

Paediatrics—Role of Nurses

By Miss L.F.I. Crasta

Paediatric Nursing Tutor (Retd)

MUCH water has flown under the bridge since Florence Nightingale who personified all that was best and glorious in Nursing—i.e., tending with loving care the sick and the wounded. Laudable as it was then and even now—it is not enough for the present day paediatric Nurses. Nursing sick children, preparing and giving formulae, administering medicines by various routes, and other specialized techniques for caring prematures and operated children, understanding and fulfilling the psychological needs of hospitalized infants are part and parcel of training of a modern paediatric nurse. The nurses working with children must know that pediatric nursing and child care now includes the healthy as well as the sick child and requires technical and psychological skill of a higher order. The child is completely dependent for the satisfaction of all his needs on those who are looking after him. There are certain basic needs common to all children. Then there are the individual's social, cultural and economic back ground which give rise to a diversity of specific needs. Promotion of health and protection against disease are the needs of every child from birth to adulthood.

The nurse in the children's ward

The nurse in a children's hospital has a complex role to play. Her patients vary in age from the premature baby to the adolescent. Hence, she has to adopt different techniques and types of care while treating them. Further in similar situations each child reacts very differently. The nurse looking after the child must be sufficiently versed in child psychology and in various stages of growth and development to be able to give adequate satisfaction to his physical and emotional

needs. She should try to develop mother-child contact to the maximum extent and avoid showing any signs of possessiveness towards the child. If for educational (exams, tests, etc.) reasons she has to take disciplinary measures, she should not use threats for carrying out some painful treatment. This can only upset the child and lead him to think that all the treatment he receives is punishment.

Changes must be expected in a child's behaviour during his illness in the majority of cases. During acute phase he will be quite amenable and even apathetic. Then, when he starts feeling better, he will often be extremely aggressive towards his parents and the nursing staff. This sudden change may be very upsetting both for the parents and the nurse, who expect the child to have become adjusted to his new surroundings. The nurse should employ great self-control and sympathetic understanding in the face of the adamant behaviour of the child, because she has other problems to cope with, like his cleanliness, feeding and comfort, and technical care, such as injections, medicines, tests and examinations. Under all circumstances she must show great sympathy and common sense in her approach to the child, for, on those qualities will depend his acceptance of the treatment during his stay in the hospital. She must take enough time to explain what is going to happen to the child, who is old enough to understand and this must be done with complete honesty.

With the young child who cannot understand, she must find time to reassure the anxious mother or guardian or in their absence, mother him. The nurse must vary her attitude according to the seriousness of illness, the duration of the stay in hospital and the nature of the child's personality.

She must above all, try to give the child individual care. The nurse should pay attention to the following points—

- (a) The prevention of accidents owing to the cot sides lifted down by the attendant of the child or by doctor or herself after examination or treatment.
- (b) Prevention of accidents owing to stairs, electric plugs, heating appliances, medicine chest, cleaning materials, sharp edged objects—all these items must be out of reach to the children.
- (c) Arrangements for dining, play sites, both indoor and out-door, for convalescent children.
- (d) Separate room to carry out all treatment and painful procedures. If this is not available, a screen at least should be put, so that other children do not get frightened on seeing the struggling child.
- (e) The interior of the ward should be painted in pleasing colours and interesting pictures should be displayed on the walls to please the child's mind.
- (f) Attention to the diet requirements especially of babies and very sick children is very important. Feeds must be warm when they are given. Care must be taken to see that children and babies especially are fed regularly every 3 or 4 hours.

Nurse-Patient Ratio

The paediatric care requires a great number of hours of care per patient than in the case of adults in a general hospital. Accordingly the proportion of professional and non-professional staff must be much greater than in an adult hospital. The general public and also the administrators of children's hospitals and institutions are largely ignorant of the problems of services and staff requirements. As such it is the nurse's duty not to