

Nurses in Psychiatric Rehabilitation

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WHENEVER PERSONS are afflicted with serious physical or mental conditions affecting their capacity to function in the society, they require concerted efforts of professionals, family members and community agencies to enable the process of healthy resumption of roles and effective re-integration into the community.

According to Hume, "Rehabilitation is the process through which a person is helped to adjust to the limitation of his disability." In other words it is a process of enabling the individual to return to his highest possible level of functioning.

Viewing Rehabilitation in this context one could infer that the process of Rehabilitation does not start always with hospitalisation only. There are many elements in the family and community which inhibit or enhance the process of Rehabilitation from the day a person becomes mentally ill. Illness perception by the patient's family members and other relatives and friends plays a vital role. The cumulative effect of un-scientific ideas, in humanistic attitude and hostile behavior of the near and dear ones could be seen in the degree of stigma attached to mental illness. In such circumstances the professionals and those persons involved in rehabilitation activities have to face infinite problems and they need to be endowed with immense energy and fertile knowledge, genuine interest, and commitment to overcome the hurdles and obstacles. Each and every step in the early stages might seem to be insurmountable tasks. However, as one continues to work with psychiatric patients and their family members, he or she finds the suitable means of helping the patients to help themselves.

Like any other problem, attached with misconceptions, long duration of treatment and inadequate treatment facilities, mental illness too has its complications, especially in regard to comprehensive rehabilitation strategies. Whether a patient is illiterate or literate, poor or rich, young or old, married or unmarried, schizophrenic or manic depressive, or mentally retarded, he or she encounters a wide variety of problems de-

pending on different issues like clinical conditions, professional support, individual and family potentials, other expectations and allied factors. Even among the educated members, misconceptions about mental illness are as much prevalent as the counterparts. So the mere fact that family members are educated does not guarantee that the patient could not have any problem of rehabilitation. A majority of the mentally ill in our country do not get any professional attention and care. Even among the remaining patients who happened to be brought to the Psychiatric Centers, Mental Hospitals and Mental Health Professionals, it is a fact that issues related to rehabilitation are not given due importance and priority. This is in fact one of the main reasons for poor treatment adherence irrespective of the psychiatric care facility for which the patient seek treatment.

Systematic Rehabilitation activities are undertaken in only few Mental Hospitals, Rehabilitation Centers, Day-Care Centers and Half-way Homes. Invariably, any successful rehabilitation programme for Psychiatric patients depends, on integrated team work of Nurses, Psychiatrists, Social Workers, Psychologists, Occupational Therapists, and other supportive technical staff. But it is rare to find all the team members working for rehabilitation in the Indian setting. Barring a few institutions all the Mental Health Care services in India depend on one or two professionals of the team. In many centers a few professionals take up the role of rehabilitating the mentally ill. The Nurse by virtue of her training and skill plays a vital role in the process of Rehabilitation in institutional and Non-institutional settings.

The activities of a Nurse in Rehabilitation could be seen at four levels: (i) Working with patients; (ii) Helping the families; (iii) Facilitating the team-work; (iv) Establishing linkages with the community.

Working with Patients

It is essential that the Psychiatric Nurse understands the patients' clinical conditions, disabilities, abilities, interests and

aptitude role functioning expectations of the family members and the nature of social support, before she could plan any rehabilitation programme. Many a time the psychiatric patients are found to have certain deficits in maintaining personal hygiene, communication, social relationship and other daily activities of living. What they need is additional professional inputs for re-socialisation. Some of the activities that could be undertaken by a Nurse as follows:

1. In order to prevent idleness and boredom suitable activities could be selected and the patient could be encouraged to participate in the activities. For example, paper-bag making, basket making, gardening, cooking, environmental cleanliness and tailoring, etc.

2. It is essential on the part of the Nurse to give positive re-enforcement as and when the patients seem to progress in various activities. It could be appropriate appreciation, sanctioning rewards or special privileges and other gestures of acceptance and recognition.

3. It is useful to support to adjust with other patients and to solve his/her problems amicably.

4. It is necessary that the patients are helped to return to the social skills like personal hygiene, good manners, communication, budgeting and time management, etc.

5. It is one of the important functions of the Nurse to help the patient to participate in useful leisure time activities or recreational activities.

6. It is important to provide brief simple counselling and guidance services to the patients focussing on the problems being experienced by the patients.

7. It is helpful to organise periodical group meetings for the patients to enable them to share the problems and to find out suitable solutions.

Working with Families

The family members are burdened with many problems like financial difficulties, disruption in routine activities, changes in

the recreational activities, general health and mental health problems as an impact on the need for maintaining the requirements of the mentally ill. So the Nurse would play a vital role in reducing such burdens by offering the following services:

1. Educating the family members about the fact of mental illness and specific guidelines to take care for their patients.
2. Offering them an opportunity to share their concerns, anxieties and problems with the Nurse;
3. Organising group discussions for the families of the mentally disabled;
4. Helping them to organise themselves to find suitable means of rehabilitating the patients.

Working with Team

As has been said earlier the rehabilitation work involves many professionals. The Nurse understands their contribution and helps the patients without any duplications and wastage of efforts. In this way she could serve as a co-ordinator of the activities related to Rehabilitation. Her main concern is that the disturbed patients and

disturbed families get the minimum benefits from the team members and utilise the available services to the fullest extent.

Working with Community

The Psychiatric Nurse comes in contact with the patients' neighbours, employers, colleagues, and others interested in the patients' welfare. During such contacts the Nurse tries her best to sensitize them about the needs of the patients and encourage them to develop a positive attitude towards the patient and a helping behaviour. She may be asked to give informative lecture on mental illness to the members of Mahila Sabha, school and other agencies. All these activities could be helpful to make use of community resources for effective rehabilitation.

Suggestions

Considering the vital role played by Nurses in rehabilitation of the mentally disabled in the hospital and in the community, it is imperative on the part of Nursing educators to identify and incorporate the essentials of rehabilitation in general and psychiatric rehabilitation in particular into the Nursing curriculum.

The practical training for nurses should include a structured programme related to rehabilitation work in psychiatric settings. Likewise, systematic research attempts should be undertaken by Nurses to understand the problems of patients to formulate indigenous rehabilitation plans and to evaluate the effectiveness of Nursing intervention in the psychiatric rehabilitative services. By such efforts the Nurse would become an active agent of rehabilitation and crusader of the cause of mentally ill in developing countries.

References

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