

Nurses at Stress

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Introduction

Mental Health is as important as Physical Health if the Nurse is to meet her responsibilities. A Nurse is exposed to a variety of stresses in her day-to-day life which impose a demand upon her to activate mental apparatus before any other system is involved.

The desired goal is adaptation, or adjustment to the change, so that the person is again in equilibrium and has the energy and ability to meet a new external demand. This healthy state can be upset by a number of stressors. A Nurse is exposed to many of these stressors every day.

Stressors

The Sources of Stress

(1) Physiologic Stressors :

- i) Chemical agents (drugs, poisons, alcohol)
- ii) Physical agents (heat, cold) radiation, electric shock, trauma).
- iii) Inf. agents (bacteriae, viruses, fungi)
- iv) faulty immune mechanisms
- v) genetic disorders
- vi) nutritional imbalance
- vii) hypoxia.

(2) Psychosocial Stressors :

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- i) Day to day stressors or commonly occurring frustrations, e.g., getting caught in a traffic jam; having an argument with ward incharge/doctor/patient; non-availability of commonly used drugs/lotions in the ward; shortage of linen/I.V. stands in the ward.
- ii) Major complex occurrences that may involve large groups, even the entire nation. These include events of history such as epidemics of a disease, e.g., Cholera/Gastroenteritis/terrorism, war etc. which are threatening situations brought into the living room through live news coverage and dramatization by the mass media.
- iii) Third group of stressors include relatively infrequently occurring situations that directly affected the individual such as death, birth, marriage, divorce and retirement.

The Stress Response

Stress, like beauty is in the eye of the beholder. Each person perceives and reacts to situations and changes differently depending on her or his personal characteristics, abilities, experience, external support systems and characteristics of the stressor itself. The stress response produced may be elicited by real, potential or imagined threats, leading to varied and multiple patterns of hormonal discharge. The goal is to mobilize the person's energy resources, to cope with the stressor and to promote adaptive outcomes.

Stress Management

Because stressful factors are a part of our lives, it is essential to develop adaptive response to stress thereby minimizing illness and generating health. How to adapt to stress is a growing area of research? Some of the current techniques include:

- a) Relaxation techniques.
- b) Biofeedback training.
- c) Stress reduction programmes.
- d) Development of a rational philosophy of life.

a) Relaxation Techniques :

There are many relaxation techniques available that apparently act to (a) reduce the damaging psycho-physiologic effects of stress and (b) promote a sense of physical and mental well being.

i) Benson's Relaxation Response :

This is a very simple procedure which involves six basic steps: -

1. Sit quietly in a comfortable position.
2. Close your eyes.
3. Deeply relax all your muscles.
4. Breathe through your nose, as you breathe out, say the word "One" strictly to yourself. For example, breathe in ———— out, "One", in ———— out, "One", etc.
5. Continue for 20 minutes. When you finish, sit quietly for several minutes at first with eyes closed and later with eyes open.

6. Maintain a passive attitude and permit relaxation to occur at its own pace, when distracting thoughts occur, ignore them and continue repeating "one". Practise the technique once or twice daily and not within 2 hours after any meal, since the digestive process seems to interfere with the elicitation of anticipated changes.

ii) Transcendental Meditation:

Meditate with mantra or a specific sound for 20 mts twice daily.

iii) Autogenic Training:

Originated by a neuropsychiatrist, J.H. Schultz. It is *passive* attention to the body. Proceed thru allowing the six exercises:

1. Inducing sensation of heaviness of limbs. To do this, the person thinks "my right arm is heavy; my left arm is heavy."
2. Inducing sensation of warmth in the limb. "My right arm is warm".
3. Cardiac regulations: "heart beat calm and regular."
4. Respiratory regulations: "It breathes me", etc.

iv) Progressive Relaxation:

Jacobson's method teaches the subject to concentrate upon various gross muscle groups in the body — first tensing and then relaxing each group.

- 1) Try to keep all other muscles relaxed as you relax specific muscle groups.
- 2) Don't forget to use your favourite self-suggestions.

v) Hypnosis:

Hypnotic suggestion to induce relaxation depends upon use of "Vivid imagery". A hypnotic state may be induced either by a hypnotist or by the subject alone

(auto-hypnosis)

vi) Yoga:

Yoga involves the practice of both physical exercises (Hatha Yoga) and meditation (Raja Yoga). The correct performance of yoga results in deep relaxation without drowsiness or sleep.

b) Biofeedback Training:

It differs from relaxation techniques in two ways:

- (1) a monitoring device (e.g. E.C.G.) is needed to measure the involuntary function and to "feed back" this information to the subject;
- (2) the subject is helped to monitor and control one physiologic process at a time. Because of the need for special equipment, biofeedback training is not practical.

c) Development of a Stress Reduction Programme:

These programmes are based upon the development of a clear and specific problem-solving approach for stressful situations. Problem-solving involves these essential steps:

- (1) Identify the problem.
- (2) Become aware of personal behaviour patterns that contribute to the problem.
- (3) Assess the cause of the problem.
- (4) Develop a plan of action.
- (5) Put plan into action.
- (6) Evaluate the plan and modify it as necessary.

d) Development of a Rational Philosophy of Life:

- * Be aware that your emotional

and physical health are one and the same.

- * Avoid excessive life changes, for too much life change produces stress and disease.

- * Avoid great swings in activity levels. Pace yourself.

- * If you are uncomfortable/ill, examine and consider changing your attitudes about life, present circumstances and illness.

- * Remember that illness and discomfort are relative events, not absolute events. You are probably better off than you previously thought you were.

- * Study those around you who appear to cope well with the problems, and mimic them if you can comfortably.

- * Insight into the feelings of others can help minimize tensions in interpersonal transactions.

- * Never forget that that a positive attitude is healthy is more than just a cliché — it can save your life.

Summary

A Nurse's life is full of stressful conditions. She should pay attention to how she reacts to those conditions. If she feels uncomfortable, she should try to alter her reaction and/or situation and develop a positive attitude to life by selecting a stress reduction method.

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— Students also composed and played a script. During the period people visited the exhibition, this made the visit lively and promoted interactions.

— The Exhibition, during week days, was shifted to old Civil Hospital, Mangrol, Mandvi. Leaflets about AIDS were distributed among the people.

— Students also gave 'radio talk' on AIDS awareness in the local language. Entire programme was

successfully concluded.

M.A. Chidambaram College Madras

The Besant Nagar Health Post in the jurisdiction of South Madras Constituency, under the leadership of Dr. (Smt) A. Sumita, the Medical Officer, organised the Polio Camp in response to the Pulse Polio Immunization (PPI) initiated by the Ministry of Health and Fam-

ily Welfare, Government of India, on 9th December 1995 and 20th January 1996. Twentytwo students of M.A. Chidambaram College of Nursing Voluntary Health Services Medical Centre, Madras participated in this programme. This centre was one of the four awardees of the 1st Prize awarded by the Rotary Club Cosmos for the best organised and conducted Polio Camp. The students were awarded the certificates of merit.

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Branch Affairs

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