

## "Alone We Can Do So Little; Together We Can Do So Much": Nurses' Involvement in The Associations

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The formation of professional associations and unions among nurses worldwide began in the nineteenth century (1). Several associations have been established around the world that provide membership to nurses all over the world, such as the International Council of Nurses (ICN). The International Council of Nurses (ICN) is a federation of national nursing associations that represents 28 million nurses from more than 130 countries (2). There is information on the homepage about the national nursing associations that are affiliates of ICN. When a person joins a national nursing organisation, he or she automatically becomes a member of ICN.

Aside from ICN, there is the Sigma Theta Tau International Honor Society of Nursing (Sigma Nursing), which has over 130,000 nurse leaders from all over the world. Sigma is an "international community of nurses, dedicated to the advancement of knowledge, teaching, learning, and service through the cultivation of communities of practice, education, and research" (3). In addition, there are a few other associations such as the Emergency Nurses Association (ENA), Infusion Nurses Society, and International Nursing Association of Clinical and Simulation Learning (INACSL), to name a few. ENA is the "premier professional nursing association for emergency nurses and expands its membership to international nurses" (4).

Nursing associations begin to form in Malaysia in the twentieth century. The Malaysian Nurses Association (MNA) is the most prominent

nursing association in Malaysia, and it was founded in 1951 (5), a few years before the country's independence. MNA currently has approximately 60,000 members across the country (6). MNA was founded to serve as a channel of communication and networking for those involved in healthcare delivery (7). Other established nursing associations for Malaysian nurses besides MNA include the Malaysian Orthopaedic Nurses Association (MONA) and the Infusion Nurses Society Malaysia (INS Malaysia), among others. Perhaps more associations will be formed in Malaysia in the future to 'connect' these nurses based on their similarities.

### **As a member, what can nurses contribute to the association?**

Nurses rarely answer the question posed above. Some organisations encourage their members to volunteer in order to contribute their knowledge and ideas to certain tasks. ENA, for example, allows members to volunteer for committees such as the Emergency Nursing Advanced Practice Advisory Council, Trauma Committee, Emergency Nursing Research Advisory Council, International Advisory Council, and a few others. The committee or council connects all branches of the nursing profession; education, research, practise, and special population needs where they benefit the emergency nursing fraternity.

Whereas Sigma Nursing offers a platform called The Circle for members all over the

world to share ideas and research findings. During a conference or congress, Sigma Nursing members can also serve as reviewers, moderators, and committee members. Furthermore, some associations allow members to make anonymous donations to help fund the organisation's operations. Attending activities organised by the association, such as attending seminars or conferences and purchasing merchandise, reading materials, and products, allows members to contribute to the income of the association.

### **Why should nurses be a member of an association?**

According to Zimmer (8), an association "is an organised group of persons (1) that is formed in order to further some common interest of its members; (2) in which membership is voluntary in the sense that is neither mandatory nor acquired through birth; and (3) that exists independent from the state". The establishment of the association focuses on country, speciality, age group, interest, and others. Merton defined a professional association as "an organization of practitioners who judge one another as professionally competent and who have banded together to perform social functions which they cannot perform in their separate capacity as individuals" (9).

Our profession evolved as a professional status over time. However, in Malaysia, the nursing profession is still struggling to be acknowledged by society. During the COVID-19 pandemic, society has recently recognised the 'existence' of nurses on the healthcare frontlines who are willing to expose themselves to the virus's danger. Nonetheless, it requires additional attention in terms of professional development. Our nurses' collective voice is critical to ensuring that our profession's educational level is recognised not only by society but also by the nursing fraternity. How and where can nurses' collective voices be heard? Our voices can only be heard by joining a group. We can only do so much if we all work together.

Matthews mentioned that "Professional organizations and associations in nursing are critical for generating the energy, flow of ideas,

and proactive work needed to maintain a healthy profession that advocates for the needs of its clients and nurses, and the trust of society" (10). To improve the nursing profession, more nurses should join associations, particularly the Malaysian Nurses Association, to strengthen our "bonding" and the visibility of our profession among society in demanding what is required of nurses.

However, among these nurses, the question of 'How can I contribute to the association versus what can the association offer me?' is frequently raised. The sad truth is that some people did wonder why they needed to be members because they claimed they received no benefit from the organisation. In the worst-case scenario, some of these nurses have received no information about joining any professional nursing organisations. This article addresses both questions in order to educate these nurses on the benefits.

The University of Buffalo School of Nursing has listed several reasons to join a professional nursing association as well as how to choose which one to join. It stated that the main reason is for professional development and growth, educational opportunities, networking, advancing nursing as a profession, and scholarships and research funding (11). The offers may differ from one another, depending on the goal of the association's formation.

In other parts of the world, some associations create a platform for members to speak out and contribute to the profession's accountability to society through resolutions, position papers, and statements. ENA holds conferences each year to bring together emergency nurses in person to discuss these issues, as well as to exchange knowledge and ideas and to give them the opportunity to present their research findings for evidence-based practice. ENA's homepage offers more opportunities to its members, including but not limited to expert advice and resources, newsletters, and reading materials such as books and journals, as well as policies and guidelines for emergency nursing education and practices worldwide.

In the case of Malaysia, the MNA's homepage lists the events and activities it has organised, including international events. In addition, the bulletin and journal provide information on

news and updates (Journal of Malaysian Nurses Association). MNA had also formed a number of special interest groups to help members from all over the country connect. The association offers a variety of educational talks, such as seminars and continuing nursing education, in which nurses are welcome to participate. Furthermore, MNA provides social activities for its members by organising visits and communal work in collaboration with other institutions.

Personal experiences as a member of the national and international nursing associations. The author's involvement with nursing associations began in 2007, when she became an ordinary member of the national nursing association, MNA (Malaysian Nurses Association). After finishing her studies, the author forgot about her membership until she began working at International Islamic University Malaysia in 2009. That year, the author renewed her MNA membership and became an ENA ordinary member for the first time. However, both memberships only lasted a year because the author went on to pursue a master's degree for nearly two years and was occupied with work duties in the years that followed.

After completing her doctoral studies in 2019, the author re-joined both associations, as well as Sigma Nursing. During this period, the author became a life member of both the MNA and the ENA. It was difficult to pay a lump sum of about MYR610.00 to MNA and nearly \$1500 within a year's time for an ENA lifetime membership. Nonetheless, when considering the benefits of membership, the author ignores the amount given to the association. It is believed that the benefits far outweigh the costs.

Being a member of the MNA's Pahang branch allows the author to be the university's representative, and the official appointment began in 2022 for two years. Kulliyyah of Nursing, IIUM has been actively involved in many activities organised by the MNA Pahang branch since her appointment, including educational talks, sports events, social gatherings, and many more. MNA also provides a platform for its members to attend the Annual General Meeting, share knowledge

through research conducted by its members, and hone their entrepreneurial skills.

While for ENA, the author explored the opportunities available as a member via its website. Surprisingly, the author discovered a plethora of opportunities, such as volunteering for dozens of committees, receiving awards for attending conferences, and receiving free reading materials such as the bulletin and the journal, to name a few. ENA also offers affordable education and training (except it is in US dollars). In 2020, the author applied for the Conference Scholarship for International Nurses and was selected to attend EN21 in Orlando, Florida. Unfortunately, due to the restrictions on crossing borders during the pandemic COVID-19, the conference was held virtually. The award was forwarded to EN22 in Denver, Colorado, and the author attended successfully.

Aside from that, the author is a volunteer member of the ENA's International Advisory Council for 2022-2023. There is still time to attend the GA, which was held at the same location a few days before the conference began. The author was appointed as an alternate member of the Emergency Management and Preparedness Committee for the year 2022, and this year was accepted as a member of the Emergency Nursing Research Advisory Council for ENA. Surprisingly, the author's opportunity for both events was far greater than the cost of the lifetime membership. Furthermore, there was the opportunity to meet new friends from various countries who shared the same interests and to network with them.

The other opportunities followed one after the other. After returning from EN22 for a month, the author was chosen to receive a \$3700 scholarship to participate in the Culture Exchange Program in the United Arab Emirates. The networking has now expanded not only to ENA members but also to the countries visited and the opportunity to inform them about the ENA council where they can also volunteer and be known on an international platform.

### **Conclusion**

Joining professional associations has a significant impact not only on professional

development but also on personal growth. The author believes that the benefits of joining outweigh what nurses can contribute to the association. By taking advantage of the world without borders, networking can take place regardless of where the nurses reside in the world. This should not stop there, and nurses can go beyond the border to learn from one another through the networking established by joining an association. More opportunities await you!

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