

The Nurse in a Psychiatric Team

By I.V.H. George*

WHEN mental hospitals served only as lunatic asylums for the segregation of patients unwanted by the family and the community the role of the nurse was mainly custodial. Later, when such asylums were gradually converted into treatment centres with a humane approach to the problem, the functions of the nurse centered on comfort measures and restorative techniques.

The Report on the Expert Committee on Mental Health and Psychiatric Nursing published in 1956 says, "as psychiatry progresses, the role of Psychiatric Nurse is becoming more and more therapeutic rather than custodial." Greater attention was then focussed on providing a therapeutic environment for the patient and scientific utilization of inter-personal relationship. Later on, as the social aspects of psychiatric disorders received greater emphasis, skill in utilization of group relationships and manipulation of the environment for therapeutic purposes were usefully added. All this helped the nurse to actively participate in individual and group patient therapy and changed her role to that of a therapist.

The Psychiatric Team

In the field of psychiatry, the whole work, whether aimed at cure or prevention of mental illness, research or promotion of mental health, is a co-operative enterprise. All the personnel engaged in this task work together as a well-knit team having equal interest and common aim and responsibility.

The psychiatric team usually consists of a psychiatrist, clinical psychologist, psychiatric nurse and a social worker. In some places the occupational therapist also is included in the team.

Functions of the Nurse

Being an active member of the psychiatric team, the nurse accepts combined responsibility with the team members in planning, organizing and executing the various programmes aimed at the treatment and recovery of the patient.

The Nurse's Role

Every member of the psychiatric team has certain roles to play in the care and treatment of mental patients. Some of these roles are common to all members of the team, while many of them relate to a particular member of the team. The nurse, who is a friend, philosopher and guide to the patient, has to play a number of therapeutic roles which are vital for the patients recovery.

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One of the major roles of the psychiatric nurse is to create a therapeutic environment congenial for the patient's recovery by providing a healthy and comfortable atmosphere and by developing favourable attitude. Through perceptive observation and accurate recording of the patient's behaviour, the nurse can help towards a correct diagnosis of his illness and proper treatment.

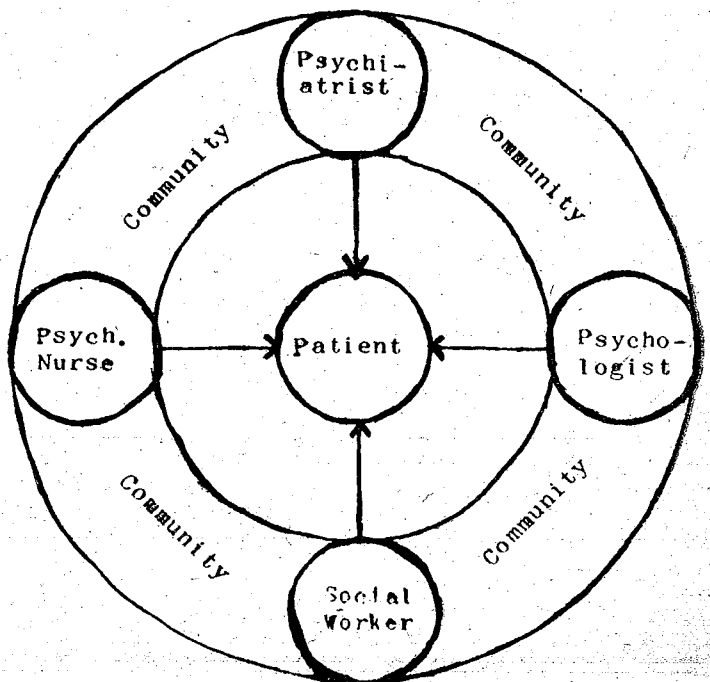
Various groups and social activities, that may be organised by the nurse help the patient to get socialized and adjustable to others. The nurse as a counsellor and a teacher provides confidence in the patient, educates him and modifies his behaviour. Her role in mental health education cannot be easily substituted as no other member of the psychiatric team has greater opportunities and longer time to teach the patient, his family and the community on the principles of mental hygiene which is so important for the prevention of mental illness and its relapses and promotion of health.

In a Community Mental Health Team, the nurse has to be a liaison between the patient, hospital and all other public health and welfare agencies and she has to provide help and guidance to the sick and his family in the treatment and rehabilitation.

Some of her major therapeutic roles are ;

As a Creater of Therapeutic Environment

In the treatment of any mental patient, one of the most important factors is a therapeutic environment which is congenial for his recovery. Notwithstanding the fact that all members of the psychiatric team and the entire hospital community have to provide for this, it is mainly the responsibility of the nurse to create such an environment in the hospital.



Team work in Psychiatry