

The "Merit-Demerit" System For Discipline in Nursing Schools

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DISCIPLINE is unavoidable in keeping a profession at its best. An army of good fame has its soldiers well disciplined. Unquestionably, nursing as a profession needs discipline.

Discipline means order maintained among individuals under proper authority so that there can be a good behaviour of students which helps teachers and administrators run the institution smoothly and efficiently.

Concerning the enforcement of discipline, different educationalists support different methods. Some argue for external discipline i.e. discipline imposed by severe punishments by an external authority. Another one is internal discipline i.e. self-direction and self-control by which the individual performs his duties worthily. But educationalists like Nunn supports free discipline. According to him discipline "is not an external thing, like order; but something that touches the inmost springs of conduct. It consists in the submission of one's impulses and powers to a regulation which imposes form upon their chaos and brings efficiency and economy where there would otherwise be ineffectiveness and waste."

But the "Merit-Demerit" System about which I am going to write can be in the category of internal discipline. The code of conduct given in the Demerit Scale serves as an external discipline. It is necessary because it provides conditions and opportunities which start the process of internal discipline.

Our institution is one which uses the Merit-Demerit System for enforcing discipline and it has been implemented for the past ten years.

Many other institutions have contrived their own weapons for enforcing discipline among the nurses. Some are found effective, but some of them are apparently a failure in certain respects and hence it has brought deterioration of discipline among the nurses considerably and molested the profession partially.

By the "Merit-Demerit" System, a nurse gets her/his number of demerits varying from one to forty, from a code of conduct written, according to the misdemeanour she/he has done. It goes on like this resembling the Mosaic laws.

A. Practical

1. Neglect of patients	5 demerits
2. Neglect of critical patients	8 demerits
3. Sleeping on duty	7 demerits
4. Narcotic record error	2 demerits
5. Giving of wrong medicine or treatment	8 demerits
6. False report on charting	8 demerits
7. Neglect to chart etc. etc.	2 demerits

The Demerit System also deals with the academic and social aspects of life. For example touching the social aspects of life.

1. Rowdiness, unprofessional behaviour	1
2. Stealing	5
3. Using foul language	2

Dealing with the academic aspects.
(some examples)

1. False report of study	2
2. Causing disturbance in study hall	1
3. Cheating in examination	2

When a student is detected in a fallacy by the ward in-charge, the tutors, or by any in authority, it is notified to the Superintendent of Nurses. The Superintendent alone is not able to decide the demerits for a student; but she confers concerning this with the "Demerit Committee."

This Committee consists of the Superintendent of Nurses, a member of the training school faculty, and a staff member (preferably one who is closely connected with the department or unit in which the offence was committed). The Committee convenes and eventually the number of demerits for the culprit is cooked out. Afterwards the offender is called before the Committee and opportunity is given to her/him to appeal and explain her/his part. If the report is baseless or a misunderstanding, she/he will be excused without demerits. If she/he was found guilty, a written charge sheet in duplicate is given to the offender and one is filed in the student's file in the nursing office.

Subsequently, if a nurse amasses 10 demerits she/he will be called before the Hospital Committee and will be given proper advice. But when she/he acquires 25 demerits she/he will be put back six months in their student status. If an unfortunate student receives 40 demerits, which is also the maximum for immorality, she/he will be impeached. At the end of each period in training, the student's record will be reviewed and the following adjustments will be made.

- If she/he had a clear record for six consecutive months, the previously accumulated demerits will be cut in half.
- If she/he had a clear record for twelve months, the previously accumulated demerits will be completely wiped out.

Merits are also given to the students who work beyond the call of duty and who do outstanding performances in their practical and theoretical works.

A couple of disadvantages that I can point out is that, an immature fellow knowing well the consequences, may be tempted by slight rules like 5 demerits for stealing, to steal. Because if they are caught they will get only 5 demerits or if left undetected, the booty can be possessed by them.

Like the parliamentary methods, it is a time consuming method because upon a complaint, investigation has to be made, the committee has to be summoned, synchronizing their time of availability. The offender's right of appeal delays the process.

(Contd. on page 321)

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