

Maintaining Professional Ethics and Discipline in Nursing

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WE, ESPECIALLY those of us who live in Bombay, are aware that we live in an era of computerisation, industrialisation, urbanisation and automation. These changes have influenced the life styles and values of people. In the health field, the development of Biomedical Sciences has resulted in new diagnostic equipments like scanners and monitoring systems. These new facilities have altered the attitudes of nurses.

Nursing has developed very slowly while medicine has leaped ahead. Nursing is still trying to come out of its barriers and establish itself as a profession. There are many institutions and Nursing Homes which use untrained people as nurses by simply giving them uniforms. This naturally brings down the standard of Nursing.

With this background it is the task of the Nursing teachers to mould and develop young girls into responsible and professional nurses.

The First Step

The first step in this direction would be to bring about changes in established Schools and Colleges of Nursing. Here, though attention is given to completing lectures and other requirements like getting all signatures for procedures, sufficient importance is not given to development of right values in students. Learning is more examination-oriented. Students like to please their teachers and they take the lead from them. So also the standard of professional ethics and discipline of the teachers have to be examined before we think of that of the students.

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MARCH 1991, VOL. LXXXII NO. 3

All of us are familiar with the International Code of Nursing Ethics and the Patients' Bill of Rights. The students can also learn these so as to have a basis for maintaining a standard of Nursing. Some of these values are in the areas of care and compassion for the sick, protection of vulnerable clients and health education. In all these we find that it is an expression of the idealism about the ability of human beings to care for each other.

What is the definition of a profession?

A profession is an occupation based on intellectual study and practice the purpose of which is to give service with ethical components. Thus we have enough guidelines to fall back on. The teachers pass on their values to the students.

Some Basic Points

Thus, the following points have to be always remembered:

1. We teachers need to feel proud of being nurses.
2. Opportunity is given to you to teach teenagers in that vulnerable age to take care of the sick and their problems.
3. Your attitude to Nursing and learning will have a tremendous influence on the students and it will produce the type of students you want.
4. You need to be a good teacher and a practitioner with a high standard of professional values, who can help the students in their professional and personal growth.
5. You need to be a role model:

- a. as a teacher - preparation for classes

and clinical instruction.

- b. in your dress - neatness.
- c. in your personality - maturity.
- d. in your work - efficiency.
- e. in your evaluation - impartiality.
- f. in your attitude - positiveness.

6. Self evaluation is a good practice: We may question ourselves - are we doing enough? The seed you sow may not become a plant at once but it will slowly grow. You should not give up when you don't find 100% results but hope for the best. Some of our students will live up to our expectations.

Now I will mention some points which personally I feel should be considered when we deal with students both in the classroom and the clinical field, in the areas of professional ethics and discipline.

Our students come from different backgrounds with a variety of behaviours, attitudes and abilities but they admire their teachers and try to emulate them. Their words and actions will have made impressions on the students.

To illustrate my point I will narrate a story told by Dr. Paul Brand. When Dr. Brand was taking clinics for his P.G. students he noticed that one of his student's mannerisms were very much like his own professor's mannerisms. He noticed it many times but could not understand it as this student had never met Brand's professor. This professor was very much admired by Dr. Brand. Later, he realized that these mannerisms were passed on by him to his students as he himself had picked up the same mannerisms from his professor. This shows us how much we pass on to our students without our knowledge. You are the role models who pass on the values and attitudes to the students.

This opportunity is given to you to teach your students and to mould them into responsible nurses with ethical values.

What are some of the areas we need to pay attention to?

1. *Uniforms*: Many Nursing leaders feel that uniform is not necessary for students but I personally like the uniform. Students need to dress neatly in appropriate clothes. Uniform brings seriousness to the task. It is easy to control the dress and appearance of students in a uniform as it prevents frivolous adornment and jewellery while on duty. Besides, the use of clean uniforms helps to maintain a required level of hygiene.

2. *The language they speak*: Correct, respectful, polite language without using slangs. This is a hard task because of their different backgrounds. You have to educate them to speak correctly.

3. *Their ethical and professional attitude* in the area of patient care is of utmost importance. They must learn to consider the patients and others as worthwhile individuals who deserve respect and consideration. By giving good care in a dignified manner this can be achieved. While talking to patients they should neither patronize nor talk condescendingly to patients. Empathy to patients is very important. The art of listening has to be learnt by the students.

4. *Teach them to be* responsible, honest, straight forward, reliable, accountable, trustworthy, punctual, dedicated and hard working students.

5. These days when we are talking of health for all, it is the task of everyone in the health field to be an agent of health care. The health teaching given may not show immediate results but it will bear fruit in the long run.

6. Give them the right opportunities for self expression and self evaluation.

7. Teach them the essence of group dynamics by helping them to develop a team spirit. They also need recognition, understanding and stimulation which can be given both individually and collectively.

8. The students should be made to realise that they are the future leaders in Nursing and so they must strive to raise the standard of Nursing and maintain a high professional and personal standard.

Teachers must thus strive to achieve both professional and personal excellence in their students.

It is you who are the role models who can accomplish the task in the area of professional ethics. You have to mould them into responsible, professional, skilful and empathic young women and men.

I will add a few thoughts about maintaining discipline.

How will you maintain the discipline?

a) Take corrective action with consideration and impartiality. If you can work along with the students and make them realise their mistakes, the students will improve. Talk to the whole student body and make them responsible for each other. Help them to realise that though you do not like to punish, you will not hesitate to take action against any violation of the Nursing Code.

b) Evaluation of students is also an area where students should be made to understand their strengths and weaknesses. When deficiencies are there help them to correct these before these go beyond control. Evaluation should be a continuous process, and should be based on positive interaction with the students and not merely on examinations.

Naturally, it follows that such a task would take a lot of time and effort and would mean adding responsibilities to an already overloaded schedule.

Professional Ethics and Discipline

The same principles apply to the Staff but the Staff Nurses are already moulded in the different schools.

The areas I find more difficult are honesty, integrity and professional competence.

1. Disciplinary action is necessary on many occasions.

2. Absenteeism is an area which gives headache especially in Bombay.

3. Responsibility to inform before resignation:

a) Talking to them in groups and individually may help.

b) Work towards their welfare.

c) Listen to their difficulties both in the work area

and with their personal problems.

d) Show consideration when possible impartially.

e) Involve other administrators when needed.

f) A good staff education and welfare programme will be

a good step towards better discipline among the staff.

In the professional sphere, the senior Nursing staff can be role models who can guide them when possible. Include the Head Nurses in the wards and make them responsible for the Staff Nurses.

Today Staff Nurses are more interested in going abroad. This reduces their motivation to be responsible. They no longer see the need to put on an immaculate image. If you have your own Nursing School then the Nursing administration have a longer association with them. Otherwise they have no loyalty to the hospital where they work. It is thus of utmost importance to establish the right relationship between nurses and their administrators in order to maintain professional ethics and discipline in Nursing.

THE NURSING JOURNAL OF INDIA