

Our Position in the Health Team

by

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The rapid expansion of knowledge and technology prevents any health practitioner from being independent and to provide total patient care. Each discipline, namely, medicine and nursing, possesses unique capabilities and knowledge. Nursing can never be practised in complete independence, neither can medicine. They must be interdependent. The continuing relationship of both the physician and the nurse with the patient and family is an essential element of health care delivery. But the relationship between the physician and nurse does not run parallel. The relationship here means a process of working together with shared goals and philosophy and understanding of the professional and individual skills and knowledge. It must include a system which provides for feedback and meet towards goals through joint problem solving.

We should not ignore the fact that the goal of nursing is to help people to attain, maintain and regain health and to help them cope with crises, illness and death. A nurse who has recognition and power, can do such a job more efficiently. But, my questions as a professional nurse are:

1. Why so many nurses express feelings of helplessness?
2. Does the medical profession recognise us as an independent profession?
3. Will the nursing profession survive?

Why so many nurses express feelings of helplessness?

In early years, physicians praised the work of nurses openly and referred to them as their colleagues but it did not last long because physicians came to believe that nurses had to be intellectually and socially controlled. Perhaps, they thought that the trained nurses were becoming too powerful and too self-important by organising their professional association and by improving in professional education.

The medical profession has in a way been largely responsible for nursing to be considered as a form of supportive labour. The social values of medical profession have been distorted by their loyal support of a class ideology that has placed no limit or restrictions on their efforts to maintain their powers in the health field, very often at the expense of others. Since nursing had to work so closely with medical profession, it has to bear the expense more than any one else in the health team. Nurses have not been free nor have they tried to any extent to free themselves, to use their creative powers in the development of nursing. Many nurses hold positions of potential leadership and power and also engage themselves in constant decision making processes, yet few are recognised as appropriate participants in policy decision making. But the fact is that nurses are the major productive energy in the health field which can be used as a powerful force to bring about the needed change.

Does the medical profession recognise us as an independent profession?

Medical men use nursing as simply a vehicle or means of producing work in the name of health care. The simple fact is disregarded that we are equal partners in the health care delivery.

We talk a lot about the health team but do we really imbibe the team spirit? The medical men view themselves as a ruling class. In the past and even now the doctors are considered authorities on the health care of the patient with little consideration of the views of nurse practitioners. The medical profession must recognise nurses as their co-workers—an independent profession. Without the pooled energies of individual nurses, health care facilities would be a far different kind of service that they do at present. The public and the hospital authorities do not recognise nursing care as separate from medical treatment. It is often heard that doctors are responsible for "patient's care" but it is seldom realised that it is a comprehensive word. It includes (i) treatment for which the doctor is responsible and (ii) nursing care for which the nurse is totally responsible.

In other words, doctors and nurses are responsible for patient's care and both should work as coworkers to make the patient care successful. Unfortunately, the nurses have permitted themselves to be used as simply a labour force to be controlled and utilised to keep the system and its various parts functioning.

Will the nursing profession survive?

Some of the reasons due to which we have not been able to attain our identity are:

- (a) Nurses' contribution and ideas are not made public, nor they try for it.
- (b) Most of us find little time to do anything for the profession except 8-hours' duty in the hospital.
- (c) The various groups in nursing disagree with each other on the stated goals and philosophy.
- (d) Some of us are engaged in in-group fighting.
- (e) Some nurses in leadership positions are least effective in their areas of interpersonal relationships and in communicating with other nurses.
- (f) We have not made concerted efforts to stand together in a dignified manner and have adopted tactics of para medical and class IV workers rather than inculcating self-confidence as the medical profession does.
- (g) Some of us are more worried about security of our chairs than giving security, help and guidance to the nursing personnel working under us.

It is essential to forward nursing interests and goals. To bring about the change we must respond collectively, constructively and co-operatively.

We must struggle to convince others about the value of nursing and its place in the health care scheme. We must keep on continuing till we achieve the goals.