

Role of Mental Health Nurse in the New Millennium

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Our life in the new millennium is not as simple as it used to be. We have progressed rapidly towards a scientific age. This progress has led to urbanization, industrialization and modernization. This, in turn, has caused hardships in life which sometimes may cross the threshold of stress tolerance and lead to mental illness. Very few people are generally aware of the mental illness and the facilities available for its treatment. Even if some of them are aware of these facilities, they fail to avail it because of the social stigma attached to it.

Mental health is as important as physical health. To achieve the target of attaining positive mental health, a mental health nurse has to play a major role in collaboration with other health workers. She is the key person to look after preventive, promotive curative and rehabilitative aspects of mental health.

The mental health nurse has a vital role to the diagnosis, evaluation and management of the patient with mental disorders. For example, in a case of hyperkinetic, mental health nurse may first recognize his/her client's activities. This has many implications in terms of working with the family and its physician and the school. To remove the child on the plea that other children or the teacher will be distressed by sitting with him is a serious error. So, here, the mental health nurse should use his/her ability to manage the child at the community level.

A mental health nurse should knock at each door and introduce herself which is invariably an unpleasant experience. She should utilize her professional skill of communication while entering the house. She should gauge the general envi-

ronment of the house and its residents. On her subsequent visits, she should evaluate interpersonal relations. She should go deep into the whole matter to find out the root cause of the problems and try to improve their interpersonal relationship by making them understand and realize the problems. She should give special attention to pregnant women and elderly people. She should advise the pregnant woman not to be tense and anxious but to keep herself happy and cheerful. Besides, looking after her physical health with the help of a mental health nurse, the mother should also try to develop her positive attitude towards the expected child. The nurse should inspire the expectant mother to bring up the child in the best possible way with adequate love and affection so that the child becomes physically and mentally healthy.

If a nurse finds any child having delinquency, truancy or any other neurotic trait, like bed-wetting she can assess the early developmental stages of that child in order to improve his behaviour and healthy parent-child relationship. The mental health nurse should also give a hope to elderly people by bringing out to the surface their usefulness to the society and guiding them to adjust in the family.

The mental health nurse should be vigilant to the situational crisis like failure, unemployment, marriage, divorce, loss and grief so that she can intervene at its earliest when the need arises. She can also step forward to help an adolescent and the middle aged women at menopausal stage for maintenance of their mental health.

She can identify drug, alcohol and tobacco addicts and try to help them at her own level and refer them to the Psychiatrist if it is beyond her limitations. She can even detect cases

of severe mental illnesses and mental retardation. She can refer all such cases to any hospital having a department of psychiatry. She can act as a joining link between the hospital and the community. When such a case is admitted to the hospital, she can prepare the family to receive him back with a positive attitude and guide them how to look after the patient at home when he is discharged. She can continue to follow up the care of the patient at home, according to his needs.

She can try to assist the patient and the mentally retarded to make suitable adjustment in the community according to their capabilities by coordinating the social resources.

She can also undertake research study of her own or in collaboration with other members of the team to add up to the present knowledge. She can work in liaison with the Multipurpose Health Worker, Public Health Nurse, Psychiatric Social Worker, General Practitioner and hospital based Psychiatrist to give **Total Health Care** to the patient and the family.

It is essential to train a large number of health personnel of all categories in the field of psychiatry and Mental Health. A mental health nurse should have scientifically sound knowledge to provide comprehensive care, updating knowledge through continuing education programmes.

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