disabilities and taking care of febrile patients. The examination of documents showed that one of the hospitals

established by Iranian people was Hashmatiyye Hospital in Sabzevar, by Dr. Seyyed Qasem Ghani. He founded this hospital after returning from Lebanon in 1920 with the help of the Sabzevar ruler. In order to provide nursing staff, a training course for several volunteers of this profession was conducted<sup>16,25,26</sup>. It seems that the training course was presented practical and without any coded program .

**Starting formal nursing education for men:** In 1921, following the coup d'état by Reza Shah Pahlavi (King of Iran) and establishment of a health department in the army<sup>27</sup>, and military hospitals in Tehran and Mashhad, courses were provided to train patient care skills that was called Moeen Doctor (MoeenTabib or Moeenpezeshk). In the Mashhad army this course has begun since 1923 and in Tehran, since the year 1931. According to documents, the duration of the course was initially 8 months. The MoeenTabib or Moeen Doctor Courses were particular to the military. Therefore, the men working in the military were allowed to attend the courses and allowed to take care of sick soldiers and wounded during the war and military maneuvers<sup>16</sup>. In 1941, an American hospital-affiliated school in Tehran attempted to recruit 3 male volunteers in nursing for a period of 2 years, but in 1943, only one person approached Kermanshah following the school closure<sup>2</sup>.

The following is a description of the different courses that have been established to teach nursing with the attendance of the men.

**Medical Assistant "Pezeshkyar":** In the first years of establishing nursing schools, the nursing education system was a combination of the most commonly used methods of the United States and Britain, which was adapted to the needs of the community and limited higher education in Iran. Because full high school education was not possible in all cities of Iran, the entry requirement for nursing was having a sixth or elementary school education. In order to attract the respect of the people to the graduates, instead of the word "nurse", the term "medical assistant" (pezeshkyari) was used to introduce the type of work which was cooperation with the doctor. This dependence on medicine, which has always been a respected job was a means of attracting people's respect to nurses<sup>2</sup>. Following in 1948, the name of the medical assistant school was changed to the nursing school and the medical assistant's title was changed to the word nurse<sup>28</sup>.

**Nursing Assistance "Behyari ":** The Behyari (Nursing Assistance) schools with the aim of educating nursing assistants to work under the supervision of a nurse or doctor were initially started by the Ministry of Health in 1952, and then, in 1957, with a new notification, the first high school graduation certificate and middle and the age between 16 and 26 were declared as requirements for school acceptance. The duration of their studies was two years and the students received scholarships during their studies and they were required to work twice of the years of study, after graduation. It should be noted that during the years 1979 to 2000 there has been modifications in the process of education and the study plan of the behyari courses, which is referred to as a new behyari education<sup>29,30</sup>.

**Gendarmerie Nursing Assistance Academy:** Since the year 1943, Military University has begun admission of

Nursing Assistance students under the title of Pezeshkyari (Medical Assistant). People with a 9th grade of high school diploma and after a two years course, were graduated as a third lieutenant. The nurse assistant nursing School in the Gendarmerie also hosted two-year medical technician courses in 1946<sup>31</sup>. In 1966, behyari (Nursing Assistance) courses were launched. The duration of the course was two years, and after the graduation, graduates were employed at the gendarmerie health care centers<sup>29</sup>. The gendarmerie which has started to admit nursing students since 1966, after the victory of the Islamic Revolution due to changes in the armed forces was changed into police force. The Army Air Force of the Islamic Republic of Iran also trained volunteers in order to complete its health care staff. In 1973, with the progress of nursing, nursing students were admitted in undergraduate courses.

**Nursing Diploma:** Until the year 1958, the graduation certificate offered by Missionary schools and all nursing schools in the country despite the difference in the educational programs was nursing diploma. In this year, the statute of nursing schools was approved by the Supreme Council of Culture and, according to the articles of this statute, the period of nursing education was three years and it was equivalent to a bachelor's degree<sup>32</sup>. In order to admit men for nursing school for a three-year period, a group of 6 male students were recruited at the Jurjani School of Mashhad in 1964. Unfortunately, five of them were transferred to other fields and did not complete the course, and only one person named Mr. Morteza Hasanpour Fard Khorashad completed the undergraduate degree and obtained the equivalent of a bachelor's degree. In the following years, he received a bachelor's degree from Shiraz University and a master's degree from a university in United States and after the onset of the imposed Iraq war against Iran, he returned to the country. He is the first male nurse to have academic nursing education in Iran<sup>16</sup>.

The bachelor's degree in nursing has become a 4-year period since 1965 and in 1975, the masters' degree course was approved. Since 1975, all affiliated institutions of the Ministry of Health and Welfare have been allowed to admit male students. Men started education for bachelors' and masters' degrees in nursing since 1976 and Ph.D. degree since 1999.

**Behyar (Nursing Assistance) Assistant "Komak Behyari":** Examining the type of nurses' activities in the hospital revealed that a part of nursing time was spent on a few primary tasks out of the nursing services that an unprofessional person would be able to do, and it would not be detrimental to the patient's health. Therefore, in some hospitals with more educational facilities, the three-month training courses were provided to train Behyar Assistants. Volunteers first with the sixth grade certificate of elementary school and then the first high school certificate attended these courses and did "Initial nursing care" as Behyar Assistant " (care related to the primary needs of the patient, such as giving bath, changing linen, etc.][28].

**The Impact of the revolution and war on the presence of men in nursing in Iran:** In Iran, due to the Islamic and religious culture of the society and the improvement of the worldwide view towards the nursing profession and the

presence of men in this profession, the views and attitudes towards the nursing have improved. Since before the Islamic Revolution and the imposed war, the Iranian people were concerned with the nursing profession and did not have a good view about the presence of women and men in nursing. The greatest factor in changing the people's perspective was the victory of the Islamic Revolution and the need for male nurses in the imposed war and their effort during the war. By announcing the plan of compliance, the morality and religious principles that became more prominent in the post-revolution period, nurses succeed to introduce this profession and need for it to the community through the participation in the revolution. Nurses, like other people of this country, played a valuable role during the revolution<sup>33</sup>.

Imposed war made people pay attention to nursing. The constant communication and contacts with wounded warriors, including warriors and refugees, strengthened the spirit of sacrifice in nurses. People felt the need for the men to enter the profession. During the war, there was a need for men to treat wounded warriors, as well there was a need for the male nurses to attend emergency care and serve injured people at the accidents, especially the battlefields. Studies also showed the desire of male and female nurses for male nurses to perform nursing activities in special and emergency departments<sup>34,35</sup>. Positive aspects of the presence of men in nursing have been considered as personal growth, getting a sense of fellowship, acquiring new skills and knowledge, beneficial educational methods, and developing of nursing profession, especially in the areas of mental health, special care, emergency care and nursing in the army<sup>36,37,38</sup>.

One of the most important achievements of nurses during the revolution and later in the onset of the imposed war was creating a positive incentive for men to orient nursing, which increased the number of nurses in the work. This increased number of male nurses in nursing society has led to a widespread and diverse change in the way nursing was introduced into society<sup>39</sup>.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

To sum up, it should be noted that despite a female atmosphere with regard to the profession, lack of full knowledge of nursing by the community, and sometimes because of lack of familiarity with the profession and traditional and religious demands, the men who had chosen this profession, were faced with two important milestones in the workplace: "Revolution and war ". At this time in Iran, due to the need for male nurses in caring and treatment situations in health care teams during the revolution and then with onset of the war due to masculine conditions during the war and men being efficient and empowering through their courage in dealing with critical situations and care for wounded warriors, the need for nursing men in Iranian society became more and more evident. It is likely to say that nursing was a profession which has been able to prove its importance during the war. Therefore, empowerment during the revolution and the sense of the need for men during the war were the factors for recognizing men in nursing and introducing nursing to the Iranian society. Eventually, these two turning points

became the factors enhancing the presence of men in nursing in Iran.

On the other hand, male nurses work professionally in Iran, because they have good scientific knowledge and good clinical skills. This knowledge and skills, along with the cultural context of the country, and the role of educational programs of schools and colleges in changing the attitudes and views on the development and professional identity of men in nursing, have had a great impact on the acceptance of men in nursing professions so that in the current situation, the equal participation of women and men in nursing schools in Iran and the presence of men in graduate studies for masters and PhD. degrees are observed.

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