

THE HISTORY OF NURSING PROFESSION IN CAMEROON

Before the advent of 'modern' nursing during the colonial era, the care of patients in different tribes and villages were in the hands of medicine men and women. That is; traditional healers. This traditional medicine could be taught through apprenticeship or transferred to successors following instructions from the ancestors. Problems of delivery and postpartum were handled by Traditional Birth Attendants who were usually elderly women who may have learned through apprenticeship.

In this era, the profession of nursing did not exist in Cameroon until the arrival of the missionaries and colonialists in the late 19th century.

Nursing education in Cameroon can be traced back to the start of the colonial era. When the Germans annexed Cameroon in 1884 they trained a type of medical personnel called 'Dressers'. A dresser was a surgeon's assistance or 'some sort of male nurse' whose duty was to dress wounds and sores. When Cameroon was partitioned between the French and British after world war one, in the French part of the country Dr Eugene Jamot opened the first school to train nurse aides in 1930. The training lasted three months and these nurses helped him in the fight against sleeping sickness.

In the British Cameroon, the British continued using the services of the dressers when they opened the African Hospital in Victoria by 1933. During this time training for nurses was only available in Nigeria and since the British managed their territory as part of Nigeria, it was easy for Cameroonians to study in Nigeria. The first training school in this part of the Country was started by the catholic mission in 1954 at Shisong. The school trained staff nurses in a three year program. The state owned Bamenda Nursing School was opened in 1969 to also train staff nurses. These schools were all hospital based as there was no university based program at that time. The entire nursing programs at this time were under the Ministry of Public Health.

The University of Buea began a four year training program for the award of Bachelor's Degree in Nursing Science. The first batch left in 2001 and were mostly nurses that had previously held diplomas. The university conferred its first Master's degree in Nursing Education in 2009. The University of Yaounde 1 which is the oldest in Cameroon also started a Master in Nursing Science degree in the late 2000s.

Entry into practice is still based on the three year diploma which can now be obtained from both the ministries of Public Health and Higher Education. Preregistration diploma programs also continue even as undergraduate programs are now available.

