When discussing about health care providers, the standard formulation is “Doctors and Hospitals” although in reality it is nurses who provide most of the skilled care that patients receive in the hospitals and the only care available to many in underserved communities.

Maybe you don’t really understand that nurses do much more than physical labour. It is hard work. Hard and harsh working conditions that even prohibit to go to bathroom and even feeding meals take their toll. Nurses are in the frontline of health care and need to be at the foundation of health care. Hospitals that are short of nurses post a greater risk of complications and even deaths. Shortage of nurses raises the risk of medical errors, safety lapses and delays the care. Peter Beurhans, an expert in Nursing says that thousands of deaths and million days of hospital care could be averted annually by increasing the number of nurses. Nurses are the glue holding the system together, he says.

Health care can be done right by ensuring the amount of nurses that need to provide quality care for all. In the US Government has decided no nurse should have more than 4 patients assigned to them. For 4 patients there is one nurse, and 2 aids. For 6 patients, 2 aids are removed and another nurse is deputed. The latest statistics from the World Health Organisation revealed that the Gulf region has a ratio of 3.5 nurses per 1000 population, in comparison UK has 12.8 and USA 9.4 nurses per 1000 population. In US, for every 120 people there is one nurse. Relative to physicians these nurse increasingly serve as lower cost prime care providers.

New England Journal of Medicine study found that there were 31 percent more patient deaths per month after common surgical procedures such as gall bladder removal or hip replacement at hospital where each nurse cared for eight patients than when a nurse cared for four patients. Surveys have consistently ranked nurses as one of the most respected and trusted professions in the US. A recent Gall Up poll survey in the US found that nursing is the top profession for honesty and ethics. It is therefore advisable for the Government to employ more nurses.

If given an opportunity, nurses could do far more to improve the health of the people. With more resources nurses could prevent or better manage illnesses such as diabetes and heart diseases, thus decreasing burden on hospitals. Nurses could also provide most of the care in responding to an epidemic like the H1N1 Flu. Nurses are also vital to cost-containment efforts. It is nurses who monitor and advocate for patients to prevent deadly errors and needless hospital re-admissions. Nurses teach how to adopt to and manage their conditions. They combine expertise with a holistic approach, providing cost-effective primary care as effectively as physicians do. Studies suggest that increase in nurse staff in clinical settings could actually cut costs, reduce complications and hospital stay and save lives. Nurses also improve the quality of care through ongoing health management and advocacy efforts such as increased breast feeding. Yet, despite all the lip service for nursing as the most trusted profession, nurses suffer from a critical lack of resources.

This disrespect weakens our health systems and leads private hospital administration to replace nurses with less skilled workers who cannot spot subtle but deadly changes in patient conditions and who cannot teach or advocate for patients. This disrespect leads officials to allocate miserly funding for nursing education and research.

Nurses must take the lead and convey the nature of their work to the public and decision-makers. Health policy makers should publicise their efforts to invest in nursing and place qualified nurses in visible positions of authority as President Obama has done by appointing a nurse Mary Wakefield to head the Health Resources and Service Administration.
Nurses could fair far better by strengthening themselves instead of always looking to someone else to do it. Each nurse has 30 patients to care for, which is quite arduous a task. Nurses have done this to themselves by remaining unorganised to gain power over administration. Few in public positions understand how stressful and difficult nurses’ job is, and fewer care to try to make things better for nurses. Nurses continue to work without breaks with too many patients to look after, work overtime. Patient care is also sacrificed as time is taken up with administrative details. Nurses for the most part think about their patients and will not walk out at the end of their shift if they feel they have not completed paper work and done the best for their patients.

Nurses’ professional services need to be seen as a separate charge in patients bill. It needs to be on the ‘plus’ side instead of showing up only on the negative side as an expense.

Unfortunately the mass media still strongly reinforces the idea that physicians are heroes who provide all meaningful care and nurses are their ‘helpers’. Media should try harder to present fair picture of nurses and shed the half-truth that health care revolves only around “doctors”.

Nurses are more than valuable allies in most of the health care reforms. Reforms cannot work without a stronger nursing profession. And that starts with you and me. To achieve real gains, we must strengthen nursing and overcome some negative cultural stereotypes that suggest that nurses are nothing more than “Doctor’s helpers”.

The National Seminar on Reshaping Nursing Profession in Indian Hospitals began with Dr Michael welcoming the dignitaries and the audience from various states of India followed by the traditional lighting of the kuthuvilaku. First Nursing Core Committee Meeting of Quality Council of India was held simultaneously. Dr Ravindranath, Chairman & MD, Global Hospitals Group appreciated the initiative and said, India needs transformational leadership in nursing to advance health care in the country. Dr Girdhar J Dyani, Secretary-General, QCI, CEO, NABH, President, Nursing Core Committee, QCI rendered special address. The theme was unfolded by Dr Rosemary Smith. The seminar was attended by 317 delegates from all states of India.

In his welcome note, Dr RV Karanjekar, Executive Director, Medical Services, GHHC, Chairman Accreditation Committee, NABHJ and Chairperson, Nursing Core Committee, Quality Council of India (QCI) outlined the need for quality initiative in nursing in Indian context. Dr Michael highlighted the salient features of resolutions identified through the self report questionnaire that was circulated.

The papers presented in the seminar included ‘Changing culture of health care delivery : Implications for professional nursing leadership – transformational leadership’ by Dr Rosemary Smith, Dean, College of Nursing, University of Wisconsin, Oshkosh (USA).

‘Overview of American Nurses Credentialing Centre (ANCC) Magnet Recognition Programme : Forces of Magnetism’ by Dr (Prof) Jaya Jambunathan, Director, Research & Evaluation and Asst. Dean, College of Nursing, University of Wisconsin (USA) enlightened the audience on ‘Safe and Quality Nursing Practice : Credentialising, Licensing and Privileging’ by Dr Josephine R Little Flower, Registrar, Tamil Nadu Nurses and Midwives Council, Chennai; followed by live discussions in open forum.

SRM College of Nursing (TN) : World Health Day 2011 was celebrated on 20 April 2011. The programme started with inauguration by the resource person and dignitaries. Welcome address and unfolding the theme 2011 - Antimicrobial Resistance, No Action Today, No Cure Tomorrow was delivered by Dr Prof Jaya Mohanraj, Dean, SRM College of Nursing. This was followed by a talk on ‘Rational use of Antimicrobial Agents’ by Dr R Jamunarani, HOD Pharmacology Dept, which created awareness on using antimicrobial agents cautiously and wisely. Dr KR John, HOD Community Medicine highlighted on Tribal Health and Antimicrobial Resistance. The programme concluded with the vote of thanks by Mrs P Abirami, Lecturer, SRM College of Nursing.