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### Master Document Text

What is the Impact of Cutting down Nursing Student Bursary in the Future of Nursing Practice in the UK?

Introduction

This essay will critically explore the impact of cutting down nursing student bursaries in the practice of nursing in the UK. A brief description of what a student bursary is all about will be provided to clarify its contribution to the practice of nursing. The new scheme that will replace student bursaries will be identified. The rationale for proposing this new scheme will be analysed and the reasons why concerned groups oppose it will also be examined. Ultimately, the aim of this essay is to provide an analysis on whether cutting down nursing student bursaries is beneficial or detrimental to the future of the nursing profession and the quality of healthcare services in the UK.

Main Body

The nursing student bursaries is part of the scheme of the NHS Student Bursaries supplied by the NHS Business Services Authority (NHSBSA 2012). It essentially awards an annual payment from the NHS to help students studying medicine, dentistry, nursing, midwifery or other healthcare courses with their study and living costs (Gov UK 2016). "A full-time NHS student can get a bursary from the NHS which depends on the household income (e.g. student's income, parents' income or spouse's income), a 1000 GBP grant from the NHS (for full time students or a reduced amount for part-time students) and a reduced maintenance loan from the Student Finance England" (Gov UK 2016, n.p.) The NHS pays the tuition fees directly to the university (Gov UK 2016). A student can even receive extra financial help if he/she is disabled, has long term disability, mental health condition, specific learning disability or have children or adult dependents (Gov UK 2016).

From the above given characteristics of a student bursary, it is fair to argue that it is a big help for many students studying healthcare courses like nursing. It is therefore safe to assume that the presence of a student bursary helps encourage the entry of students to study nursing and stabilise those who are already immersed with their nursing study. Ultimately, this helps to secure the future of the nursing workforce in the UK.

In line with the idea that student bursaries help encourage people to study nursing, it can also therefore be said that this scheme of giving out financial aid to students is one strategy that helps combat the problem on nursing shortage. This is because it encourages people to study nursing because of the perceived less financial burden when compared to studying a non-healthcare related course and so naturally many more would prefer to study nursing which would eventually increase the number of professional nurses available. Without the student bursary helping out many nursing students, the possibility of many discontinuing their study because of financial constraints is a potential reality. This can ultimately contribute to the existing problem of nursing shortage as few nurses will graduate in the future because they have shifted to another course or halted their studies. This emphasises that worsening the current problem on nursing shortage is one potential primary ill effect of cutting down student bursaries for nursing students. In line with this, a study conducted by Buchan and Aiken (2010) showed that one of the major causes of nursing shortage in the world is constrained resources that lead to the undersupply of new nurses. The Truth about Nursing Organization (n.d.) also highlights the inadequate resources for nursing education as one of the causes of nursing shortage.

Nursing shortage whether local, regional, national or global has a major impact on nursing practice inasmuch as it can lead to failure to maintain or improve the quality of health care (Buchan and Aiken 2010). In the UK for instance, the latest statistics show that 23,443 nursing vacancies exist in the UK which is equivalent to 9% of the entire nursing workforce and to try to address this, 69% of UK trusts are actively recruiting nurses from abroad (Hughes and Clarke 2016). One reason for this high vacancy rate is that although the number of positions available have elevated, the number of trainees have not increased (Hughes and Clarke 2016).

Cutting down the student bursaries available for nursing students will only worsen the problem because it will discourage prospective nursing trainees and so instead of increasing the number of trainees which is important to solve the problem on nursing shortage, it will only further reduce the number of people who want to study

nursing. Nursing shortage affects the quality of patient care in many ways. For instance, the lack of nursing staff in a hospital can lead to a heavier workload for the staff nurses present which in turn can negatively affect nursing job satisfaction and contribute to a higher turnover and again lead to shortage (Duffield and O'Brien-Pallas 2003). This is a logical consequence because the fewer the number of staff nurses working in a ward means that each nurse will have to cater to a higher number of patients in order to effectively care for all the inpatients and perhaps a longer period of time. This can lead to work-related stress and burnout and therefore degrade the quality of care that they can render and may eventually decide to quit.

A study by Nevidjon and Erickson (2001) recommended that increasing the funding for nursing education is a good strategy to address the problem on nursing shortage. A study by Keenan (2003) relate that subsidizing training is another way to increase the number of registered nurses. It is safe to argue that the concept of student bursaries is a good example of increasing the funds for nursing education particularly subsidizing training of future nurses so that more nurses eventually graduate and enter the nursing workforce and ultimately there will be more staff nurses working in hospitals. Based on all of the foregoing arguments, it can be declared that the student bursaries is actually a very good initiative by the government in helping future nurses.

Regrettably, Bhardwa (2016) reports that the government has confirmed the removal of the student nurse bursaries and will be replaced by student loans beginning 2017. One rationale for this move is to save approximately 800 million GBP in funding which is currently used to support the 60,000 student nurses which the government then intends to utilize to establish up to 10,000 new training places (Jenkin 2015). Since it was first announced, it has been opposed by several components of the health sector (Jenkin 2015). In fact, according to Johnston (2016) a **coalition of more than 20 charities, medical and professional bodies and trade unions led by the Royal College of Nursing, the British Medical Association, the Royal College of General Practitioners and the Patients' Association wrote an open letter to the prime minister essentially** claiming that the governmental move to end bursaries for nursing and midwifery students is a very risky gamble. It could leave a nursing graduate with 50,000 GBP of debt and this is enough to discourage people from studying nursing which is a serious problem especially now that the NHS is requiring more nurses to fill nursing vacancies (Johnston 2016).

Merrifield (2016) suggests that removing the bursaries and replacing it with loans is like punishing students. Abrahams and Nash (2015) boldly relate that students paying for their own tuition fees is a bad idea and once it is implemented many students will no longer work on goodwill. Nursing students are a vital component of any ward and it is a rare sight to see a ward function effectively without the help and goodwill of nursing students (Nash and Abrahams 2015). Removing the bursaries will most likely deter prospective nursing students (Abrahams and Nash 2015). Abrahams and Nash (2015) further state that the government does not fully understand the actual issue and that is the reality that there are not enough mentors or placement areas to accommodate the number of students which the government is trying to increase by using funds intended for the bursaries.

On the other hand, the Universities UK and the Council of Deans of Health support the action to replace the bursaries on the basis that it will remove the cap on the amount of training places the government can afford to make available (Jenkin 2015). The removal of the student bursaries will provide the government with sufficient funds to create new training places (Jenkin 2015). It is estimated that around 10,000 additional places will be created from 2017 and 2020 which means 3,300 places per year (Watt 2016). It is safe to argue that this increase in places can naturally allow more prospective nursing students. This is good because NHS employers will have a bigger pool of qualified home-grown nurses and therefore the reliance for overseas or agency staff will reduce (Gummer 2016). Dame Professor Jessica Corner, chair of the Council of Deans of Health says that the replacement of the bursary with loans will not have a negative impact on the number of applicants and in fact up to 10 applicants are vying for each of the 20,000 training places a year (Jenkin 2015). Aside from this, the change will also help universities to fund courses because currently many schools receive less than it actually costs to deliver training programmes (Jenkin 2015).

It can be declared that the government's action to change the bursaries into loans does propose an advantage. The advantage is that it can create more training places that will be able to keep up with the high number of people who want to study nursing which under the current bursary system is limited because the funds for the bursaries can only support a limited number of students. There is however one flaw in this plan and that is the reality that having more training places for potential nursing students does not immediately mean that these will be taken advantage by prospective students because there is that consideration that they will no longer receive financial aid from that government and that they will have to pay for their own training and education. The loans which the government offer cannot be considered as a subsidy since it is a debt which students will have to pay. This implies that the plan of the government to change bursaries into a loan system will also rely on whether prospective nursing students are willing and financially able to self-finance their studies. Aside from this, there are also other factors which contribute to the desire to study nursing. The Health Foundation (2016) states that factors like the perception of career opportunities after graduation and potential for high level pay are examples of long term factors that greatly affect prospective students' desire to proceed to nursing.

#### Conclusion

Overall, it can be said that the premise from which the government based its decision to replace bursaries with loans does have a potential advantage but it is insufficient to guarantee that there will still be a high influx of prospective nursing students once it is implemented. There is also the consideration that if the strategy of giving loans instead of bursaries does not work, there will be even less prospective nursing students and even fewer nursing graduates in the future and this will only contribute to the current problem on nursing shortage in the UK and worsen its effects on the quality of healthcare services. There is also the reality that those who are already studying nursing will be greatly affected once the change has been implemented and it is logical to argue that some nursing students may even decide to quit because they will be unable to finance their studies. With these arguments, it can be said that cutting down nursing student bursaries and replacing with loan grants can either positively or negatively impact nursing practice in the UK but the greater weight is on the possibility of it failing to achieve what it is supposed to, worsen instead of helping address the problem of nursing shortage and negatively affect the future of nursing practice in the UK.

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