

## **Restoring the dignity of the nursing and midwifery professions in a confrontation with the psychological and psychiatric consequences of a terrorist attack on the human body**

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### **ABSTRACT**

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On October 9-10, 2017, the International Scientific Conference „Polish, European and Global Nursing” was held in Warsaw, Poland. The main organizer of the conference was the National Council of Nurses and Midwives in Warsaw. The event was an excellent opportunity to seriously discuss the situation of nurses and midwives and other topics in a large

group of experts, pondering such issues as how to restore the dignity and prestige of the profession, and also how to initiate a discussion on the psychological and psychiatric consequences of a terrorist attack on the human body.

**Keywords:** Mental disorders, terrorism, public health, scope of practice, symptoms.

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According to data from the *Central Register of Nurses and Midwives* (CRPiP), 288,000 nurses were registered in Poland at the end of 2016, of whom 69.5% were over the age of 45. According to Zofia Malas, President of the National Chamber of Nurses and Midwives: “The problem of generational change will deepen, because too few young people are taking up jobs in the profession to replace outgoing staff” [1].

4,500 nurses and midwives are educated in Poland every year, but only half stay in the profession. „When they find out what wages they will get in the profession, graduates in nursing and midwifery look for jobs elsewhere, where work will not be so physically and mentally stressful” [2].

During six thematic sessions of the International Scientific Conference „Polish, European and Global Nursing”, **representatives of following institutions: the Ministry of Health ; the Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Policy ; the National Health Fund ; and nurses, midwives, academic teachers and managers of medical facilities, all of them, discussed the future of the industry.** The thematic areas addressed at the conference concerned such issues as systemic solutions for health care management, education of nurses and midwives in the EU, the place and role of nurses and midwives in coordinated primary care, and interpersonal communication in nursing. The conference was also an opportunity to broaden academic knowledge. Scientific issues concerning clinical practice standards for nurses, the role of nurses and midwives in senior care or the new face of an aging Europe were also discussed during the two-day meeting [3,4].

The necessity of conducting a continuous dialogue on the situation of nurses and midwives in Poland is illustrated by data on the industry: **per 1,000 residents there are only an average of 5.2 nurses and midwives in Poland, in comparison to an average number ( per 1,000 residents) of 9.8 nurses and midwives in European Union.** Additionally, the percentage of nursing program graduates who have applied for their licenses to the Regional Chambers of Nurses and Midwives is very low. In fact, out of 21,070 graduates in undergraduate and graduate programs in this major of all graduates, only 4,020 applied for a license to the Regional Chambers [1].

Therefore it is worth paying attention to the information provided by the Deputy Minister of Health, Jozefa Szczurek-Zelazko, on the progress of work on the implementation of an educational benefit as a separate health service. Alicja Szewczyk presented the „General standard of clinical nursing practice as a diabetes educator”, which states: „Standards, recommendations and procedures do not restrict the work of a nurse/midwife, and even more so, they do

not free her from thinking and making decisions on her own. Standards are the basis for decisions, but they do not provide ready-made solutions in every situation” [5].

During the 6th thematic session: Mental health as a superior value, Mr. Dariusz Wojciech Mazurkiewicz, Ph.D. in Medical Sciences, from St. Mark’s Place Institute for Mental Health in New York (USA), gave lecture on „*The psychological and psychiatric consequences of a terrorist attack on the human body.*” The main goal of said lecture was an attempt at making the Conference participants aware of the dangers in the aspect of the human individual as well as the risk of very serious and long-term consequences deteriorating the health of nurses and midwives, if it were necessary for said professional groups to provide medical services in first response teams helping the victims of terrorist attacks.

Study results undeniably prove that not only victims exposed directly to the act of mass terrorism but also medical staff providing assistance after such traumatic experience, constitute a group exposed to the psychiatric and psychological effects of this traumatic experience. Fifteen years after the WTC terrorist attack, the following was noted in medical staff engaged in providing medical services to the victims: nightmares, intrusive memories (from the WTC site where help was rendered), PTSD, anxiety, depression, sleep disorders, negative effects on family and marital relationships, and on civil unions, where main somatic problems are respiratory disorders, eyesight and eye problems as well as neoplasms. That group lives in endless mourning, pain and suffering [6].

The threat of terrorism is a new challenge for nurses, midwives and doctors in Poland. The subject of terrorism is missing from nursing and midwifery teaching programs. It was emphasized that in the face of the growing threat of terrorism in the European Union countries, including Poland, there is an emerging need to update the nursing and midwifery curricula in undergraduate and graduate programs, by adding topics on professional functioning in the event of a terrorist attack, as well as by extending authorizations under the licenses of these professional groups so they are knowledgeable about and aware of the manner, competence and certainty in providing medical services for the recipients, and all that in special situations involving the counteracting of the effects of a terrorist attack. This is all the more important as the Polish legislator does not provide for any systemic solutions regarding the education of nurses and midwives concerning practical conduct in the case of an act of mass terror, anti-terrorist prevention, extension of authorizations to administer and apply pharmacological agents in the event of a

sudden and destructive event referred to herein.

Mr. Dariusz Wojciech Mazurkiewicz, Ph.D. in Medical Sciences, discussed leading diagnostics for PTSD, clinical depression, as well as risks of cognitive disorders and dementia and of concomitant somatic diseases in psychiatry, increased risks of suicides and hospital admissions, after and as a result of a terrorist attack. He pointed out intercontinental mood changes in the population after the terrorist attack. He discussed a wide timeframe from the moment of the terrorist attack to the onset of first symptoms of mental disorders, which, according to his own research carried out on a group of 200 victims of the WTC attack, can range from 1 day to 50 months.

The objective of the lecture in the sixth thematic session, apart from the issues demonstrating the destructive influence of terrorism on the mental sphere, was to emphasize that the professional group of nurses and midwives is willing to address very serious medical and psychological issues that representatives of other groups of medical professions in Poland are unable to take up [or for various reasons avoid]. Undoubtedly, this is consistent with the trend of restoring dignity and prestige for the professional groups of nurses and midwives.

## CONCLUSION

There is a real need not only to achieve systemic solutions that would increase the possibility of restoring prestige and dignity for the profession of nurses and midwives, but also the need to develop and adopt such options that would ensure protection of the aforementioned professional groups against long-term disastrous health-deteriorating consequences, resulting from the effects of providing services to victims in the event of a massive terrorist attack.

## Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest of this paper.

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