

The Contemporary Nurse in a Dilemma

*By J. Priyadharsini

Bedside nursing and patient-centered care are all too familiar terms used frequently in relation to nursing. These terms, however, seem to be alien to the modern nurse as far as her practicability is concerned. The contemporary nurse seems to face a dilemma in putting into practice the ideal of patient-centered care in a society which is changing faster than one can contemplate.

At present when specialities are multiplying and the division of labour and responsibilities among various kinds of medical personnel are becoming more and more acute, the nurse is expected to be an expert in each of these categories. The present healing art seems to become more and more technical and hence the nurse is expected to possess technical competence. The responsibilities of the nurse are even on the increase owing to rapid development of medical science. The medical profession tends to delegate more and more technical procedure to the nurse—the procedure for which she was considered “not skilled” in the past.

All the myriad technicalities of medicine take the nurse away from the patient, whose mental picture of an ideal nurse does not seem to conform with what he sees in reality. The multi-disciplinary milieu of the modern hospital demands of the nurse much more than what her education offers. Her judgment, knowledge and skill are constantly being exercised. Her therapeutic role with the patients is giving way to domestic chores and increasing

non-nursing duties. Her dilemma also results from the emphasis on technical competence.

The nurse is all too aware of the silent longing of her patient, the longing to be the consumer of best possible care, but she is helpless. If the concept of bedside nursing has been hammered in during her training, the nurse feels that in reality it is less and less possible and this feature is realized as inevitable. The nurse has always been taught to do the best for the patients, but she hardly finds it feasible to put these ideals into effect.

The nurse cannot help involving herself in the use of those gadgets attached to the helpless form of the patient, some of which are vital to maintain life. Hence she confronts the constant danger of forgetting “the ‘person’” in each of the forms confined to the hospital bed.

The nurse, should, however, accept only the responsibility for these procedures which keep her next to her patient.

Unless efforts are made to bridge the wide gulf existing between the “ideal” and the “real” even the existing public image of the nurse will fade into something akin to nothing, and the traditional role of the nurse will only be an abstract.

There can be only one solution for this—a more clear definition of the nurses’ role—a definition which does not threaten the nurses’ “unique” role.

History of Nursing

The League of Red Cross Societies published in 1965 a series of slides depicting the History of Nursing from ancient times to the 19th Century inclusive.

At its meeting in Geneva in May 1971 the Nursing Advisory Committee of the League decided to complete the series with a further set on trends in Nursing in the 20th Century. These slides, it was felt, would be a valuable teaching tool in Schools of Nursing.

We would appreciate it very much if anyone could assist us in collecting source material in the form of photographs, scripts, cuttings or any other material which you consider of interest.

We look forward to any assistance you can give in collecting the material for this project.

These slides are available for use by the Schools of Nursing in teaching History of Nursing.

Mrs. Leila Sharma
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Open Forum is meant to encourage free and frank discussion and comments by nurses on matters of professional interest. Opinion in this column will be published anonymously, if so desired, but the name, address and qualification/position of the author must be made known to the Editor (not for publication).

Readers’ participation can only make this column a forum for exchange of views.

Comments are invited on the feature “The Contemporary Nurse in a Dilemma” to be published in one of the forthcoming issues of the Journal.

Please send your contribution to the Editor, The Nursing Journal of India, L-16, Green Park, New Delhi-16.

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