

Nurse-Administrator in the Psychiatric Setting

By Mrs. A.D. Malhotra*

THE Nurse-Administrator is a key person in the nursing organisation and it is essential that she is specially prepared to function as a leader in the psychiatric setting. She should be well equipped with up-to-date knowledge in this area, in order to be helpful to her staff. She should recognise even more thoroughly than ever before that all patients must be seen as persons and not merely as the "carriers of diseases," and some basic knowledge of personality patterns is of immense value in the nurses' job. Nurses need specialised training and can be given a kind of teaching that will equip them with some understanding of the specific emotional and personal reactions of patients and as nurses to deal with these reactions in a more sophisticated fashion.

She should also see that ample opportunities are provided to nurses to keep abreast with the change coming up in the psychiatric nursing through in-service education programme. Opportunities for professional development through workshop and refresher courses need to be organised from time to time.

The administrator has to force several problems which may not be present in such an intensity in the general hospital. The problems are compounded by a shortage of professional persons. To some extent psychiatric nursing within the profession is considered as a taboo. Nurses generally do not come forward to work in mental hospitals.

The nurse-administrator should also emphasise the value of therapeutic nurse-patient relationships to her nurses. The core of this relationship is the understanding the nurse has to her own and the patient's behaviour. She has also to emphasise the fact that there are

no "routine cases" and the nursing care should be individualised and not generalised.

She should also see that the nurses are fully useful to patients, recognise the clinical problems which the patients present. Pains-taking study and reporting of results should be done so that all psychiatric workers can benefit from the observation and experience of nurses. The administrator should evaluate the patient's need very carefully and accordingly the staff be assigned to different units. Her concern about the patient's environment cannot be over emphasised. Physical environment should be determined by the need to control patients or the need to protect them, but should be as pleasant and home-like as possible. By the same token, the social organisation of the hospital and the relationship among personnel should be such that socialisation on the part of patients is encouraged and supported. Psychotherapeutic environment should permit balance of work and play.

The nurse-administrator should also see that staff of high calibre are recruited to undertake the task of re-treatment, re-training and planned activities for the patient.

There are many skills which the nurse needs to develop, but without doubt, the most important are: skill in inter-personal relationships and skill in communication. Both skills are basic to good team and to sound administration.

This comment was made by nurse-leader and educator as part of a lecture given to nurses at Edinburgh University in March, 1969. Her subject was "Psychiatric Nursing in Transition." There is no doubt about it that the nurse administrator is called upon to accept new roles and responsibilities, for which she needs a different and wider preparation.

The old concept of choosing nursing service leaders because of seniority in the institution rather than because of suitable educational or personal qualification is out-moded and cannot hold good in the present set up.

Today the nurse-administrator is also expected to understand psychotherapeutic procedures, such as individual psychotherapy and group therapy techniques and to be able to guide her staff in the same direction. She also occupies a crucial position in the social structure and function of nursing units. Besides being administrator she is intermediary among staff members and an example of good mental health.

The field of mental health nursing is an expanding one of increasing importance to the nursing profession as a whole, while the use of nurse specialists in psychiatric hospitals, mental health teaching and guidance is growing. It is also recognised that a basic knowledge of personality development and maladjustment is now a requisite tool for the practice of nursing in any area.

The nurse-administrator needs to be skilful in creating and maintaining good interpersonal relationships with her staff and with other departments. She should take sufficient care to prepare nurses who will be able to relate therapeutically with their patients.

Dr. Karl Meanninger puts it simply and beautifully. "If we can love: This is the touchstone. This is the key to all the therapeutic programme of the modern psychiatric hospital; it dominates the behaviour of its staff from the director down to the gardener."

Skill communication is an art and technique which first gained importance in the field of psychiatry and then as borrowed by other disciplines. This skill is of first importance in all interpersonal relationships whether these are related to patient-care or to personal relationship. Non-verbal communication goes to a greater extent among psychiatric patients and nursing staff and the need to acquire these skills is being recog-

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*A.D.H.S. (N) Haryana, Chandigarh