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Strategy for nursing research in Sweden

Clara Aarts¹

First of all I would like to congratulate the people of Colombia for receiving the Nobel Peace Prize 2016. Peace is one important prerequisite for good health. In Sweden it has been peace for 200 years.

Short Introduction to Health Care in Sweden

Sweden has about 10 million inhabitants. The responsibility for health and medical care is shared by the central government, county councils ($n=20$) and municipalities ($n=290$).¹ Health care in Sweden is largely *tax-funded*, a system that ensures *equal access* to health care services. Health and medical care represents about 7.5 per cent of Sweden's gross domestic product (GDP). Sweden has 61 hospitals, seven are regional hospitals, and about 1200 Primary Health Care Centers, of which > 40% are private centers year 2015. It is common nowadays for county councils to buy services from private health care providers

but patients are covered by the same regulations that apply to municipal care facilities. *Research example at our Department, Associate Professor Ulrica Winblad and research group who study the effects of marketization on health care.*²

Strategy for Nursing Research

The Swedish Society of Nursing, the professional organization for nurses, updated in 2016 their strategy for nursing research,³ which I summarized below:

Today more than 1 500 nurses have a doctoral degree and about 120 are professors in the nursing field. The challenges Sweden faces today are an ageing population, increasing migration, high levels of mental health problems and lack of equality between different income groups. My comment: Internationally, Sweden is ranked as one the most equal gender countries in the world.⁴ Example of gender equality: Parents are entitled to 480 days of paid parental leave, of those 90 days are reserved for the father/partner.

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In 2014 25% of the total parental leave was taken by the fathers/partners.¹ This example highlights equal gender possibilities for parental leave but unequal distribution, however compared with the possibilities of parental leave internationally Sweden has one of the best regulations in the world.

The *aim of nursing research* is to improve and make care safer and more equal for both individuals in need of care and their significant others. The research should be characterized by strong cooperation among different nursing and healthcare disciplines as well as other relevant areas. It is essential that the research questions are based on problems related to the clinical activities close to the patient. The Swedish Society of Nursing stresses the importance of involving all core competencies in research and quality improvement in nursing. The six competencies are *person-centred care, team work and collaboration, evidence-based care, quality improvement, safety and informatics*.

Research areas of importance for improved health are the following:

Living with a long-term disease or multi-morbidity. There is a need for research on information, education, self-efficacy, patient-provider partnerships, nursing care with reference to basic needs and the organization of nursing care delivery for this patient group.

Mental health and health effects of migration. Areas in which research can make an important contribution are mental ill health support for marginalized groups as well as the effects of the increase in migration on health and nursing. Three areas are prioritized: Child and adolescent mental health, adolescents and adults with long-term mental illness, and addiction problems and research on the health effects of increased migration. *Research example at our Department, Associate Professor Clara Aarts and research group.*⁵

Ill health and equality of care. The health of the population and access to nursing and healthcare

are unevenly distributed and clearly linked to socio-economic conditions, migration and marginalized groups. There is a great need for research that investigates how nursing interventions and nurses' competence can prevent ill health and promote healthy living habits. *Research example at our Department, Child health and Parenting (CHAP) by our new Professor Anna Sarkadi and research group.*⁶

Safety. A key role for nursing research concerns quality as well as safety, for example preventing pressure ulcers, malnutrition, infections and fall injuries. Other vital research areas include a prevention focused safety culture, ensuring staff competence, and a safe care and work environment. *Research example at our Department, Professor Lena Gunningberg and research group who study prevention of pressure ulcers.*⁷

Leadership and the organization of nursing care. Leadership plays a crucial role in the competence of healthcare staff and the quality of nursing care. This is the most important factor when it comes to whether and how new knowledge is implemented in healthcare settings. The structure and organization of nursing care are important research areas. Person-centred care necessitates organization that invites the patient to be a partner and co-creator in his/her own care. *National research example on person-centred care lead by Professor Inger Ekman,*⁸ *University of Gothenburg.*

Information and communication technology (ICT). There is a need for nursing research about how digital technology is perceived by users of e-health and welfare technology, how it should be structured in order to support patients, their significant others as well as healthcare professionals and how to improve information management in nursing, healthcare and general welfare. *Research example at our Department, Uppsala University Psychosocial Care Programme (U-CARE) by Professor Louise von Essen and research group.*⁹

Funding

The Swedish Society of Nursing highlights the importance of more resources and further developed structures for nursing research through dialogue with decision-makers, participation in debates, working to eliminate knowledge gaps and dissemination of relevant research results. Moving into the future cooperation with municipalities, county councils and regions should be extended to enable funding of single subject studies as well as larger research programs.

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