

The 'Ideal' and 'Real' Role of A Nurse in the Hospital: Doctors' Perception

Dr E. SURYAMANI

The Health team that provides treatment to the patients in a hospital consists of doctors on the curative side and nurses on the care side. Of the two, the role performance of the nurse is crucial since she is responsible for not only providing comprehensive nursing care to the patients but also associated functionally with the doctor in the recovery of the patient. The efficiency of her role performance therefore depends to a large extent on the role perception of the doctor. Hence the present study. The study was made in King George Hospital, Visakhapatnam, selecting a sample of 60 doctors. The findings of the study revealed that as an important role-set member, the doctor's perception of nurses' role is very much relevant and essential for the efficient role performance of the latter.

MODERN medicine, unlike traditional medicine, gives importance to the social and psychological factors in the treatment of the patient (Folta and Deck, 1966: 50). The health team providing treatment to the patients in a modern hospital consists of doctors and nurses. While the focus of doctor is on the curative aspects, the focus of the nurse is on the care process, which is mainly expressive in nature. The role of the nurse is institutionalized as a routine in the hospital organization. It is ill-defined and all inclusive, quite different from that of the doctor. The nurse is functionally associated with the doctor and carries out his/her orders and directives for the recovery of the patient. She performs the functions delegated to her by the doctor. Further she is in-charge of the hospital ward performing administrative, managerial, coordinating and supervisory functions also. If the role-performance of the staff nurse who is solely responsible for providing comprehensive nursing care (Jayalakshmi, 1980: 63-68), to the patient is not adequate, the hospital organization tends to fall short of its services. The efficiency of her role performance partly depends on the role definition, role perceptions and expectations of the doctor, who is not only superior but also one of the most important role-set members of the staff nurse. Therefore it is essential all the while to study the doctor's perceptions of the professional role performance of the staff nurse in the hospital organization in the light of role analysis.

Recently some social and behavioural scientists like Oommen (1978), Venkata Ratnam (1979), Chandani (1985), Madan (1972) analysed either one or the

other concepts like role perceptions, role expectations, role commitment and role performance of doctors and nurses separately. In these studies there has been no attempt to sort out the important independent factors explaining doctor's perceptions of nurse's role in an hospital organization. Hence the present study, by empirical analysis, aims to identify and analyse the role perceptions of the doctors regarding the ideal and real images of the nurse and expectations of the doctor.

The Present Study

King George Hospital, one of the biggest teaching-cum-general hospitals, in the state of Andhra Pradesh, located in the city of Visakhapatnam was selected for the present study. In its size, structure and organization, the hospital is a large scale, formal organization. At the time of the study it has about 1200 bed strength for in-patients and a number of departments for out-patients manned by 110 doctors and 165 staff nurses working in and operating various specialized departments and wards.

Necessary data were collected through interview schedules from a sample of 60 doctors. The responses from the selected sampled doctors (60) were quite encouraging and the analysis revealed certain interesting facts, a summary of which is presented below.

Of the 60 sampled doctors 80 per cent are males and the remaining 20 per cent are females. This gives the male, female ratio of 4:1 which indicates the numerical preponderance of male doctors over female doctors. Venkata Ratnam's, Madan's and Chandani's (1979, 1980 and 1985) studies also gave similar findings. The reason may be the literacy rate among females in the city is low and the number of

The author is Research Associate, UGC, Department of Sociology, Andhra University, Waltair.

those who have received higher education is still lower (census of India 1981: pp 83). Further, 65 per cent of the doctors in the sample are civil assistant surgeons, whereas the remaining 35 per cent are civil surgeons. It is pertinent to note here that all the doctors in the sample are specialists working in various specialized departments. But all the doctors are doing collateral duties of both teaching and therapeutic work.

A majority of the sampled doctors (70 per cent) belonged to the age group 30 to 50 years (i.e., middle aged persons). Again 68 per cent of the doctors were quite experienced having more than 10 years of service in their profession.

Doctor's perceptions on the 'ideal' and 'real' role of a Nurse:

Commenting on the ideal role of a nurse, 58 per cent of the doctors expressed that physical care of the patients is the ideal role of a nurse, followed by 22 per cent, who felt that the ideal role of a nurse is to follow doctor's instructions given from time to time. But while 12 per cent of the respondents opined that nurse's ideal role is to act as a liaison between doctors and patients, 5 per cent expressed that nurse's ideal role is to give supportive emotional care to the patients. The remaining 3 per cent opined that educating the patient is the ideal work of a nurse.

TABLE: 1
Doctors' Perception of 'Ideal Role' of A Nurses

Functions	1st Per- fer- ence	2nd Pre- fer- ence	3rd Pre- fer- ence	4th Pre- fer- ence	5th Pre- fer- ence	6th Pre- fer- ence	Total
1. Liaison between doctor and patient	7 11.7	9	14*	11	14	5	60
2. Physical care of the patient	35 58.3	10	10	3	2	0	60
3. Supportive emotional care	3 5.0	5	13	16*	10	13	60
4. Educating the patient	2 3.3	13	10	14	16*	5	60
5. Record maintenance	0	4	3	7	10	36*	60
6. Following doctors' instructions	13 21.7	19*	10	9	8	1	60
Total:	60	60	60	60	60	60	

*Indicates order of priority.

Thus, on the whole a majority of the doctors identified physical care of the patients as the ideal role of a nurse in the hospital. However it is interesting to note from the following table-1 that no single doctor has identified "record maintenance" as the ideal role of a nurse. That means, in doctors' evaluation, this function does not come under the purview of the ideal role of the nurse and if any nurse performs these functions, it means she is not playing her ideal role at all in the organization. Table 1 shows the preferential order of the ideal nursing functions. A single largest majority of 35 out of 60 doctors stated in their first performance, that the ideal role of a nurse is "to see the physical care of the patient". A majority of 19 out of 60 doctors reported in their second preference, that the ideal role of a nurse is "to follow doctor's instructions". Similarly, 14 out of 60 doctors have stated in their third preference the ideal role of a nurse is "to act as a liaison between doctors and patients.". In the same way, the fourth, fifth and sixth preferences go to "supportive emotional care", "educating the patient" and "record maintenance" respectively. All this reveals lack of unanimity, as such, among the doctors with regard to their perception on the ideal role of a nurse in the hospital.

To verify the discrepancy between the ideal role and the real role of a nurse, the doctors were asked about their opinions on the actual role a modern nurse is playing.

TABLE: 2
Doctors' Perceptions of the 'Actual Role' Performance of Nurses

Functions	1st Pre- fer- ence	2nd Pre- fer- ence	3rd Pre- fer- ence	4th Pre- fer- ence	5th Pre- fer- ence	6th Pre- fer- ence	Total
1. Liaison between doctor and patient	4 6.7	5	19*	19	9	4	60
2. Physical care	3 5.0	12	14	23*	2	6	60
3. Supportive emotional care	0	3	8	3	14	32*	60
4. Educating the patient	1 1.7	4	3	8	35*	9	60
5. Record maintenance	45* 75.0	3	3	4	0	5	60
6. Following doctors' instructions	7 11.7	33*	13	3	0	4	60
Total:	60	60	60	60	60	60	

*Indicates order of priority.

As per the order of preference, 75 per cent of the doctors identified "record maintenance" as the actual role the modern nurse is playing in the hospital under first priority which is a sad commentary on the present day role performance of the nurses. As "record maintenance" was not at all identified by any single doctor as the ideal role of a nurse, a large majority of doctors stated that the present day actual role the nurse is playing is only record maintenance. Of the remaining 25 per cent, 12 per cent stated that the actual role the nurse is playing is following doctors' instructions, 7 per cent felt the nurse is acting as a liaison between doctors and patients, 5 per cent perceived that nurses are providing physical care to the patients, and the remaining 2 per cent stated that the nurses are educating the patients.

The single largest majority of doctors identified the actual role functions of the nurses as "following doctors' instructions", "to act as a liaison between doctors and patients", "looking after the physical care", "educating the patient" and "providing supportive emotional care" in second, third, fourth, fifth and sixth rank orders, respectively. Thus here also there is no categorical unanimity of opinions among doctors on the day-to-day functions of the nurses.

All this definitely shows that there is discrepancy in the perception of the doctors between the 'ideal' role and the 'real' role performance of the nurses.

Doctors' perception of the nurses' work-load

When the doctors were asked about the work load of staff nurses, a majority of 65 per cent of the doctors sincerely stated that nurses' work load is too heavy as they are performing multiple duties in the hospital like maintenance of wards and records,

TABLE: 3

Opinions of Doctors' on the Nurses' Work Load

Categorical replies	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	39	65.0
No	15	25.0
Can't say	6	10.0
Total:	60	100.0

distribution of drugs and diet to the patients, and acting as communication agents between doctors and patients, in addition to patient care. As against this, 25 per cent frankly felt that nurses' work load is not at all heavy in the hospital. However, the remaining 10 per cent of the doctors expressed their inability and incapacity to evaluate the work load of the nurses and therefore not willing to react at all to this question.

Doctor's Opinions on Nurses' Duties

To another question, "Do you feel that the nurses are doing duties other than nursing care?" Fortyfive per cent of the doctors stated that nurses are doing so many duties other than nursing care. In the ward

administration if any member is absent or not willing to do that job in the scheduled time she takes the responsibility to complete that job. As a custodian of the ward, she does the work in one way or the other or make the concerned person do that work even by compulsion. Some times when the doctor is absent or not available readily, she acts as a doctor in an emergency situation and sometimes she acts even as an accountant, supplier, manager, co-ordinator, etc. In playing these roles she is either neglecting or finding no time to render expressive nursing care, which is the most essential and avowed function of her role, for which she is paid. As against this, 42 per cent of the doctors felt that what

TABLE: 4

Doctors' Opinion: Nurses are doing Duties other than Nursing Care

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	27	45.0
No	25	41.7
Can't say	8	13.3
Total:	60	100.0

all the nurses are doing come under comprehensive nursing care and form a part of their prescribed and expected duties in the hospital. To them, without careful management, accounting or coordination, it is not possible to do comprehensive nursing care. However, the remaining 13 per cent of the doctors expressed their inability to comment either way and hence could not give any categorical reply. It is again pertinent to note here that a majority of 60 per cent of the doctors were not at all satisfied with the role performance of the nurses in the hospital under study. While 42 per cent of the doctors expressed that nurses spend most of their time in the hospital with patients, 30 per cent reported that nurses spend more time with doctors only by way of assisting, advising and receiving instructions from them from time to time. When the doctors were asked to rank the status-position of nurses in the hospital hierarchy, an overwhelming majority (88 per cent) ranked the nurses 'second' in the hierarchy next to themselves. Thus, at least, with regard to the ranking order in the hospital hierarchy there was consensus among the doctors.

Taking Professional Advice from Doctors

Fortyeight per cent of the doctors have stated that most of the nurses frequently come and take professional advice from them. They have also asserted that without their advice, the nurses do not proceed further in the care treatment of the patient. As against this, 37 per cent of the doctors reported that nurses never care to meet them and take professional advice from them. However, the remaining 15 per cent are of the opinion that the nurses do visit and consult them but occasionally.

TABLE: 5

Taking Professional Advice from Doctors

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Frequently	29	48.3
Occasionally	9	15.0
Never	22	36.7
Total:	60	100.0

Following Doctors' Instructions

When the doctors were asked to what extent the nurses follow their instructions during the working hours, 55 per cent stated that the nurses sincerely and satisfactorily follow their instructions without any grumbling whatsoever. However, 45 per cent reported that the nurses working under them follow instructions only to a certain extent during the working time in the hospital. But none of the doctors reacted negatively to this question.

TABLE: 6

Following Doctors' Instructions

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Fully	33	55.0
Partially	27	45.0
Never	0	0.0
Total:	60	100.0

Doctors' Perception of Nurses' Role Commitment

When the doctors were asked to give their opinions on the nurses' role commitment to their profession, 35 per cent of the doctors stated that nurses working under their supervision and guidance are fully committed to their profession. As against this, only 7 per cent expressed that the nurses are not at all committed to their professional duties. Those doctors who felt that the nurses are partially committed to their profession constituted 22 per cent. The remaining 36 per cent could not give any opinion with regard to the role commitment of the nurses working under them.

TABLE: 7

Doctors' Perception of Nurses' Commitment

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Fully committed	21	35.0
Partially committed	13	21.7
Not at all committed	4	6.7
Can't say	22	36.6
Total:	60	100.0

Discussion with Nurses about Patients' Problems

Further, 58 per cent of the respondents categorically stated that they always prefer to discuss with the nurses working under them about the ailment of the patient, and the type of remedy needed from the hospital, since nurses play a crucial role in rendering patient care, next to themselves. However, 32 per cent frankly admitted that they never care to feel the necessity of discussion about the patient and his problems with the nurses, since in their view nurses' duty is to follow only the instructions given by them. But 10 per cent of the doctors affirmed that they do discuss with the nurses about patients, but their decision is only occasional depending upon the situation and the time available.

It is generally stated, that instrumental functions are performed primarily by doctors and secondarily by the nurse, and the expressive functions are primarily by the nurse and secondarily by the doctor (Johnson and Martin, 1958: 373-377). Therefore, when the doctors were asked whether or not they agree with the statement, about 61 per cent were in complete agreement with the statement, followed by 28 per cent who overtly disagreed with the same, and the remaining 11 per cent could not give any categorical reply. Those who agreed with the statement, have stated that the given statement reveals the ideal role of the doctor and the nurse in the hospital organization. But they have expressed their own doubts about the reality. Those doctors who disagree with the statement, have expressed that such categorical division of labour and specialization of function as is revealed by the statement is difficult to follow and put into practice always.

When the doctors were asked about the actual situation in the hospital where they were working, 72 per cent sincerely felt that nurses are not at all performing the expressive functions in the hospital, since there is no time for them to concentrate on such functions. While 16 per cent of the doctors could not speak about the real situation, the remaining 13 per cent admitted that the nurses are performing mainly the expressive functions.

Doctors' Perception of Ward and Record Maintenance of Nurses

Nurses generally complain that most of their time is being wasted in the maintenance of wards and record work and keeping them neat and up-to-date. Therefore, doctors were asked whether or not they agreed with this general complaint of the nurses. As per the responses thus collected from them, while about 47 per cent strongly agreed with the viewpoint that nurses waste their time mostly in maintaining the ward and keeping the records up-to-date, 28 per cent simply agreed with the same view point. That means 75 per cent were positively supporting the nurses' general complaint. As against this, 15 per cent did not agree at all with the general complaint of the nurses, whereas the remaining 10 per cent did not prefer to give any opinion on this issue.

Doctors' Perception of the Tendency of the Nurses to avoid Administrative Work

When the doctors were further asked about the nurses' tendency to avoid administrative work, 47 per cent simply agreed and 27 per cent strongly agreed with the viewpoint. In other words, 74 per cent accepted that nurses by and large try to avoid administrative work. As against this, only 6 per cent of the doctors disagreed with the viewpoint generally held on nurses' tendency to avoid administrative work. The remaining 18 per cent could not give any categorical answer.

TABLE: 8

Nurses' Tendency to Avoid the Administrative Work

Response category	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly agree	16	26.7
Agree	28	46.7
No opinion	11	18.3
Disagree	5	8.3
Strongly disagree	0	0.0
Total:	60	100.0

To another question, "Is there any device to check whether the nurses are doing expressive care or not?", a majority (65 per cent) stated that as it is there is no precise device available to check the nurses whether or not they are doing expressive care (tender loving care). While 30 per cent said that patients and her role-set members are the only devices to check and complain against her if she fails to do her duties properly, the remaining 5 per cent have no knowledge at all about such devices.

When the doctors were asked the reasons for choosing private nursing homes by the patients, 55 per cent frankly admitted that "better nursing care"

TABLE: 9

Doctors' Perception of Patients' Preference to Private Nursing Homes

Response category	Frequency	Percentage
Better attention of doctors	7	11.7
Better nursing care	33	55.0
Cleanliness of ward	5	8.3
Availability of better instruments	9	15.0
Better facilities for patients' attendants	6	10.0
Total:	60	100.0

is the main cause for patients' preference to private nursing homes. On the other hand, 15 per cent stated that availability of "better instruments and equipment" is the main cause for such preference. But, 12 per cent opined that "better attention of doctors" is the main reason why patients prefer mostly the

private nursing homes despite the high expenditure involved. However, for 10 per cent of the doctors "better facilities for patients attendants" is the reason for such a preference, while for the remaining 8 per cent cleanliness of the hospital and its wards is the main reason for patients' such preference.

Coming to the aspect of occupational role relations in terms of the relations that are existing between the doctors and nurses, 55 per cent of the doctors described their relations with nurses in informal-friendly terms. But, while about 30 per cent stated that their relations with nurses are usually formal and business like, the remaining 15 per cent stated that their relations with nurses within the hospital are formal and outside the hospital informal.

Doctors' Perception of Real Problems faced by the Nurses in the work situation

When the doctors were asked about the real problems faced by the nurses in the hospital, 65 per cent of the doctors identified that nurses have no time to spare for the real patient care, since most of their valuable time in their working hours is being wasted in the clerical work and record maintenance. Further, they felt that the nurses are made in-charge of looking into the equipment, drugs, linen, crockery, etc., and if any of these things are lost or missing they are solely made responsible. Therefore, most of the nurses' attention is diverted in looking into these matters carefully. On the other hand, 33.3 per cent of the doctors stated that lack of knowledge and professional efficiency are the main problems faced by the nurses. To them, the facilities during their training period were insufficient and inadequate to meet the challenges of the modern complex hospital organization. They suggested that periodical inservice training should be given to all the nurses on modern methods of rendering patient care. Again, 45.1 per cent of the doctors expressed that the nurse-patient ratio is not well-balanced in the hospital, and hence nurses are suffering from heavy work load. Lastly, lack of sufficient cooperation from the Class IV employees (like ward boys, female nursing orderlies, thoties of both sex. etc.) are the major problems of the nurses as identified by the doctors.

Doctors' suggestions to solve the Nurses' Problems

When the doctors were asked about the suggestions, in meeting the problems of the nurses, 63.3 per cent of the doctors suggested that every ward or department should be provided with clerks and/or office assistants for maintaining records and looking into the non-nursing duties. But, 41.7 per cent viewed that it is essential to recruit more and more staff nurses, keeping the nurse-patient ratio at least at 1:5. Some doctors have even stated that strict discipline should be enforced in controlling Class IV employees and frequent transfers among Class IV employees is one of the suggestions offered by the doctors in that direction. Some doctors opined that

the minimum educational qualification of a nurse should be a bachelor's degree instead of SSC or 10th Class, which is the prescribed qualification at present. In recruiting the nurses, the doctors suggested, that proper screening should be introduced and during the training period periodical aptitude tests should be conducted for the student nurses.

Conclusion

As an important role-set member the doctors' perception of nurses' role is very much relevant and essential for the nurses' performance of her role. Their suggestions regarding the performance of nurses' role are pertinent and have got to be implemented by the hospital organization in order to enable the nurse to perform her professional role efficiently.

Again the doctors' expectations of the nurses' professional role performance are in fact contradictory to her own expectations of her role. The conditions existing in her work situation, the ongoing socialization and the semi-professional treatment of her by the organization make her 'indifference response' type and she indulges in 'off-the job pursuits' and drifts away from her professional role. To this extent the hospital organization is failing to achieve its goal of providing comprehensive nursing care to the patient.

Bibliography

1. Chandani, A. 1985: *The Medical Profession—A Sociological Exploration*. Jainsons Publications, Ajit Arcade, Kailash Colony, New Delhi-110 048.
2. Foltz Jeannette, R. and Deck Edith, S. 1966: *A Sociological Framework Patient Care*. John Wiley and Sons, INC, New York.
3. Jayalakshmi, D. 1980: "Nurses' Role Performance—A Research Study", *The Nursing Journal of India*, March, Vol. LXXI, No. 3.
4. Madan T.N. 1972: "Doctors in a North Indian City: Recruitment, Role Perception and Role Performance", in Saberwal, Satish (Eds.), *Beyond the Village: Sociological Explorations* (Simla, Indian Institute of Advanced Study).
5. Madan, T.N. 1980: *Doctors and Society*, Vikas Publications, New Delhi.
6. Oommen, T.K. 1978: *Doctors and Nurses*, MacMillan, Delhi.
7. Venkata Ratnam, R. 1979: *Medical Sociology in Indian Setting*, MacMillan, Madras.
8. Census of India 1981: S.S. Jaya Rao of the Indian Administrative Service, Director of Census Operation, Andhra Pradesh, Pp. 83.

TNAI Workshop on School Health

The three-day workshop to mark the International Nurses Day with the theme "School Health" was organised by the Trained Nurses' Association of India, at the TNAI Headquarters, New Delhi from May 16 to 18, 1989. Dr (Mrs) Sally Anne Bisch, Regional Nursing Officer, WHO, New Delhi, was the chief guest.

In her address, Dr Bisch called upon the nursing personnel to improve the standard of school health services. As the children belonged to the vulnerable group, they need particular care. Efforts should be made to ingrain in their young mind the importance of good health habits, which in turn

would have an ever lasting impression to maintain their own health as well as of their family.

She also mentioned about the WHO Assembly which was to meet at Geneva to discuss "Health of the Youth", with stress on handicapped children in order to bring them to normal life. Dr Bisch hoped that the participants would greatly benefit from the workshop by way of learning the principles, tools and techniques, thus improving the standard of school health services and making the children health consciousness.

In all 14 School Health Nurses/ PHN from MCD Delhi Administration, MIHFEW and Batra

Hospital participated in this workshop.

Earlier Mrs Narender Nagpal, Secretary General of TNAI in her welcome address spoke on the significance of continuing Education Programme and hope the participants would benefit from this workshop.

In her introductory remarks Miss J.P. Dhaulta, Assistant Secretary-cum-SNA Advisor, TNAI outlined the development of Continuing Education Programme of TNAI.

Mrs V. Chhabra, the Course Coordinator, proposed the vote of thanks.