How nurses contribute to clinical research and support needed for nurses in clinical research- Geoffrey M. Maina

The work I am currently involved in –

I am a Lecturer at Moi University, Kenya and currently engaged in a PhD research project entitled Negotiating Identities: A Narrative Inquiry into the Lived Experiences of People Living with HIV. In this research, I engage people living with HIV and AIDS (PHAs) who are involved in HIV work. Involvement of PHAs in HIV work (education, prevention, research and care) is critical to the accomplishment of Greater/Meaningful Involvement of People with HIV and AIDS (GIPA)/MIPA mandate. To be involved in GIPA/MIPA work, PHAs publicly and continuously disclose their HIV status by living and reliving their lived experiences of being infected with HIV virus which has a great educative value and impact.

In Kenya, with a HIV prevalence of 6.2%, PHAs are fundamental to HIV prevention and in supporting HIV treatment and care. Yet, even as PHAs endeavour to actively participate in GIPA/MIPA activities, they are continuously confronted with HIV stigma and discrimination associated with disclosing their HIV status. Moreover, although HIV disclosure is voluntary, the experiences and impact of the continuous public self-disclosure, and of retelling and reliving public stories of living with HIV as they fulfill GIPA/MIPA mandate has not been well explored. I am utilising narrative inquiry methodology to inquire into the experiences of PHAs who are involved in HIV work. My aim is to understand how PHAs story their experiences, make sense of their experiences and how they construct their HIV identity in order to fulfil the GIPA/MIPA mandate. Moreover, I want to understand the social, political, ethical, and psychological implications of continuous public self-disclosure of HIV status. I am in the middle of data collection.
How I hope to contribute to clinical research

Through this research, I will highlight the lived experiences of people living with HIV as clients of health year even as they endeavour to fulfil the GIPA mandate. Specifically, I want to explore how illness narratives can illuminate the interactions of social and medical aspects of the illness with a person. By positioning PHAs as expert knowers of their illnesses, I will seek to demonstrate how nurses can benefit from PHAs lived experiences to inform their HIV care. For nurses in Kenya to provide patient centred care, they need to appreciate the changing and complex nature of HIV infection and how it is experienced by PHAs. That way, they respond effectively to support PHAs in adhering to their medications, and address factors that may hinder their compliance to treatment.

In addition, having an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of living with HIV will equip nurses in fighting institutional HIV stigma and discrimination. This is instructive given that nurses in Africa, and Kenya in particular where HIV prevalence is high, have been documented as sources of HIV stigma and discrimination. Thus, they can embrace evidence based practice in HIV care and support PHAs in their endeavour to fulfil GIPA/MIPA mandate. Furthermore, nurses can learn from PHAs who as expert knowers can provide insight into their experiences of living with HIV which can strengthen patient-nurse relationship.

Support needed for nurses in Kenya

There are not many universities providing graduate degrees in nursing and therefore, not many nurses in Kenya have graduate degrees. Capacity building for nurses to have advanced degrees in nursing is critical because it will unlock nursing scholarly potential that has been lacking in the Kenyan nursing landscape. By unlocking the scholarly potential, nurses can
become contributors of knowledge and further enhance the nursing profession in Kenya.

Capacity building for nursing scholars can be achieved through:

1. **Helping the universities offering degrees in nursing develop masters and PhD programs.** This will increase nurses’ access to advanced nursing degrees of their choice. As things stand, any nurse aspiring to further education is forced to seek education opportunities outside the country. For instance, I did my master’s degree in South Africa and now pursuing PhD in Canada since these opportunities were inexistent at the time in Kenya. Doing these advanced degrees outside Kenya is expensive and prohibitive for many young graduate nurses.

2. **Mentoring by the experienced nurse scholars** - For a young scholar liker me, I feel that as I come closer to finishing my PhD, I need to be mentored in research through post-doctoral fellowships and other forums so that I can increase my research output and also develop my own program of research. By pursuing a post-doctoral opportunity, I will be hoping to present my doctoral work in conferences (locally and internationally), increase my publication output and network more. In the end, I will be well equipped to mentor others and also launch graduate programs here in Kenyan universities.

3. **Conducting collaborative researches where less experienced nurses are co-principal investigators.** By writing joint grants with experienced nurse scholars, inexperienced nurses can acquire grant writing skills, research management skills and learn the art of attracting grants for programs and interventions. Also, as a result, a greater understanding of cultural and international interactions can enrich the scholarly acumen of young scholars.

4. **Knowledge translation into policy and practice** - Young nurses need to be supported to make impact in their areas of operation through supporting policy changes and informing
practice. There is therefore need for Kenyan nurses to be supported in knowledge translation of their research output. As it is, there are no courses on knowledge translation in our graduate program. Thus, providing mentorship and support in KT will make our research impactful.

In conclusion, nurses in Kenya are making tremendous efforts and sacrifices in order to realise their scholarly potential. With the right support, mentorship and encouragement, we will build a solid future where nurses will have opportunities to advance their studies and realise their potential as academics, researchers, clinicians and administrators.