

THE ROLE AND STATUS OF A NURSE IN HOSPITAL SETTING-SOME PROBLEMS

By

M. Sankara Rao, Lecturer in
Public Admn., Andhra University,
Waltair

THE History of the Nursing education can be traced far back to the times of 'Florence Nightingale' who initiated training school in 1860. But the significant role played in Nursing education came into existence only after 1930's.

It was, thus, during the period 1860-1930, that the Nursing first emerged as a distinct and secular profession primarily engaged in by women, and more particularly by unmarried women. Although, there is at present a tendency to encourage men to enter the profession of nursing, it is justified that the profession of Nursing is catered more to the women than men, since, by nature, women carry infant in their womb, and, later on, on their back.

Yet, in some other local or social conditions, it is, further, determined that most masculine or upper-class task fall into the category of "exploit" while most feminine or lower class tasks can best be classified as 'drudgery'.

According to the following attributions and social concepts, it can be considered that only women are suitable and adaptable to the profession of Nursing.

1. The most natural attribute of woman is the care of ill and infirm and children, because they are not only physically weak and helpless, but also psychologically dependent on mothers. Therefore, women are especially qualified for the functions like caring the sick and

nursing the babies and those tending the sick are designated as "Nurses".

According to historical data and contemporary Psychological view, women, by nature, is well qualified as a 'Nurse', since she is blended with the bearing and nursing of babies and ministering to the sick.

2. Florence Nightingale, while describing the natural quality and affinity of women, divides her trainees into "Lady Probationers" and "Nurse-Probationers". The latter group after their recruitment are especially active in those parts of the hospital work corresponding to simple house-keeping in the hospital setting. The role of "Lady probationers" is defined as a sanitation agent of a house.

3. It is a universal definition of women that they are less independent and less capable of initiative and less creative than men, and for that reason, they stand in need of masculine guidance and supervision in playing nursing role. Thus the work of nurse is defined as an exercise of functions which are specifically delegated to her by the Doctor.

Under the above attribution, it is revealed that the nursing profession was, at first, forced into the ancillary activities of the poor hospitals and subject to a very severe discipline, and, later, subordinated to the physician in-charge of the "case".

In India, after independence though commendable develop-

lopments have been made on hospital organization administratively, structurally and functionally by the introduction of so many specialisations, and though the role of the 'Nurse' has become onerous, nothing has been done to expand the educational opportunities and professional status of a 'Nurse' except replacing the healing art by her progress notes, ward rounds, etc., in the hospital. Everybody knows that, in the hospital, it is only the nurse who can manage to persuade the sick child 'to eat' and encourage the patients 'to live'. But nobody takes cognizance of her need of social, professional status and educational development.

The most obvious factors responsible for this state of affairs are firstly rigid bureaucratic hospital traditions which shackle the privilege and prestige of even the most high-minded Doctor. Similarly, most of the present structure of the nursing care does not enable her to dispense the provision of human love towards patients. Thus it affects the professional status of a 'Nurse'.

Secondly, regarding the educational advancement, she is not given such opportunity in order to get higher positions, even though she is well versed with the functions of doctors and administrators in terms of experience. In social life, she is treated by others as drudgery and menial, even though her presence in every floor and ward of the hospital is inevitable. Thus the structure of the hos-

hospital and the norms of it extremely limit the opportunity for her educational advancement.

Thirdly, the professional satisfaction of the Nurse, in most of the hospitals, is, something very meagre indeed, because she has to perform her functions in compliance with orders. Hence she is naturally discouraged and disparaged from displaying her foresight, initiative, imagination and genuine feeling.

Fourthly, in many hospitals, the social and professional status of the nurse and her assimilation to professional personnel is, even today, rather vague and indefinite. In brief, the position of the 'Nurse' in the clear-cut hierarchical system is somewhat intermediate one. Hence, nobody can recognise the direct consequences of her position, her personal merit or years of services. Thus, the personal insecurity of life and status-problems of the nurse in hierarchical structure of an organization is comparable to that of lower-middle classes. Thus the nurse is frequently forced to display an excessively professional attitude which stultifies her relationships with the patients and stunts her both professionally and emotionally.

Finally, a well established and experienced Doctor may seldom display his professional talents when he meets human beings professionally; whereas a nurse cannot afford to lose her dignity as a "Professional". But at the same time, she cannot evince continuously her professional attitude of nursing towards patients, since the religious and social taboos, in India, continue to play an important role.

Unless revision of the professional status of a 'Nurse' is urgently taken up by the Government, and unless nursing schools and hospital administrators systematically take cognizance of the nurses' need of emotional and personal security

and of the task of giving real nursing care with a clearly defined status, there can never be really adequate medical care, nor a really meaningful profession of Nursing.

The following are the suggestions set out for the advancement of the social life, educational opportunity and professional status of a 'nurse' in the hospitals.

1. The task of tending and loving care as a part of total therapy at the patients' bed side should be assigned to the 'Nurse'.
2. Since the Principal task of nursing education is the liberation of the nurse's capacity to love and dispense affection, the effective nurse must be an emotionally mature person, because emotional maturity expands her professional status and scope of her work in a manner as to enable her to attain gratification.
3. Number of nurses are living from hand to mouth or less than that, even. Their living conditions should be improved by offering better emoluments.
4. In some of the towns where new hospitals have been established it is obvious that there are no nurse's quarters. This problem should be solved by erecting quarters with sufficient accommodation.
5. A hospital is essentially established to meet community needs, to cure the diseases and to alleviate human pains and suffering. In order to keep the institution's continuous functioning it must gear itself not only for the achievement of the ends for which it is established, but also for the satisfaction of aspirations sought by its

staff members. One important desire among nursing personnel is for social, educational and professional advancement.

- a) In social life, she should be regarded by the superiors and Doctors with motherly and sisterly respect, since her presence in every floor and ward of the hospital is unavoidable;
- (b) In educational advancement, a nurse who has put in ten or more years of service should be permitted to up advance courses in nursing or the Final year (M.B.B.S.) Part I & II examinations along with medicos, since she is well versed with the functions of Doctors and no less in knowledge also she is no less than the junior Doctors in the hospitals;
- c) In professional advancement, she should be given opportunity to reach the adaptable cadre within the pyramidal structure, if she improves her educational qualifications, as it is the only way for her to be out from the sense of utter alienation.

If the suggestions are properly implemented by the Government as well as hospital organizations, there will be, to some extent, an emancipation in the social life of a nurse and an advancement in the role and status of a nurse.