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THE ROLE OF THE NURSE IN PRIMARY HEALTH CARE

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## Introduction

The total area of Iraq is 434,224 Km<sup>2</sup>, but only half of this area is settled and only three percent is cultivated. The population is approximately about 11 millions.

The health services were curative oriented services until recently the provision of adequate basic health services in rural area started to be given first priority by the government.

There are 159 hospitals all over the country with a total of 21774 beds. There are 166 outpatient departments and 83 maternal and child health centres . 232 main health centres and 752 subcentres. The latest statistical reports concerning health personnel indicate that there are 3182 physicians, 11970 para-medical personnel (Intermediate level health workers) and 2814 nurses plus 238 midwives.

The only way of meeting health needs in the rural area in the past was through the dispensaries which were providing medical care, curative in nature. The government set up the Rural Health Foundation aiming at rendering integrated and comprehensive health services to rural population throughout the country.

### Rural Health Foundation :-

It was established by the Ministry of Health in 1963. It is responsible for the planning and development of rural health services and for pre-service and in-service training of different categories of professional and auxiliary health personnel assigned to work in rural areas.

H.E. Minister of Health is the chairman of the high council of the foundation which has an autonomous administrative and financial authority. It is directed by the Secretary General who is the Secretary of the Council. The Chief Medical Officer in the governorates (sixteen) implement the plans developed by the foundation and its council. The main objective of establishing this foundation are the development of basic health services to promote and protect health of the rural population.

Basic health service system includes; Main health centre at each Nahya for a population of approximately 20 thousands, of which there are (as it was mentioned in the introduction) 219 main health centres. There are 3 pilot health centres, Abu Churaib (Baghdad) to serve the middle region of the country, Homeidat (Mosul) to serve the northern region and shatt el Arab (Basrah) to serve the southern region.

The subcentres are small health centres usually attached to a main health centre and should serve a population of 4-5 thousands, their number in the country now is 752. There are also 249 mobile health units going to remote areas to render some simple and urgent health services.

### The Services Available :-

1. Health education.
2. Environmental Sanitation.
3. Prevention and Control of communicable and endemic diseases.
4. Maternal and child health service.
5. School health service
6. Vital statistics.
7. Curative and outpatient services.

### Village Health Stations :-

In 1974 and 1975 a community survey was carried out in Abu Ghuraib (pilot project for basic health services) which identified the need for the village health stations. It is the nature of the Iraqi rural settlements that very few houses are collected to form villages and are scattered in large areas of the country.

The very cold, wet winter and hot summer make it difficult for the inhabitants of those scattered villages to come to the main and subcentre for health service. To make better coverage for the basic health services for all inhabitants of those villages it was decided to add to the system of main and subcentres a Health Station which is supposed to provide primary health care to its community, and can refer cases and problems to the subcentres as well as the main centres and hospitals .

After surveying the community needs, demands and resources it was decided that they better recruit young women who can read and write and have good reputation in her community to train her as a health worker for few months, in the pilot centres.

#### Activities of the village health worker :

The health worker would be responsible to perform the following activities to her community :-

1. Registers births and deaths.
2. Supervises safe water supply.
3. Distributes insecticides.
4. Takes vital signs T.P.R. for fever cases.
5. Reports communicable diseases.
6. Measures weight of pregnant women.
7. Makes simple urine analysis.
8. Measures weight and height of children.
9. Gives simple health education.
10. Refers cases to proper agencies.

The station should be visited once weekly by a health team consisted of a medical assistant; a public health nurse and a sanitarian who will perform basic health services that are beyond the ability of the health worker.

## Nursing System

Nursing personnel in Iraq is composed of several categories including college graduate nurses, technical nurses, trained nurses, dressers, vaccinators and health visitors. Most of them were prepared in curative agencies and are hospital oriented nurses. In the rural health system some of these technical and trained nurses are utilized for functional tasks; giving injections, doing some dressings and giving bedside nursing care to a limited number of patients.

There are 126 nurses working in the basic health services all over the country. Most of them have had no community nursing background in their training programmes.

### Nurse Preparation Programmes :-

#### The College of Nursing :

It was opened in 1962. It is a four years educational program. It enrolles high school graduates ( 12 years of general education ). The degree it offers is Bs.C in Nursing. The number of it's graduates until 1975 were 226 graduate nurses. Community Nursing is taught in this program for the 4th year students and it is a 3 credit hour course for 15 weeks. The clinical part of this course is carried out in Abu Ghuraib Center. Previously the students experience was centre-based. In 1975 the plan of the field experience was revised from centre-based into community based. After finishing the 15 weeks community nursing experience in Abu-Ghuraib it was founded that the experience was satisfactory from the point of view of the college and centre staff.

This field experience imphasized the student involvement in collecting and analyzing data about the community and in finding solution for the diagnosed needs as well as implementing remedial actions.

#### Schools of Nursing :

The first School of Nursing was established 1937 in Baghdad. Those days there are 6 schools in Iraq, ( Baghdad, Mosul, Basrah, Hilla, Erbil and Solimania ). They accept primary and intermediate school graduates ( 6 or 9 years of general education ). Their age should range between 14 and 25 years. In 1975 the total number of schools graduates is 2050 nurses. They train them for three years to be staff nurses. There is no community health nursing course in the curriculum of those schools. Having had no community nursing in their pre-service training, nurses of this category are assigned to functional tasks when they are employed in basic health service and some of them attend in-service training courses in community health nursing. The faculty of these schools are recognizing the importance of introducing the concept of community work in the curriculum. It is expected that community health nursing is going to appear in next revision of the curriculum.

#### Dressers and jiddas training :

To overcome the problem of shortage of nursing staff, different training courses for auxiliary people, were organized. A program to prepare dressers (male nurses ) was going on activity and stoped before few years. It was for 2 years training after 9 years of general education. Another course is the training program for local traditional birth attendants ( jiddas ) which are carried out the health centres. This program is of vital importance for Iraq in which 30 % of the deliveries are domeciliary deliveries .