

WORLD HEALTH
ORGANIZATION

REGIONAL OFFICE FOR THE
EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

ORGANISATION MONDIALE
DE LA SANTE

BUREAU RÉGIONAL DE LA
MÉDITERRANÉE ORIENTALE

REGIONAL NURSING SEMINAR

Teheran, 9 - 19 November 1966

EM/NURS.SEM./9
21 September 1966

ENGLISH ONLY

THE NURSE INTERPRETS HER ROLE
TO OTHER DISCIPLINES AND TO THE PUBLIC

by

AWATIF A. OSMAN
Director, Khartoum Nursing College
Khartoum, Sudan

An individual who holds in a society given memberships with given responsibilities is expected to perform in certain ways because of these memberships and these responsibilities. The expectations ascribed to him/her are called "roles". This term "role" is used in several different ways by scientists. The meaning of the term needs to be clarified in respect to its use in this paper. It is used here to cover the functions expected of an individual in a specific position in a given organization or a social system. Such a definition suggests that every individual enacts a wide variety of roles, since he/she holds a wide variety of memberships in a society. A person may be a nurse, doctor, engineer or lawyer, and a friend, parent or business associate etc. The expectations of each of these roles will vary. At the same time, these roles are interrelated and interacting. Our particular interest, of course, is in the functions that define the role of the professional nurse. As in other professional roles, several sets of expectations, from the various social systems which are significant in the work life of the professional person, converge to define the role of the nurse.

Firstly, the writer wishes to identify the roles which the nurse enacts, and how these roles are interpreted to other disciplines and to the public. From the writer's experiences as a nurse she has come to the conclusion that there are four major professional nursing roles. Each role has certain specific functions and each provides interpretation

./..

of the nursing profession. These roles are :

- the nurse as a giver of direct patient care;
- the nurse as a member of the health team;
- the nurse as a member of a profession;
- the nurse as an individual and as a member of society.

The nurse as a giver of direct patient care

In this role, the focus is on the patient. The nurse gives the direct care by carrying out the physician's orders intelligently and with a thorough understanding of the scientific bases for the prescribed treatments. She knows the expected results, and performs procedures with deftness and ease, to achieve the maximum effectiveness of the treatment, the safety and comfort of the patient, as well as the incorporation of the therapy in her total plan of nursing care. She observes, evaluates and communicates significant information regarding the patient. She applies her sociological and psychological knowledge in achieving understanding the patient and so creates the kind of nurse-patient relationship that will promote the patient's well being. The patient must be enabled to feel that the nurse herself believes in what she is saying and knows what she is doing. This is evidenced by her sincerity, effectiveness, directness and simplicity of expression. If the nurse has demonstrated her reliability in small things that pertain to a patient's satisfaction, he will be more likely to rely on her judgement and advice in more important matters.

The nurse, in giving care, also helps the patient learn how to achieve and maintain optimum health. She understands and accepts the ways in which socio-economic, religious, ethnic and cultural factors affect the health concepts and health behaviour of individuals.

All these functions in giving direct care, focused on the patient and on potential patients and carried out by a well trained, understanding nurse, interpret to the patient and the public much about the nursing profession.

The nurse as a member of the health team

Health services demand a wide variety of skills. This entails the provision of a variety of health workers, even though these

individuals may not be together physically at the same time or the same place. The nurse, like other members of the health team, does not and cannot act alone. She must see herself then as a member of the total health service group and define her relationships with the other members. It is extremely important that she recognize the value of working cooperatively towards the common objective - the welfare of patients and the community.

In this area, the role-functions that the nurse will carry are several. She participates with other members of the health team in providing current and continuing health care, demonstrating professional competence, and relating herself to and communicating with the different individuals and groups with whom she has contact. She conveys a feeling of confidence in the integrity and competence of the members of the total group. She teaches and supervises auxiliary personnel in the group, giving due consideration to individual differences and needs. She serves as nurse-consultant to the members of the health team - physicians, sanitary engineers, epidemiologists, health education specialists, etc. -, giving them the benefit of her knowledge of the attitudes of the people towards health, of their economic status, the health problems encountered in the home, the cultural patterns and traditions, etc.

To be effective and far reaching, the nurse in this role must fill a defined place in the overall structure and functioning of the entire health team, in the total health programme, whether these be related to hospitals, clinics, health centres, homes etc. The nurse has to be constantly aware that patients, their families and others are sensitive to the kind of interpersonal relationships that exist among members of the health group which serves them. An atmosphere of cheerfulness and good will and mutual understanding among the members of the group is conducive to producing the optimum well being of the individual and the community.

The nurse as a member of a profession

The nurse shares, with members of many other professions and disciplines, certain responsibilities and status.

In this role, there are four important functions she needs to carry:

./..

- She interprets her profession to the public;
- She works effectively with members of other professions on common problems;
- She is an active member of her nurses association and of other organizations;
- She is responsible for her own professional growth and participates in the promotion of the professional growth of others.

Why interpret nursing and how should it be interpreted to the public?

To a layman, a nurse may represent no more than a trained person who is needed during periods of serious illness¹. This nurse may be to him a private duty, a general staff or a visiting public health nurse, who carries out a number of functions under medical and/or nursing supervision. The nurse must understand that the patient - the public - has the right and the need to be informed about her profession. A variety of methods can be used by the nurse in acquainting her public about her profession. All mass communication media can be used - radio, television, press, speeches, tape recordings. The nurse can participate in committees, in other public group activities and at conferences, workshops, seminars, etc. The writer believes in what a speaker at one of the International Congresses of Nurses said, that "good public relations must be developed by the spoken word and by the written word, locally, nationally and internationally"². The "image" of nursing in the public mind is created primarily by the nurse herself at the patient's side but "external" public relations are also necessary. Public relations programmes are important tools in acquainting the public with the fact that the primary objective of the nursing profession is service to the public. The success of a public relations programme requires, first, belief in the truth and worth of the message.

To write for the public may be considered frightening but the willingness to write, and the interest and the desire to interpret nursing, serve as a good beginning. There is a definite need today for nurses who can write on topics related to their profession. This writing may be in

./..

¹Lester D. Crow and Alice Crow. Understanding Interrelations in Nursing, New York : The Macmillan Co., 1961, p.6

²Veronica Awon-Khan. "Report from the Panel Session on Public Relations", World Health Organization Papers and Reports, International Council of Nurses Twelfth Quadrennial Congress, Melbourne, Australia, April 1961, p.48

any form which presents successfully to the public information about nursing activities. Whatever be the type of presentation, - nursing articles, short items on health education, pamphlets, brochures, textbooks, descriptions of nursing experiments or surveys, etc. - , all will lead to wider and deeper knowledge of nursing and health and will interpret nursing as a healing and health service to the public.

"With her wealth of experience gained in working with people under varied and trying circumstances, the nurse is potentially a good public speaker!"

Julie E. Miale¹

The nurse has numerous opportunities to speak with others as well as to others. Speeches may consist of addressing informal or formal meetings, with a small or a large group of listeners, on subjects related to the nursing profession. Most important is that before undertaking to address the public, the nurse should be well acquainted with the structures, purposes, functions, major issues, problems and trends in her profession, so that she communicates and interprets this information effectively to individuals and groups with differing social, cultural, religious and political orientations.

The nurse works with members of other professions on common problems. She identifies the professional problems shared with other disciplines and participates in efforts to solve such problems. She also communicates with the wide variety of groups involved in the field of health, both those within and those outside the health services as such. For example, in community projects for public welfare, she asks members of other disciplines - educators, social scientists, etc. - , to participate with her in workshops, seminars, talks or discussions designed for the information and education of the public.

The nurse, an active member of her nursing association, possesses specialized knowledge acquired through definite studies common to all members. Both individually and through her association she strives to establish and maintain the high quality of services which ensure the protection and security of her society.

./..

¹Luella J. Morison. Steppingstones to Professional Nursing, St. Louis : The C.V. Mosby Co., 1965, p. 240

Nursing is essentially a social profession. Therefore, if the nursing associations know and understand the needs of their people and society, they will stimulate and encourage their own members to take part in various community affairs, and to join other groups, in activities aimed at rendering the services which society has a right to expect and which will promote community welfare. The nursing associations also have a responsibility to project an accurate and favourable image of the nurse and nursing.

As a member of other associations other than her own, the nurse is helped to understand and accept the relationships between her association and other organizations and thus identifies and extends the areas of mutual cooperation, and makes her contribution to the extension of the knowledge of health.

The nurse as an individual and as a member of society

The degree of success a nurse achieves in her relationships is built on her habitual attitudes towards herself and others. She must learn how to achieve and maintain an acceptable state of mental and physical health; she must develop recreational skills and interests outside her work.

Through her own experiences and those of her patients, the nurse comes to recognize and respect the great power of religious and spiritual influences.¹

The nurse needs to display constantly a constructive interest in the world about her and a desire to participate in wholesome recreational activities with others who, like herself, possess emotional stability and worthy standards of conduct. The more she enters into society around her and the more she indicates willingness to share her knowledge and skills, her high idealism, zest for living, out-going behaviour and cooperative qualities will help her become the kind of person who is universally respected and admired.

./..

¹Lester D. Crow and Alice Crow.Op.cit, p. 435

This paper is based on the beliefs that the nurse plays a very important role in the lives of people, that she is a dedicated member of society.

An attempt has been made to point out how nurses should make use of all the tools of communication in interpreting her role and that of her profession. The nurse is fortunate in having a large and receptive audience : the patients and the public whom she serves. Nursing is viewed in terms of what it means to the individual and the community and to their immediate interests and needs. The nurse should not miss the opportunities of her daily contacts with her public to promote mutual understanding.

Every nurse, whether she is conscious of it or not, is constantly influencing, through her personal, social and professional behaviour, the attitude of the public towards the nursing profession. If she learns through communications skills to be articulated in interpreting to the public the objectives of her profession, she can and should be its most powerful agent.¹

Nurses are becoming increasingly aware of the impact of good public relations programmes not only in improving communication between them and the public but also in influencing favourable relationships with members of other professions. A nurse must be a strong public relations agent if she is to make known the objectives of her profession and interpret her various roles.

¹Alice Girard. "The Professional Nursing Associations - And You", World Health Organization Papers and Reports, International Council of Nurses Twelfth Quadrennial Congress, Melbourne, Australia, April 1961, p.48

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- American Nurses Association. "ANA Standards for Organized Nursing Services",
American Journal of Nursing, 65 : 3, March 1965, pp. 76 - 79
- Broe, Ellen. "The Nurse as a World Citizen",
Nursing Outlook, 11 : 12, December 1963, p. 905
- Charbonneau, Gabrielle. "Our Professional Obligations",
The Canadian Nurse, January 1966, pp. 19 - 20
- Clemence, Sister Madeleine. "Existentialism : A Philosophy of Commitments",
American Journal of Nursing, 66 : 3, March 1966, pp. 500 - 509
- Crow, Lester and Crow, Alice. Understanding Interrelations in Nursing,
New York : The Macmillan Co., 1961
- Morison, Luella. Steppingstones to Professional Nursing,
St. Louis : The C.V. Mosby Co., 1965
- Nelson, Roy. The Nurse Speaks,
Philadelphia : F.A. Davis Co., 1958
- World Health Organization. Papers and Reports Presented at the International Council of Nurses Twelfth Quadrennial Congress, Melbourne, Australia, 17 - 22 April 1961,
Geneva : World Health Organization, 1961.