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THE ROLE OF THE NURSE IN A CHANGING SOCIETY

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The traditional concept of the role of the nurse is the care of the sick in hospitals and in the homes of patients. At the beginning of the 20th Century nurses were poorly prepared. Many did private duty in homes. These nurses were by and large dedicated to the care of the sick; some were of a low moral type interested essentially in personal gain. They were on duty around the clock, with "a little time off" for sleep and recreation at the convenience of their employers. Special duty nursing in hospitals was rare. There was a great dearth of well equipped hospitals at that time. Moreover, people believed that when there was no hope of recovery at home, the patient could be sent to the hospital, to die. The very idea of sending people to hospital was dreaded by the relatives. As a result, private duty nurses had abundant opportunity to establish themselves and gain the confidence of the public. These nurses had an opportunity to know their patients and their families because severe illnesses, such as Typhoid Fever and Pneumonia were followed by long periods of convalescence. In fact all serious illnesses required long periods of convalescence. Skill in caring for these conditions was an important criterion of good nursing. As there were no miraculous antibiotics, prevention of undue strain on the heart in Pneumonia and of relapse in Typhoid Fever was dependent upon nursing care. The ultimate recovery of the patient was largely dependent on the skill of the nurse working under medical direction. Nurses who made Obstetrics their practice accepted engagements for

from one to three months. The more successful the nurses were in adapting themselves to conditions in the homes and the care of the mother and infant, the more popular they were in their respective communities. Intelligent and well informed nurses exerted a considerable influence among the families and friends of their patients. But public opinion about nursing was also influenced by the inaptitude of an increasing number of poorly prepared nurses. Nurses at this stage were not prepared as they are to-day. They were utilized as subordinates to the medical staff. They were taught only procedures associated with various types of treatment. The system of training did not stimulate thinking about why the treatments were prescribed. Because of this inadequate preparation, dedicated nurses were troubled. Nurses knew very little about the value of total nursing care, consequently their efforts were directed toward the physical care of the patients only. The numerous other needs of patients were not recognized, or if recognized the nurses were unable to cope with them because of their lack of understanding and the pressure of duties. Further, social conditions other than nursing, created by ignorance, poverty, overcrowding and superstition were not easy to tackle.

The conditions existing in the country in the field of health promotion exerted a constructive influence on the development of nursing. The newer scientific discoveries in medicine and the social studies with their resultant effort on the standard of living have necessitated changes in the role of the nurse.

Anesthesia and scientific advances in the fields of bacteriology and pathology have greatly developed the field of surgery. The search light of science has reduced the incidence of Typhoid Fever, Malaria, Yellow Fever and other communicable diseases. The marked improvement in means of treating patients has increased the number of hospitals. These changes have created problems for nurse educators who have endeavoured to develop educational programmes designed to prepare nurses to meet the total range of needs in nursing services.

It is felt that the achievements made thus far in the field of health could not have been accomplished without nursing. Nurses are required to work in hospitals as well as in public health fields. They are required to participate in the teaching of health principles in homes, schools, hospitals, industry, clinics and health centres.. In addition they are expected to assist in disease prevention, health promotion, rehabilitation and the more technical aspects of patient care, and to assist the less highly skilled worker to care for patients efficiently and effectively.. These changes have also necessitated the need to plan the nursing curriculum to meet the needs of the people.

It is imperative that institutions be established to educate young women as nurses capable of assuming the role of the modern nursing. Poor nursing defeats the intention of the best medical advice, and good nursing often supplants the defects of bad advice. Sometimes nursing care does more to cure disease even than medical care, and in the prevention of disease and the promotion of health, it may be of equal or even greater importance.<sup>1</sup>

Recognition of the need for reforms in the care of hospitalized patients is the first step in the evolutionary process. It is really a difficult task to prove to unwilling minds that trained nurses are more capable than the untrained. The school of nursing has to prove its usefulness and be prepared to face opposition from many influential people. The school of nursing cannot survive until nurses establish themselves by their efficiency and secure the interest and support of physicians and other citizens.<sup>2</sup> The determined nurse has to work for the improvement in the nursing care of the sick. Even now there is a dearth of the right type of girls for nursing in many parts of the world. The cultural pattern of the countries has much to do with this situation. It is the belief of many people that the best place for all women is in the home, and women who work outside the home are not respected. It is sometimes felt that only due to the need for money that women come out to work. This very idea stands as a stumbling block to progress. Because of this attitude often women of the right calibre hesitate to come out and work for their country. As it has been felt that nurses can best establish themselves by their efficiency and thus secure the support of the physicians and citizens, there is need for large numbers of well trained nurses who will be able to give good nursing care to the patients. To prepare such nurses good nursing schools must be established. Student nurses need to be supervised when they are at the patients beside. They should be helped to identify patients' needs and attend to them intelligently and with some understanding of human behaviour.

The "Situation Approach" is one method that nursing instructors can use to introduce the student to problem solving methods in nursing and to develop in her an awareness of the total needs of the patient and his family. It is the responsibility of nurse educators to study the health needs of people so as to be able to ascertain what knowledge and understanding is necessary for the students in order to successfully meet the individual needs of their patients. Early in the student's experience, planned supervised observations with some participation in out-patient clinics and public health agencies, will help her to develop an understanding and an appreciation of the physical, psychological and social needs of patients, their families and their communities.

In this part of the world student nurses are considered more as workers than as students. They are taken to the wards very early in their training and the head nurse is too busy to spend time in explaining the principles of nursing care to them. The student nurse's attention is immediately drawn to the ward routine and she is expected to follow this with very little guidance or supervision. Thus she loses her best chance to learn to care for patients as individuals and without guidance is not able to identify what her role actually is in all of its aspects. We are now confronted by the situation that nurses must understand their role clearly and be able to interpret this role to the public. Nurses are handicapped in several ways: lack of status, unfavourable social attitudes toward nursing, undesirable conditions of employment and a dearth of the right type of candidate for the schools of nursing. Nurses are deeply conscious of the danger of poorly prepared nurses to society and to the profession. In 1949, the nurses of Pakistan under the aegis of the "Trained Nurses Association of Pakistan" stated their functions to be:-

1. To protect and elevate the profession of nursing.
2. To uphold the dignity and honour of the profession
3. To promote a corporate spirit among all nurses for their common good.
4. To enable nurses to discuss problems affecting nursing.
5. To provide a medium whereby nurses can express themselves and their wishes in regard to legislation affecting nurses.
6. To collect, publish and distribute among nurses and others up to date on nursing in all its branches.
7. To take steps which may be necessary to improve the status of nursing.
8. To devise means and methods to attract suitable applicants to the nursing profession.

It is imperative that all nurses be stimulated to work diligently to further the functions of their own organizations because with unity there is always greater opportunity to achieve the means by which action can be taken.

The rise of nursing toward the stature of a profession has been greatly stimulated by the progress of medical science. The relation of nursing to this is significant. Most physicians and surgeons now appreciate that blind obedience to orders is not enough, that skill and a high degree of intelligence is essential for the handling of new equipment, drugs and procedures in the execution of their orders.

Nurses interpret nursing to the patient and his family by the quality of care given. Nurses must also be citizens who are interested in community affairs, health teaching and assuming the responsibilities of mature adult citizens.

The role of the professional nurse is influenced by the following factors:

- 1) Modern Medicine and advances in the field of Public Health;
- 2) Increased demands for Nursing Services and
- 3) The Status of Nursing and of Women<sup>4</sup> generally.

Today, modern methods of medical treatment have affected the work of all members of the health team and especially nurses both in hospitals and in public health. New demands have been made upon nurses by the introduction of antibiotics and chemotherapy. These drugs have modified and have made new demands upon the nurses. Early ambulation and early discharge has increased the nurses' need to teach patients and their families more effectively. Today it is essential that the patient and his family understand the care required by the patient in the home. In addition greater integration of the hospital and public health services are required to provide continuity of care between the hospital and the home. Advances in the field of surgery have also required more skill on the part of the nurse. The modern nurse must also have knowledge and understanding of the principles and methods of rehabilitation, and the ability to teach the patient and his family. The aspects of mental health, especially the principles of mental hygiene are an integral and extremely important factor for the nurse of today. As public health and medicine advance throughout the world, nurses must also assume their share of responsibility for the prevention of disease and the promotion of health. Therefore, as the nurse must assume a changing role both the nurse and doctor will need to redefine the functions of the nurse.

The increased demand for nursing services is an essential requirement for a successful health programme. Today, functions which were previously a part of the doctor's responsibility have been delegated to the nurses, because of increased demands made upon the doctors with modern aspects of medical practice. The various increase of service to patients provided by the clinical laboratory, X-ray, deep therapy, and other departments which are all an integral part of modern patient care have increased the nurse's work load. Consequently, if the hospital and other health services are to function with wholesome co-operation, greater numbers of nurses are required to avoid conflicts in providing total patient care.

The inadequate status of nursing and of women in some cultures of the world have enhanced the problems of meeting the health needs of the people. Today the basic education necessary to give the nurse co-status with other members of the health team is retarded in some cultures. Only when Nursing Education can be established on a sound basis comparable to that of other workers in the

health field of the country or countries concerned can this problem be solved. "It is interesting to note that in countries where medicine is highly developed and nursing is not, the health status of the people does not reflect the advanced stage of medicine".<sup>5</sup> Nursing is essential in the successful implementation of the health programmes in all countries of the world.

Cultural patterns and social attitudes have also limited the number of nurses in some countries. Nurses may not be accorded social esteem; their work may be considered of a subservient nature and may demand personal sacrifice and a degree of seclusion that is not expected of other female workers, who are members of the health team. Custom may also deny women the right to essential education necessary for nursing. The attitude that women's place is in the home may further the problems of nursing in some countries. Cultural patterns and social attitudes hence prohibit the freedom necessary for both education and the **practice** of the nursing profession.

Nurses may also be excluded from policy making bodies, authority may be withheld and the nurse has not been able or has not been permitted to assume full responsibility as an administrator hence the advancement of nursing is jeopardized.

The basic curriculum of a nursing school should be planned in such a way that the social and civic responsibilities of student nurses are developed. These responsibilities would help the nurse to become socially sensitive to the needs of the people of her country. Nurses would then recognize the need to belong to civic organizations as well as their own organizations. They should be members of committees, both on a local and a national level. The student nurse can be assisted to identify her social and civic, as well as professional responsibilities by attending professional meetings and other meetings both as a participant and as an observer.

Nursing schools should be structured on educational principles. The nursing school should not be organized as a means of providing care for the patients only. The care given to patients by student nurses should supplement the needs of nursing service. Student nurses require time, understanding and supervision to give adequate care to patients. They cannot be **expected** to carry the service load of hospitals as students. Student nurses should be treated as students at all times during their educational programme.

Progress is also being made in the field of education for qualified nurses. They are receiving post-basic education from university planned programmes. The further preparation in the nursing field is helping these

nurses to fulfill their role in nursing along with other members of the health team. Nurses in Pakistan are being encouraged to further their own education. It is hoped in the future that nurses will attain the level of an academic education. The governments and nurses should be encouraged to utilize all scholarships for further study in the various aspects of nursing. There is a great need for nursing administrators and nursing educators in Pakistan.

Nurses are aware of the need for research to determine the health needs of the people in order that scientific planning can be made to both prepare the type of nurse needed and to provide the service required. The Expert Committee on Nursing has recommended that the World Health Organization undertake fundamental research with the assistance of social scientists to determine the real health needs of the people in two or more different societies and determine how nursing can best function to meet these needs through health teaching, participation in preventive programmes, care of the sick and other means. Very little or nothing has been done in the field of research in Pakistan, as there is still a great shortage of nurses to carry out the basic service needs of the country. But to keep pace with the progress in the field of nursing in other parts of the world, it is imperative that change come rapidly here. Moreover, through the medium of the International Council of Nurses and the World Health Organization nursing has become a matter of world-wide concern. Through the efforts of these organizations all member countries are attempting to improve the standard of nursing education and improve the care given to the people.

The Nurses Act in Pakistan had necessitated the establishment of a Nurses Board for the purpose of standardizing the education, examination and registration of nurses. This is done with the idea of keeping a check on nurse practice in the country. This organization had been able to establish reciprocity with the nursing councils of some of the other countries who are members of the International Council of Nurses. This helps to establish uniformity in the education of nurses and in the employment of professional nurses. Nurses are under a moral obligation to maintain and promote good standards of nursing practice.

Nursing is in a constant state of adaptation to meet the needs of society. With modern inventions many nursing practices are becoming obsolescent. But the fundamental responsibility of the nurse remains the same at all times. The promotion of health is their chief concern. To help the nurse to fully represent her profession, it is thought essential that she should be free from undue economic pressure. She should be encouraged to participate in

actual planning and administration of nursing services and nursing education as well as in the development of nurses' associations. She should be prepared and permitted to serve the role of exclusive spokesman for nurses in matters affecting their employment. There can be no doubt that it is necessary to improve the economic status of nurses in order to maintain good standards of nursing service. The World Health Organization and the International Council of Nurses in their joint efforts are trying to promote the best interests of professional nursing throughout the world. The International Labour Organization is mostly concerned with the role of nurses in the international health movement and the relationships between nursing organizations and services and International Health Agencies.

"We, Nurses, representing various nations of the world, sincerely believing that the profession of nursing will be advanced by greater unity of thought, **sympathy** and purpose, need to work together to improve our work in the service of the sick, to promote the health of the nations, and to advance the best interests of our profession."<sup>6</sup>

With the above aim in view Nurses of the world are assisted to strengthen nursing schools. I.C.A., Colombo Plan, WHO, UNICEF and various other agencies have initiated programmes for the development of nursing in the underdeveloped countries of the world. The scope and usefulness of these international nursing activities cannot be fully described. Their further development is a stimulating challenge to nurses who agree with Raymond B. Fosdick that "anything that contributes to the exchange of creative ideas across boundary lines contributes to the welfare of mankind".<sup>7</sup>



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P.S. We do not have original copies for other direct quotes, were taken from the secondary source of Roberts, American Nursing. Therefore the page numbers are absent.