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## International Journal of Nursing Sciences

journal homepage: <http://www.elsevier.com/journals/international-journal-of-nursing-sciences/2352-0132>

## Global health education in Chinese universities and potential for collaboration with schools of nursing: A qualitative study

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## ARTICLE INFO

## Article history:

Received 16 September 2016

Accepted 1 December 2016

Available online xxx

## Keywords:

China

Education

Global health

Nursing

Qualitative research

## ABSTRACT

**Background:** The Chinese Consortium of Universities for Global Health (CCUGH) was established within schools of public health in 2013 with the goal of enhancing global health in China. Expanding nursing students' exposure to global health curricula is important as nurses are essential actors in the health care system. However, information related to existing global health education within CCUGH-affiliated universities and the current engagement of Chinese schools of nursing in global health remains extremely limited.

**Objective:** To identify and describe the current definitions and conceptualizations of global health education in Chinese universities, with a focus on schools of nursing, in order to explore potential opportunities for strengthened collaboration between global health initiative and schools of nursing in China. **Methods:** Purposive sampling with snowballing was used to recruit 19 key informants who were critical stakeholders in global health and nursing in China. Key informant interviews were conducted from July 2014 to February 2015, and data were updated in June 2016. Content analysis was used to analyze data via Atlas.ti 7.

**Results:** There was a rapid growth in global health education within and beyond CCUGH-affiliated universities with nine universities establishing global health institutes. Translation and definition of global health lacked consistency in Chinese language. Though no course directly related to global health was offered, schools of nursing were gradually participating in global health education and research. Nursing was a critical component of global health, and global health and nursing mutually advanced each other. Nursing education should include global health contents, but at present independent global health curriculum in schools of nursing was not appropriate.

**Conclusion:** Increasingly Chinese universities are promoting global health education through the platform of CCUGH. It is an ideal moment to promote and expand work across the fields of global health and nursing, specifically to highlight opportunities for collaboration across education, research and practice.

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## 1. Introduction

From the 1990s forward the era of globalization has resulted in an increasingly interconnected world [1]. Globalization is affecting the economy, politics, education and also specific professions, including nursing [2]. Global health has been defined as “an area for

study, research, and practice that places a priority on improving health and achieving equity in health for all people worldwide”, and involves “many disciplines within and beyond the health sciences and promotes interdisciplinary collaboration” [3]. In 2009, the Consortium of Universities for Global Health (CUGH) was established with the mission to “define the field of global health,

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Peer review under responsibility of Chinese Nursing Association.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ijnss.2016.12.001>

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standardize curricula, expand research, and coordinate projects in low-resource countries" [4]. In 2013, the Chinese Consortium of Universities for Global Health (CCUGH) was established by 10 schools of public health within Chinese universities, with the goal of enhancing global health in China. These consortiums engage a variety of disciplines including public health, medicine, dentistry, pharmacy, and nursing to achieve their stated goal.

Nurses and midwives play an essential role in health care systems worldwide providing about 90% of health care globally [5]. As nurses and midwives make up the largest proportion of the global health workforce (35 million, 80%), their engagement in global health is crucially important [6]. Yet, references related to global health education within CCUGH-affiliated universities and the involvement of schools of nursing in global health in China remain extremely limited.

In April 2013, the Chinese Nursing Association officially became a member of the International Council of Nurses (ICN), an international body whose mission is to ensure quality nursing care for all and sound health policies globally [7]. By the end of 2015, China has more than 3.24 million nurses [8], and is well positioned to play an important leadership role in global health nursing. However, despite this growing interest in global health in China—shown by the establishment of CCUGH, the engagement with the field of nursing has been limited. As health becomes increasingly global, there are significant implications for nurses as the primary providers of health services [6]. Therefore, the preparation of Chinese nurses in global health, and their increasing participation in global health research and in policy forums are an important step to improve healthcare globally. A comprehensive understanding of the current development of global health education in Chinese universities and potential opportunities for collaboration between global health and nursing is of great importance.

The aim of this study is to identify and describe the current definitions and conceptualizations of global health education in Chinese universities, with a focus on Schools of Nursing, in order to explore potential opportunities for strengthened collaboration between global health initiative and Chinese Schools of Nursing.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Study design

This study was a qualitative research using key informant interviews for data collection. Key informants are knowledgeable people who are likely to provide needed information, ideas and insights on a particular subject, and key informant interviews can provide data and insights that cannot be obtained from other methods or sources [9]. The data collection, analysis, and reporting followed the Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research (COREQ) [10,11].

### 2.2. Participants

Purposive sampling with snowballing was used to recruit 19 key informants who were critical stakeholders in global health and nursing in China, principally directors at global health institutes or deans at schools of public health affiliated with the CCUGH ( $n = 7$ ), and deans at schools of nursing affiliated with the China Medical Board (CMB) China Nursing Network ( $n = 8$ ), and professors or directors from other Chinese universities and NGOs ( $n = 4$ ).

### 2.3. Data collection

From July 2014 to February 2015, key informant interview data were collected via open-ended, semi-structured interviews held

either in person, by telephone/Skype, or e-mail (1 case). Especially, data related to current status of global health institutes were updated in June 2016 with three key informants. All interviews were conducted by the first author in Chinese (Mandarin) or English. The interview guide was developed through team discussion and literature review. The interview guide included the following key domains: (1) key informant's definition of global health; (2) current global health activities in key informant's school/institute; (3) key informant's perception of the relationship between global health and nursing, and how they can contribute to each other; and (4) resources and barriers to establishing/expanding global health curriculum in schools of nursing. The interviews lasted approximately 30–60 min and were audiotaped, and notes were also taken during the interviews to highlight key commentary. We stopped recruiting key informants when data achieved saturation.

### 2.4. Data analysis

The interviews were transcribed verbatim, in either Chinese or English by the first author and subsequently summarized in English. A codebook was developed and data were analyzed using content analysis. All transcripts were read at least three times and coded by three bilingual authors (Chinese and English). The meanings of significant sentences were identified and these formulated meanings were then organized into clusters of themes using Atlas.ti 7.

### 2.5. Ethics approval

The Institutional Review Board at the University of Washington approved this study on June 16th, 2014 (IRB No. 47682). At the outset of the interviews, the purpose and scope of the research and key informants' rights were clearly explained, and signed informed consents were obtained from all key informants.

## 3. Results

Nineteen key informants participated in the study. Their characteristics are highlighted in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
Characteristics of key informants ( $n = 19$ ).

Characteristic	$n$ (%)
Gender	
Female	11(58)
Male	8(42)
Age (years)	
30–39	1(5)
40–49	8(43)
50–59	9(47)
≥60	1(5)
Length of practice (years)	
5–9	1(5)
10–19	3(16)
20–29	10(53)
≥30	5(26)
Professional title	
Associate Professor	1(5)
Professor	16(85)
Director Nurse	1(5)
Not applicable	1(5)
Education	
Master	4(21)
PhD	15(79)

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