

Preservation of Health of Nurses

With Special Reference to Mental Health

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Abstract

Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely an absence of disease or infirmity. Nurses face stress due to insecurity, excessive competition, hazardous working conditions, long and monotonous working hours, night duty, threat of physical violence, sexual harassment, etc. Stress can cause ulcers, myocardial infarction, musculo-skeletal problems, rise in blood pressure and blood sugar level, and an increase in stomach acid. It can generate anxiety or depression or both. Steps should be taken to reduce the sources of stress. Principles of health and mental hygiene should be followed to preserve health of nurses, also.

Introduction

Health is the basis of life; it is the root of happiness; it is the source of peace and pleasure. A healthy person is a happy individual. Health is an asset of an individual and a nation too. With the increase of stress and complexities of life, people in general and nurses in particular, are facing health problems more and more. The health of the nurses needs to be preserved at all costs.

Health and Health Hazards

According to World Health Organization, health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely an absence of disease or infirmity (Cavanagh and McGoldrick, 1958). Health of nurses is deteriorated due to stress, such as loss of a loved one, self esteem or threats to status, goals, security of job and life, etc. Stress can generate symptoms of depression or anxiety or both. Stress can cause a rise in blood pressure and blood sugar level, and increase in stomach acid and constriction of the arteries (Smolensky, 1977).

Allergy to antibiotic is common in nurses. The recent finding of increased mutagenic activity in the urine of nurses who admini-

ster cytotoxic drugs to cancer patients is disturbing (McDonald, 1981). A nurse is open to the following types of health hazards: (a) Physical hazards, (b) Chemical hazards, (c) Mechanical hazards, (d) Biological hazards, and (e) Psychological hazards. The psychological hazards affect both body and mind very badly. Such hazards arise from one's failure to adapt to an alien psychological environment. Frustration, lack of job satisfaction, insecurity, poor human relationships, emotional tension are some of the psychosocial factors which may undermine both physical and mental health of workers (Park and Park, 1986). The influence of psychological hazards can be reduced to a certain extent by following the principles of mental hygiene.

Mental Hygiene and Mental Health

Mental hygiene is a science which deals with the process of attaining mental health and preventing mental illness in society (Chauhan, 1986). Mental hygiene and mental health are very closely connected and intimately related. Mental hygiene is the means, but mental health is the end. A good mental health is the healthy state of mind and mental well-being. A good mental health can be achieved by following the under-noted principles:

- To preserve a sound mind in a sound body in a sound society (Coleman, 1988);
- To prevent illness;
- To break bad habits;
- To form a good habit system
- To face reality, and not to withdraw from it;
- To accept hardships of life, but not to avoid them;
- To resolve mental conflict;
- To tolerate frustration, and
- To adjust with the environmental conditions.

Precautions against Stress

Nurses bear the burden of both the home and the hospital. It is a strenuous task for nurses to run the home and the hospital simultaneously. Nurses suffer from infec-

tion from patients and back pain for lifting bed ridden patients. To reduce stress, the following steps may be adopted:

- To decrease the home responsibilities by encouraging family members to share some of responsibilities;
- To provide sufficient rest periods;
- To fix the duty hours by rotation;
- To provide adequate nursing staff for a hospital;
- To provide vaccination against dreadful diseases;
- To provide training to the nurses for proper lifting techniques for bed ridden patients (Levy & Wegman, 1983);
- To have medical check-up at regular intervals; and
- To provide counselling assistance (Rao, 1987).

Conclusion

All persons who are connected with health care system must co-operate to preserve health of nurses. Government machinery should be geared to prevent illness of nurses who are devoted to take care of the health of people.

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