

Innovation in Provision of Health Care— Health Care and the Rural Masses

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A major task of health workers of which nurses form a part is three fold : prevention of disease, promotion of health and maintenance of health.

Institutionalised health care and nursing was suited 20 years ago to the world of relatively static demographic pattern and restricted means of communication. But the shift in the demographic patterns and the demand for medical care or health care is much larger than the means.

Prevention of crippling and disabling conditions, both physical and mental, as well as giving assistance to those who have become disabled are also being stressed today.

Most of the developing countries have adopted philosophies and standards of medical and nursing care and education of health personnel from the West. Health Educational patterns of advanced countries were perhaps unrelated and not suited to developing countries where a large part of the population live in rural areas.

Therefore, the question is how relevant are our educational and training programmes to the delivery scheme of health care ?

Population explosion, even in advanced countries, is making it impossible to provide minimum health care to the people. To possess the highest standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of an individual.

Health Needs

The following are the health needs of developing countries.

(1) The study of diseases and epidemics reveals that poverty and disease form a vicious circle in the community. People fall sick because they are poor. They are poor because they are sick and have no energy to work. Productivity goes down and national economy suffers. Poverty breeds disease and disease in turn breeds poverty.

(2) The level of understanding of the people from developing countries, especially with regard to

health and nutrition, is limited.

(3) High Birth rate—e.g. India's population is 547.4 million. Every 1.4 seconds a baby is born—56,000 a day, 22 millions a year. In spite of the Family Planning Programme the birth rate is 41 per 1,000. Death rate has dropped to 16 per 1,000 causing an increase in population.

(4) Resources, involving highly technological tools and supplies being imported, are limited and costly.

(5) Environmental Sanitation : proper disposal of waste, contamination of food by flies and pollution of water. Insects and pests are breeding.

(6) Control of communicable diseases has not yet been fully achieved.

(7) Malnutrition : The nutritional status of the people of developing countries still leaves much to be desired. Protein deficiency in infancy and childhood is still widespread. This leaves population, specially in rural masses, weak and susceptible to disease and infection. Health development of a child is basic to its full growth.

Keeping the above features in mind we will discuss the need for a change in the provision of health care to the rural masses.

Health is defined as a complete state of physical, mental and social well-being and not merely an absence of disease or infirmity. Radical shifts and changes are already occurring in roles, and functions of physicians, nurses and other health workers and it is inevitable that this will continue at an accelerating rate.

To make intelligent plans for the future, it is imperative that the health professions face up to the changes taking place and work together towards achieving common goals of better care for people and better education for health workers.

Health Care Delivery

We as nurses can play an important and positive role in mini-

misng mental and physical sickness if we change our approach in delivering the health care. The heritage of nursing is in many respects different from that of medicine and other health professions. Nursing emphasised selflessness, self-sacrifice and unending service.

To my mind it appears that the nursing profession should establish direct contact with our client, the sick, to gain the confidence of the public. Otherwise they will shift their trust to lay people. In our zeal for professional sophistication we are going away from the most required approach to the success of our profession i.e. human touch—our approach as nurses has to be one of innovator, motivator, and demonstrator.

What is Nursing ?

Much has been said about nursing, let us look at it from new view point to suit the need of the present day community. Nurses' role in the delivery of the health care can be one of supportive rather than strictly technical. We need to ask ourselves seriously : how good is the education we provide ?

Rural Population

Health care in developing countries needs our attention purely from preventive aspects. Nurses in primary care centres should be in a position to treat minor ailments. I see no reason why nurses cannot be the project directors in rural health centres, particularly when nurses are granted a legal licence to practice the profession.

Therefore, I would suggest the establishment of a pilot project in a rural set up run by nurses.

This Health Guidance Clinic, as I would like to call it, takes the responsibility to prepare a band of people to educate the rural masses on the preventive aspects of health care.

From the Health Guidance Clinic each family of the project area receives total care which includes "Womb to Tomb Care." Education on preventive aspects should include cleanliness, immunization, nutrition, education of environmental sanitation, provision for safe drinking water, drainage and the use of latrines.

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