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THE NURSING SECTION WITHIN THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH

A FUNDAMENTAL FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF NURSING SERVICES AND NURSING EDUCATION IN IRAN

by

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To raise the standard of nursing in Iran and to concentrate efforts toward improving nursing services and nursing education, the nursing division was established, in 1954, in the Department of Public Health, Ministry of Health. Due to the critical shortage of graduate nurses, little was known about nurses hence there was little recognition given to the profession. It was not until public health nursing was developed and concentrated in meeting the health needs of the people that nursing became appreciated. Prior to this date, the preventive medicine division was held responsible for public health nursing. You will be interested to learn that the need for and promotion of a separate nursing division was felt due to the need of the medical profession in the department of health. This gave nurses more recognition.

The Division's activities first were concentrated on preventive aspects because of the need and also lack of qualified nurses who could be held responsible for other health needs.

Nurses in Public Health worked hard in promoting the standard of nursing care by promoting the practice of modern nursing in the cities and rural areas of Iran. Modern nursing was a new plant and much needed to be done to help this plant to grow. Health institutions became aware of nursing and the demand for trained nurses increased. Continuous requests kept coming to the Ministry of Health for graduate nurses, and as the nursing division was established within the Ministry, all nursing matters were referred to us and we had to be watchful of the steps we were taking. Requests came to the nursing

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division from hospitals all over the country, and we studied the situation in order to find ways and means in which we could be of help. Hence, the first step was to make a survey of the nursing schools and hospitals to ascertain our capacity for training, we checked the curricula, facilities, and potential for training more nurses for this purpose. Nursing education and hospital nursing service sections were formed in 1955. During this past year, another section has been added, that of mental health nursing.

Now that it has been explained to our readers how the nursing division was formed within the Ministry of Health, I would like to state the over-all purpose of the division. This is to raise the standard of the nursing profession in the country, to increase the number of applicants for the nursing schools, to improve the nursing care in hospitals, and, above all, to promote the health standard of the community.

As you have already noted the development of the division and its over-all purpose, I would like to explain not only about the organization but its aims, objectives, and how the division has operated until now to achieve the mentioned goals. The first objective was to survey the existing nursing schools, their curricula, facilities, and possibilities for training more nurses. This survey took one and one-half years. The survey began in October 1955 and continued until August 1956. After the survey of schools and affiliated hospitals, the need for a general discussion on nursing problems, involving the present and the future programmes in Iran, was felt. At the same time, by the request of the Seven-Year Plan Organization, a plan had to be submitted for:

1. The number of professionally trained nurses necessary to staff the present government hospitals;
2. The number of schools of nursing necessary to train the required number of nurses;
3. The number of auxiliary trained personnel needed; and
4. The need for post-graduate study through scholarships to provide further education in order to prepare nurses for positions in teaching, ward supervision, and general administration in hospitals, schools of nursing and public health.

The idea of a conference to discuss nursing problems was presented to the Minister of Health in early June 1956 following his return from the Ninth General Assembly of the World Health Organization held in Geneva late in May 1956, the theme of which was "NURSES": their education and their role in health programme. One of the recommendations of this assembly was that individual

countries review and evaluate their nursing programmes in order to improve the status of the nursing profession and the care of the sick. The idea was agreed to by the Minister of Health. So the conference was held late in August and September 1956 where the problems were discussed in the presence of the Minister of Health, groups of physicians, nurses, midwives, and interested governmental, voluntary and private representatives. Leaders in nursing of other countries were invited to assist us in a solution of our problems. The recommendations which were made by the group at the conference have been followed such as:

1. A National recruitment programme to increase the number of applicants has been established.
2. Financial assistance has been given to existing nursing schools which with such aid have been able to reach government recommended standards.
3. Nurses returning to the country from scholarships abroad have been placed in responsible positions in keeping with their training, and wherever possible, have been placed under competent supervision until they are able to assume leadership alone.
4. Salaries, working conditions, and living conditions for graduate nurses were reviewed and raised to assure proper recognition on a high professional level. The nurses' employment law was passed by the Government the latter part of February 1960.
5. A constitution for the admission of students to the nursing and auxiliary nursing schools was passed on the request of the nursing division by the Ministry of Education in May 1958.
6. It was the recommendation of the conference that auxiliary nurses be educated to overcome the acute shortage of nurses in short-range and long-range programmes. The auxiliary nurses should work under the supervision of graduate nurses. It is worth mentioning here that there are seven professional nursing schools and six auxiliary nursing schools in Iran.
7. A nursing education conference was held in February 1959 to work on a national standard curriculum guide for professional nursing and auxiliary nursing schools. The nursing curriculum has been prepared and was based on the International Council of Nurses' curriculum guide and has been submitted to the High Council of Education for approval. The auxiliary nursing schools' curriculum has been prepared but is not yet ready to be submitted.
8. The hospital nursing service section is conducting in-service educational programmes for the present employees, such as nurses and nurses aides in the Ministry of Health hospitals.

The personnel, their preparation, and essential skills and attitudes for this type of work

Prior to the passing of the constitution for nursing and auxiliary schools,

entrance requirements to the schools of nursing differed from one school to another, (education - sixth grade and above). Since 1958 the entrance requirement for all nursing schools is the same as for university (completion of high school). Natural science students are preferred. The duration of the education is three years. The auxiliary nursing schools which are a recent development in Iran accept ninth grade, for two years of training. Their first year of training is general nursing and in the second year they can elect special training according to their interests. They may go for hospital nursing, rural midwifery and/or public health nursing. However, since there is prior need for hospital nurses, not all auxiliary nursing schools have the three mentioned services. At present, most of them are training auxiliaries for hospital practice.

There are three recognized categories of nursing personnel that exist:

1. Professional nurses.
2. Practical nurses.
3. A sub-professional group who have on-the-job training but are not included in the nurses' employment law.

At present there are approximately 1,500 graduate nurses in the country, and about 500 students studying in the schools of nursing.

Now you have become acquainted with the basic preparation. The nurses who are working in the hospitals as head nurses or in nursing schools as assistant instructors, and/or in public health after having had experience, are sent on post-graduate studies. Of course the number of scholarships as a rule is limited. Therefore, the number of nurses prepared by advanced education is few.

As Nursing has become a recognized profession, the attitude of young girls entering the profession is one of eagerness, interest, and love in caring for the sick. Facilities in which students are receiving their practical experience and where graduate nurses are working are limited, but the spirit of nursing is there and the manner in which most face the shortage of supplies and equipment, and the courage they have shown in the face of difficulties is most gratifying.

The patients who are exposed to nursing care are appreciative and the doctors who have become used to working with nurses are crying for more.

In terms of years of development the section is very young. In spite of this many steps have been taken to meet health needs and advance toward the

improvement of health services. Much remains to be done.

The services in both curative and preventive nursing must expand in order to reach all people in the rural areas as well as the towns and cities, not only for government hospitals but all hospitals, clinics, etc. We do not as yet have a nurse-practice act, national registration of nursing personnel, national nursing examinations, nor Board of Examiners. The Iranian Nurses' Association is young but is a member of the International Council of Nurses. To-date it has 447 members and six regional offices.

There are many problems yet to be faced and solved. It may take a few years to have a nurse-practice act. To secure this type of legislation, we have to give time to ourselves. A national board of examiners has to be established, but no step can be taken until the curriculum is approved. Accreditation of all schools of nursing is in the process, and there are many other plans and works which have to be started and accomplished.

In conclusion, although I do not know what type of organizational pattern you have in your respective countries, we cannot say that what I have described here is the ideal fundamental for improvement of nursing services and education in a country. However, I believe that there should be a central authority for nursing in the organizational pattern of the Government where programme planning, budgeting, developing nursing resources, and counselling can be done.