



EDITORIAL

Dr Bheri Ramsaran and the Guyana School of Nursing

By [Stabroek News](#) April 3, 2012



It would be a travesty, no less, if the recent revelation of an 80.5 per cent failure rate among the current batch of students at the Guyana School of Nursing were not now to result in an independent enquiry into conditions at the institution. We had, after all, been served with earlier expert warnings that conditions at the school were negatively affecting the teaching and learning environment and while the Jagdeo administration had set no great store by holding public officials to account for damaging deficiencies in the public sector infrastructure, President Ramotar need not follow his predecessor's lead. There is absolutely nothing wrong with the President demanding that his ministers and other officials account for their delinquencies.

It was barely a few weeks ago that a public comment by Guyana Public Service Union (GPSU) President Patrick Yarde drew an absurd outburst from Health Minister Dr Bheri Ramsaran, which, rather than address the issue raised by Mr Yarde, made light of the matter by directing a trite personal attack at the union President. The Health Minister then went on to refer to a \$345M investment in nursing training in 2011, seemingly oblivious to the fact that such a significant investment renders the



part of the students whereas more than twenty per cent of them emerge from training equipped to serve in a national health sector that cries out for trained professionals. Indeed, now that the performance of the most recent batch of trainees has been made public, the earlier warnings by students and trainers about the nexus between conditions at the Nursing School and the absence of a convivial environment for teaching and learning renders Dr Ramsaran's ill-conceived and dismissive remarks even more unfortunate.

Two years ago, Dr Ramsaran's predecessor, Dr Leslie Ramsammy had declared that around \$600M annually was being spent on nurses' education and had undertaken to do more to deliver more professionally trained nurses to the health sector in the wake of the disturbing report on the decline in the country's nursing resources contained in the study undertaken by the Jamaican consultant Una Reid. Again, the conditions at the Nursing School and the appalling failure rate among its students begs the question as to whether or not Dr Ramsammy took his own undertakings seriously, since the neglect of the Nursing School appears to be impacting directly on the government's ability to produce trained nurses to compensate for the loss of skills alluded to in the Una Reid study.

The findings of the Una Reid study in the matter of the nexus between a shortage of nurses and levels of pay and working conditions was of course no more than a reminder of the historical official insensitivity to the front-line role which nurses play in a country where access to health care in some regions of the country remains limited. The valuable insights of our nursing professionals on issues like gaps in the health care system and the consequences of those gaps for health care delivery and other areas where improvements are needed to increase access, promote prevention, coordinate care and improve the overall quality and efficiency of the health care system continue to be ignored by government. The truth is that nurses' opinions on health care delivery are deemed by the powers that be to be less worthwhile than those of doctors, consultants and state bureaucrats. More than that, nurses have become the favoured whipping boys/girls for failures in the health care delivery system, a practice that is altogether consistent with the official norm of heaping blame for shortcomings on those functionaries deemed to be lowest on the food chain.



Just over three years ago the then Acting Principal of the Guyana School of Nursing, Pearl Munroe, disclosed that the school might have been on the threshold of being brought on par with similar institutions elsewhere in the Caribbean and that the Ministry of Health would play a leading role in the helping the school to realize that objective. Then we were told that the school had undergone a successful evaluation by the General Nursing Council and hopes appeared to be high that graduates of the school could move on to complete a Masters Degree. That year, 2004, we also learnt that the success rate for nurses graduating from the school was in excess of 90 per cent. The current success rate suggests that over the past seven years the performance of the Nursing School has been almost entirely reversed and it is this overwhelming tragedy, rather than pointless indulgence in counterproductive distractions, that ought to preoccupy Dr Ramsaran and the Ministry of Health. For his part, President Ramotar must direct his Health Minister to cease his evasive and, frankly, counterproductive jousting and sit down with the professionals who are intimate with the problems facing the Guyana School of Nursing.



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