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SUPERVISION IN NURSING  
A Social Process of Democratic Leadership  
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"Supervision in Nursing - A Social Process of Democratic Leadership"  
..... It sounds good. What does it mean?

It is intended that this question be answered as the theme is developed but brief, introductory definitions will help to focus our thinking.

What is supervision in nursing? It is a process of leadership designed to improve the quality of nursing care, through developing the skill and knowledge of personnel, coordinating their activities and promoting their welfare.

Why call it a social process? Because it involves the actions and relationships of a social group: a group which is organized for the purpose of the progressive betterment of the care given to the patient; a group in which the supervisor, with her special knowledge and skills, stimulates and assists her associates to reach their common goal.

How "democratic leadership"? Through providing conditions under which all personnel participate actively and to the best of their ability in planning, in the solution of common problems, in the execution of the programme as planned; through the encouragement and recognition of leadership in others.

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Supervision is primarily concerned with personnel - with stimulating their interest and increasing their ability in giving better nursing care - but it is connected closely with administration: it supports administration, interprets it, enlists it's support, spreads it's effectiveness and shares those of it's duties and responsibilities which make for the betterment of personnel performance.

Who are the supervisors in nursing? Engaged in the process of supervision are all who stimulate and promote the development and welfare of personnel, towards the betterment of patient care. We can include then the Director of Nursing Service (The Matron), the Director of Nursing Education (the Principal Tutor), the Public Health Nursing Supervisor, the area supervisors (the assistant matrons), the nursing instructors (the tutors), the head nurses (the ward sisters) and, where team nursing is in effect, the staff nurses.

For our study, we will take a look at an area supervisor and her activities:

It had been a busy day, finishing off a busy week, and Miss Asia is tired, so tired that she would consider consulting her physician if she had not just received his report that her annual medical examination showed that she was in excellent health. She realizes that it is the tiredness that comes after a full week of devoting her energies to all aspects of fulfilling her responsibilities to her job, to her profession, to herself. The next day - her day off - she will spend at the seaside with her family and, in the evening, attend a musical concert with a friend: it will be late when she returns to her flat so, before going to bed, she is reviewing briefly her planning for the coming week. This planning will have to be reviewed and revised as the week progresses but she has learned that for effective functioning a leader starts with a tentative, recorded plan.

Miss Asia is the Nursing Supervisor in a three-ward medical unit. She is directly responsible for the activities of the three head nurses and their staffs. Each ward has forty beds and provides for the care of men and women. Hers is a busy schedule of work. She has learned that it involves a continuous process of personal learning and readjustment to meet the requirements of changes in personnel, policies, practices and procedures.

Miss Asia has been in this position for two years. She is taking evening courses towards further post-graduate qualifications and it is proposed that the following year she be granted a leave of absence to complete the requirements of this study. On completion of this study, she plans to return to the same, or a similar, position. Perhaps some day she will want to consider the possibility of assuming a different position but, for the present, she has found that the work of a nursing supervisor provides for job and personal satisfaction and she considers that she has more to learn of the responsibilities of the position, the promotion of her own effectiveness, the development of the supervisory process for the continuous improvement of nursing care.

How has Miss Asia been prepared for her job? Following her graduation from a three-year programme in basic nursing education, she spent two and a half years perfecting her skills as a nurse practitioner at the bedside: staff duty at her home hospital for two years and six months in private duty nursing. A brief experience of being the nurse in a doctor's office made her feel that she would enjoy the work of a head nurse. A year of graduate study in ward administration and teaching was followed by three years as head nurse on one of the wards of the medical unit in which she is serving presently. She hesitated when asked to assume the position of supervisor in the unit, for the responsibilities were greater and different to those she had learned to carry, but the Director of Nursing Services considered that she was capable of doing the job and enthusiastic that she take it on. Miss Asia, who had been taking evening courses in the social sciences during her term as head nurse, immediately arranged for studies in supervision and administration.

Let us take a look at Miss Asia's activities during the day which has just ended:

Miss Asia had arranged with the Director of Nursing Service to go directly to one of her wards (Ward A) that morning, to return later to the Nursing Office for the daily briefing, as she wished to attend a post-morning report presentation on "The Essentials of the General Nursing Care of a Patient with Cardiac Disease", a presentation which she had stimulated and assisted one of the nursing assistants (practical nurses) to prepare. This nursing assistant had been a problem as, trained in a school which prepared nurses of this level to give injections, do surgical dressings and carry out other more technical nursing duties, she had resented and resisted this hospital's policies in regard to the responsibilities carried by an individual in her position. Her thoughtful and enthusiastic presentation that morning showed that she now accepted and found satisfaction in her work as assigned to her.

Following her briefing in the Nursing Office, Miss Asia had conferred briefly with each of her head nurses and then had made rounds with the head nurse on Ward B. She was able to make complete morning rounds of one ward only each day but had found that she could depend on the head nurses to acquaint her with their problems and progress. The rounds gave her the opportunity to study the head nurse and the rest of the personnel in action, to become acquainted with the patients and their problems, to evaluate policies, procedures and practices.

On the completion of the rounds, she returned to one of the rooms to assist a second year nursing student in the care of a patient with diabetes mellitus. The patient was not seriously ill but she was extremely obese, her skin showed signs of the development of decubiti and Miss Asia had noted that the student was having difficulty meeting her constant, irritated demands. The unit's two nursing instructors were busy elsewhere and Miss Asia was constantly aware of her responsibilities to know and educate her future staff members.

Next, Miss Asia had arranged to obtain a specimen of gastric contents from a patient on Ward C. The staff nurse looking after this patient had recently been transferred from another section of the hospital. The head nurse on the ward to which she had been assigned previously, this being her first working experience in this hospital, had reported that the nurse was careless and disinterested in her work, rough and thoughtless in her approach to the patients, uncooperative with other personnel and not observant of policies and regulations. The supervisor of the other unit was away on sick leave. The nurse herself claimed that it was a question of a personality clash with the head nurse, of incomplete orientation to the ward policies and

routines, of the newness and strangeness of the situation and the personnel. Miss Asia had planned a programme, including the use of the demonstration of desirable performance, designed to assess the nurse's abilities and personal qualities.

There followed a group conference for the orientation of new nursing personnel: only one of the group was to be assigned to Miss Asia's unit but as part of their over-all orientation about, the opportunity was afforded for all personnel to receive brief instruction, and participate in discussion of, each individual service unit of the hospital.

Each day, Miss Asia set aside time for individual conferences. Even though these were usually brief, often it was not possible to have many such conferences. However, Miss Asia did not wish to have a day go by when she did not meet the "individual" in her groups. The day in question was a busy one in this respect:

First, she discussed with a staff nurse from Ward B the question of her transfer to another unit. The staff nurse had been in this active medical unit for many years. Now, her physician felt she should take a position where her responsibilities were not as physically strenuous. A small metabolic research unit was being developed in the hospital; the patients would be up and about for the most part; in this unit, the medical staff wanted a nurse who was noted for being careful of detail, conscientious in the collection and care of specimens, accurate in recording and reporting. The staff nurse was reluctant to leave her familiar environment but the emphasis placed by Miss Asia on her qualifications for the new assignment aroused her interest and enthusiasm and gained her assent to the transfer.

Miss Asia's next interview was with a staff nurse from Ward C who was preparing for the presentation of a patient-centred nursing conference on cirrhosis of the liver. The nurse reviewed with Miss Asia the plan for the presentation and they discussed the use of the various visual aids which had been collected. The nurse was particularly enthusiastic in presenting for Miss Asia's inspection and approval, the illustrated chart of dietary rules and regulations which had been made by a group of patients suffering from this condition, with the assistance of the dieticians.

The "Chief Pantry Maid" of the unit came in next to discuss her idea that a swinging counter be placed across the door of each pantry, this intended to relieve congestion in the pantry and provide for more efficient service of meals and nourishments. The title given this worker was honorary only, and peculiar to this particular medical unit, but what a difference the title, and the requisite assignment of responsibility and authority, had made to the functioning of this lady: no longer was she frequently away from the unit on visits of complaint to the housekeeping department; no longer did she exclaim continually of the stupidity and uselessness of all other hospital personnel. She was the "Chief Pantry Maid" - a leader - who devoted her full time to the execution of her "duties".

Miss Asia's next interviewee was the head nurse from Ward C. The purpose of this interview was to discuss the graduate courses which the head nurse planned to take in the evenings, in advance to a further year's study at the university. At the close of the conference, the head nurse brought up the question of allowing a patient with carcinoma of the head of the pancreas to enjoy a radio without using ear phones. The patient was debilitated and emaciated and it was thought that the pressure of the ear phones would cause discomfort and might contribute to the development of pressure sores. He was in a single room. It was decided that the hospital policy in regard to the use of radios could be modified in this case, with the nursing personnel ensuring that the volume of sound be kept low.

One of the nursing assistants had an appointment to acquaint Miss Asia with the planning of a group which was organizing a social get-together for all the personnel in the unit. This nursing assistant was a comparative new-comer to the unit, had appeared to be lonely and unable to make friends easily. She had been constantly asking Miss Asia to visit her home, to engage in social activities with her, to accept "just some little thing which I made for you". She was now the accepted and well-liked leader of this particular group and was proud of her success.

Miss Asia's next task was to review with the head nurse on Ward B the preparations for a visit to be paid to the ward that afternoon by a group from the National Diabetic Association. This head nurse's father was the chairman of this Association and she had been instrumental in interesting the Association in providing the funds for setting up a small demonstration unit in relation to the self-care of a person with diabetes mellitus. The group from the Association was visiting to inspect "their unit". One member, an artist, had shown particular interest and had assisted the ward staff in the preparation of the posters.

A meeting had been called by the Director of Nursing Services for discussion, with the hospital administrator and the architect of the plans for a new restroom and locker unit for nursing personnel. To this meeting, Miss Asia took the ideas and suggestions of her staff.

Prior to going off duty for the day, the ward clerks had brought in the routine, daily records which had to be sent to the Nursing Office and the head nurses came in to present their reports. At one time the supervisor and the head nurses kept these records and the supervisor had written reports which for the most part duplicated those of the head nurses. Miss Asia and her head nurses had been instrumental in bringing about changes in the procedures so that they were more free to devote their energies to other responsibilities.

A short meeting was held with the head nurses in which the hospital budget was discussed, this in preparation for future meetings to ascertain needs in regard to equipment and supplies in the coming fiscal year.

Taking a look at the highlights of Miss Asia's planning for the next week, we find that:

- she has scheduled a meeting of the group which has been formed at the request of the Nursing Procedure Committee to work on revision of the form used for keeping "Nurse's Notes" and on the procedures for "Kidney Function Tests". This same group is working on standardizing the routine of the three wards in regard to the collection of all specimens.
- there is to be a further conference on the possibility of introducing "team nursing" in the unit. The head nurses have continued to show some resistance to the idea and the staff nurses are uncertain as to their satisfaction with the suggestion that team nursing would be more operable and successful, and their experience more balanced and varied, if they were rotated through the different wards of the unit, rather than being permanently assigned to one ward. The Assistant Director of Nursing Service, the Assistant Director of In-Service Education for Nursing Service Personnel, the Director of Nursing Education and the Administrative Supervisor in

charge of Auxiliary Nursing Personnel have been invited to assist in the discussion.

- there is further work to be done on the paper on "The Functions and Usefulness of the Ward Clerk", which Miss Asia and the head nurse on Ward A are preparing for presentation at the district meeting of the professional nursing association. Miss Asia had asked this head nurse to work with her on this paper because she is showing the most resistance to the introduction of "team nursing", as she had when the idea of the appointment of ward clerks was first discussed, and also she had not to the present time contributed as much to the operation of the overall unit, or to nursing in general, as had her co-head nurses.
- one evening, the psychiatric consultant to the unit and the clinical instructor in psychiatric nursing are presenting papers to the staff and students on "The Mental Hygiene of the Chronically Ill Patient".
- there is to be a meeting in relation to the Professor of Medicine's desire to start his weekly "Grand Rounds" at nine rather than ten on Wednesday mornings. The Professor has agreed to meet with Miss Asia, her head nurses, representatives from the staff nurse group and the heads of the housekeeping and dietary departments to discuss the problems involved in such a change.

What have we seen in our brief glimpse of Miss Asia and her activities? What have we learned of supervision? Of supervision as a social process? Of democratic leadership? Of how a supervisor sets about to fulfill her responsibilities? Of what techniques and methods a supervisor uses? Of what is required of the supervisor in relation to her preparation, skills, personal qualities?



What is supervision in nursing?

We have seen supervision not as a function of inspection, overseeing, directing or superintending but rather as a cooperative undertaking in which all personnel involved participate actively in a programme of improving the services rendered to their patients: a social process of a number of people working together to achieve a common purpose; a process which is enabled by the supervisor, an individual capable of so performing because of her knowledge and understanding of human behaviour, of the social situation, the functions of nursing, the policies, procedures and organization of the hospital administration.

What have we seen of supervision as a social process?

We have seen that it is in essence interaction between and among the participants. Interaction which is aimed at the satisfaction of purposes, needs and interests; which brings about changes, changes which are only accepted as the individuals and the group believe them to be of value; which eventually results in the development of new goals, of greater insight and knowledge; which involves relationships which are delicate, and difficult to manage.

What have we learned of democratic leadership?

The supervisor, in giving democratic leadership,

- recognizes the personal worth and respects the dignity of each individual;
- is cognizant of the abilities of each individual, of the role played by each, and seeks to provide opportunities for the best expression of each personality;
- recognizes and accepts individual differences;
- works on the assumption that all individuals, and the group, are capable of growth;
- has faith in the power of the individual, and the group, to solve problems;
- strives for the maximum development and satisfaction of the individual and the group;

- aims at establishing and maintaining effective working relationships between all personnel;
- attempts to develop in all an acceptance of obligations, while recognizing their rights;
- provides for the active and cooperative participation of all in the solution of common problems, in planning, in the conduct of the programme;
- recognizes and stimulates leadership in others; fosters initiative and self-direction;
- uses group discussion, deliberation and decision for solving problems; establishes an atmosphere permissive to free expression of opinion, to full contribution; serves as a resource person; assists in coordinating the efforts of all in the group.
- uses all resources to solve problems and to reach objectives.

What have we discovered as to how a supervisor sets about to fulfill her responsibilities?

The supervisor starts with the recognition that effective functioning is dependent on a clear conception of the work to be done. To this end, she sets up a well planned programme

- which provides for the orientation of personnel to each work situation;
- in which definite responsibilities, with commensurate authority, are delegated according to the ability of the personnel and along clear, unambiguous lines;
- which provides all facilities for operation and cooperation;
- which endeavours to ensure uniformity of techniques;
- which supports and interprets policies and procedures;
- which provides for clear channels of communication;
- which allows for continuous analysis of the situation, for revision of objectives, techniques, methods and for reallocation of duties to meet changes.

What techniques and methods have we noted were used to achieve the goal of supervision: that of the improvement of nursing care, through the promotion of the growth and welfare of the personnel?

To achieve this goal and fulfill her function, the supervisor has included:

- direct observation;
- demonstration of desirable performance;
- staff participation in the ward teaching programme, in cooperative planning, in formulation of ward policy;
- the preparation and use of instructional materials;
- individual and group conferences;
- the orientation of new personnel;
- group participation in problem-solving;
- in-service education, course work for personnel in service, participation in activities of the professional organization;
- promotion of public relations and the provision of social contacts.

What is required of the supervisor in relation to her preparation for her work, her skills, her personal qualities?

The supervisor has had the educational and experience preparation which has given her

- a real understanding of her own functions and of her place in the hospital organization;
- a thorough knowledge of nursing problems, programmes and practices;
- an understanding and acceptance of organizational policies and procedures;
- an understanding of individual behaviour, of group behaviour and interaction;
- a knowledge of the processes of learning, of growth and development - in the individual and in the group; a knowledge of effective educational practices.

She is a skilled nurse practitioner; has the ability to plan and organize; is able to interpret, explain and modify nursing techniques; demonstrates competence in stimulating, leading and coordinating the activities of individuals and of groups.

Her personal qualities are those of leadership: she has something to give that is greater than those whom she supervises; she inspires confidence by her ability and her high expectations; she thinks clearly and purposefully; her enthusiastic interest and her cooperation engender these qualities in others; she is friendly and sociable without being intimate; she shows her acceptance of her obligations through loyal service, adherence to policies and accepted practices, participation in community and professional activities, promotion of her own professional growth; she recognizes the need for good personal health, for recreation and relaxation; she has a sense of purpose and direction.

Supervision, then, a social process of democratic leadership, aimed at the improvement of patient care.

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