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THE launch of the inaugural Malawi Nursing and Midwifery Journal marks an important milestone in our country's pursuit of excellence in nursing and midwifery. It provides a platform for scholarly discourse, innovation, evidence generation, and professional reflection. More importantly, it offers an opportunity to reaffirm the indispensable role of professional regulation in safeguarding the public while advancing the nursing and midwifery professions.

Nurses and midwives constitute the largest cadre of healthcare professionals in Malawi and remain the backbone of the health system. They provide care across the continuum of life; from health promotion and disease prevention to emergency, curative, rehabilitative, and palliative services. As Malawi implements the Health Sector Strategic Plan III (2023–2030), strengthening the nursing and midwifery workforce is fundamental to achieving Universal Health Coverage (UHC), improving maternal and newborn outcomes, and realizing the aspirations of Malawi 2063. The HSSP III prioritizes quality service delivery, human resources for health, leadership and governance, digital health, and research. A well-regulated nursing and midwifery profession is therefore, indispensable.

Professional regulation is far more than registration and licensure. It is a comprehensive system that establishes standards for education, practice, ethics, continuing professional development, accreditation of training institutions, and disciplinary processes that protect the public from unsafe practice. The Nurses and Midwives Council of Malawi (NMCM), established under the Nurses and Midwives Act No 16 of 1995 (Cap. 36: 02), has the statutory responsibility of ensuring that every licensed

practitioner possesses the competence, integrity, and professionalism expected by society.

However, regulation must continuously evolve to match changing healthcare needs. Advances in technology, increasing specialization, emerging diseases, demographic transitions, and growing public expectations require regulatory frameworks that are responsive, evidence-based, and forward-looking. Regulatory reform should therefore, focus on competency-based practice, digital registration systems, strengthened continuing professional development, enhanced quality assurance of education programs, and greater collaboration with employers, educators, and professional associations.

The Ministry of Health and Sanitation has placed considerable emphasis on improving the availability, competence, and equitable distribution of human resources for health, while strengthening governance and quality of care. These priorities resonate strongly with the Council's mandate. Effective regulation complements government efforts by ensuring that workforce expansion is accompanied by competence, accountability, ethical conduct, and patient safety. As training institutions increase enrolment to address workforce shortages, maintaining educational quality becomes increasingly important. Quantity without quality cannot produce the competent workforce required for modern healthcare delivery.

Nursing and midwifery education in Malawi has made commendable progress through curriculum reviews, accreditation of additional training institutions, expansion of degree programs, and stronger collaboration among regulators, academia, and service providers. Nevertheless, significant challenges remain. Clinical placement sites are becoming overstretched; faculty shortages continue to affect educational quality; simulation infrastructure remains inadequate in many institutions; and rapid technological changes demand continuous curriculum review. Greater investment in faculty development, digital learning platforms, simulation laboratories, and clinical mentorship is therefore,

essential if graduates are to meet contemporary practice expectations.

Similarly, nursing and midwifery practice is evolving rapidly. Healthcare delivery is increasingly multidisciplinary, technology-driven, and evidence-based. Practitioners are expected not only to provide safe clinical care but also to demonstrate leadership, quality improvement, research utilization, digital competence, and effective communication. Professional regulation must therefore, promote lifelong learning through continuing professional development while ensuring that ethical practice remains central to patient care.

Professional associations also occupy a critical position within the regulatory ecosystem. While the Council regulates the profession in the public interest, professional associations advocate for the welfare, professional development, leadership, and advancement of their members. These complementary roles should never be viewed as competing but rather as mutually reinforcing. Strong professional associations contribute to policy dialogue, leadership development, scientific advancement, and professional solidarity. At the same time, they face challenges including limited financial sustainability, low membership participation, inadequate research capacity, and constrained advocacy resources. Addressing these challenges requires renewed commitment from members and stronger partnerships with government, academia, development partners, and regulatory bodies.

Another important priority is strengthening professionalism and ethical conduct. Increasing public awareness, social media influence, and changing patient expectations require nurses and midwives to maintain the highest standards of accountability. Complaints against practitioners should be viewed not merely as disciplinary matters but also as opportunities for learning, systems improvement, and strengthening public confidence. Regulatory processes must therefore remain transparent, fair, timely, and focused on protecting the public while supporting remediation where appropriate.

The future of nursing and midwifery regulation in Malawi lies in collaboration. Government, regulators, educational institutions, employers, professional associations, researchers, development partners, and practitioners all have shared responsibility for strengthening the profession. Evidence generated through this journal should inform regulatory reforms, educational innovations, clinical

guidelines, and health policy decisions. Research must increasingly address locally relevant challenges and generate practical solutions for improving patient outcomes.

As the Acting Registrar of the Nurses and Midwives Council of Malawi, I remain optimistic about the future of our profession. Malawi possesses a dedicated nursing and midwifery workforce, resilient educational institutions, committed professional leaders, and supportive national policies. By embracing innovation, strengthening regulation, promoting ethical practice, investing in education, and fostering collaborative leadership, we can build a nursing and midwifery profession that is responsive to the health needs of our people and aligned with national development aspirations.

May this inaugural journal inspire critical thinking, professional excellence, and evidence-informed leadership. Let it serve as a catalyst for continuous improvement in nursing and midwifery education, practice, research, and regulation. Together, we can strengthen public trust, improve quality of care, and contribute meaningfully to a healthier Malawi.

References

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