

Public Health Nurse in Mental Health Programme

By Mrs. Prem Misra

WITH changing concepts of psychiatry, the public health nurse is at a pivotal point in the promotion of mental health, prevention, treatment and rehabilitation of mental illness in the community. She needs to possess a thorough knowledge of modern psychiatric nursing concepts, personality structure and dynamics of behaviour, also skills in communication, observation, recording and interview techniques.

The concept of 'total health' is not understood by the majority of our community. There seems to be a dangerous tendency to attach increasing importance to physical well-being and neglecting the mental and social aspects of health. There are certain life situations, normal, or critical, which generally tend to threaten the mental health of individuals in the family. The public health nurse may have to intervene to promote mental health and prevent mental illness in the following situations :—

Antenatal period : Pregnancy generally disturbs the equilibrium of family relations. Fears of pregnancy may arise out of ignorance, superstition and misunderstanding common to most of the parents. The simple scientific explanations given tactfully will dispel these fears and reduce tension mostly.

Postnatal period : A common reaction pattern in the mother in this period is that of depression, varying in degree and cause and making her feel inadequate. Early ambulation, by encouraging her to resume normal activities gradually, will help her regain her confidence.

Adolescent period : This is a stormy period in child's physiological and psycho-social development. The adolescent is confused and worried towards his natural ambivalent feelings of pain vs pleasure ; dependence vs independence ; fear vs strong desire to rebel, etc. He is

awkward in motor coordination and emotional reactions and becomes extremely sensitive. Another important aspect of this period is the integration of sex into personality pattern and his frequent use of self as a sexual object. This in turn makes him feel guilty giving rise to a conflict which becomes difficult for him to resolve by himself. The adolescent longs for sensible adult in whom he can confide without being ridiculed. Proper understanding and guidance can prevent delinquency and other mental disorders at this age.

Involuntal period : Psychotic breakdown is more frequent at terminal period than at any other age. This is partly due to declining activity of endocrine and reproductive glands and degenerative changes in the brain, but more is due to economic dependency leading to frustration, threats and conflicts. Aging process is really physiologic and psychologic and not chronologic. There are some people who feel they are old at the age of 50 and others feel young even at 70-80 years of age. The realisation of old age may precipitate the spells of rejection like being told, 'you are no more needed or wanted' and as a consequence attitudes of self-pity, 'dispair, childish dependency and resigned apathy are created. From the age of 40, the people must be advised to cultivate hobbies, interests and absorbing skills to lend zest and personal significance during their declining period of life. Our country is showing an increase in the number of people who live to become old. The security of joint-family for the old is disappearing gradually giving rise to the need for Homes and Clubs for the aged in the community. The old must be helped towards retaining their usefulness in the society.

Large family : A large family is a drain on mother's emotional

resources which indirectly affects the whole family. To meet the basic need of each child in an average family of 6-members becomes a nightmare. Parents make great efforts to meet the biological needs and prevent communicable diseases and accidents but starve the children of emotional needs, or pay very little attention on emotional traumas causing the hidden scars. The parents need to understand the importance of immunisation against emotional disturbances by meeting child's psycho-social needs, the **NEED FOR SECURITY** by being genuinely loved by parents and the **NEED FOR SELF-ESTEEM** by being recognised and respected as an individual in the family. These two needs are very important to be met in early childhood towards a balanced personality. The parents need to understand the normal pattern of emotional and intellectual development and psycho-social needs at different stages of child's growth. Parents with large families tend to be overdemanding or overpunitive towards the children due to their own anxiety. This kind of attitude needs self-development, initiative and independence of thought in a child, hampers the emergence of that uniqueness which makes personality and results in emotional disturbances. The parents need guidance in understanding their own behaviour and its possible ill-effects on the child.

Only child/Adopted child : Overprotection is a common phenomenon in bringing up this child. Over-anxious mothers are prone to do every thing for him, protect him from even minor hurts, and do not offer him independence for his normal development. Such a mother needs help to understand the causes of her anxiety and an encouragement to permit the child to have wide range of activities within proper safeguard.

Handicapped Child : Mechanics of guilt operates in most of the parents of such children. This guilt complex is evident from parent's anxiety-ridden questions concerning the child whom they tend to overprotect. These parents need understanding and helpful explanation.

tion of the child. This will minimise their own anxiety and help the child to grow and mature in a manner comparable to that of his peers except for his disabled part.

Motor deprivation: A child may be deprived of mother's protection during infancy for various reasons like mother's death; long illness; long absence for some reason; or mother's rejection of the child. Separation of mother is significant during the second half of the first year or first half of the second year. "Any prolonged deprivation of young child may have grave and far reaching effects on his character and so on his future". Therefore, besides emphasising the importance of mother substitute in her absence, the stress must be laid on planned parenthood to safeguard the health of the family.

Chronic illness: There are many emotional, social and economic implications in the care of chronically ill patient who is being looked after in the family. The family and the patient need to understand the limitations and necessary restrictions towards its treatment and progress. Continued warmth and interest are necessary to the well-being of such a case. The patient and his family need to be helped in helping themselves in his nursing care and prevention of further complications.

Acute, fatal, Venereal diseases or Tuberculosis, all cause mental distress in the family and need appropriate emotional support; referring to the institution for its treatment and providing continuity of care in the family.

Keeping all the above situations in view, the role of public health nurse seems to be very vital in promotion of mental health and prevention of mental illness in the community. Here she gets an opportunity to visit each home and participate in creating an atmosphere of mutual trust, tolerance, security and understanding which is so essential for optimum mental health.

A public health nurse also helps the family in adopting a favourable

attitude towards stress situations to accept the reality and plan the future objectively within the available resources.

Nurses working in the community have to modify the beliefs of general public towards mental illness, its prevention, treatment, prognosis and rehabilitation. She lays emphasis on the fact that the well-being of human organism depends not only on freedom from pathological micro-organisms but on freedom from humiliation, terror and helplessness as well. She also informs the public about the mental health services available in the community like Child Guidance Clinics; Marriage and Family Counselling Bureaux; Rehabilitation Centres; Juvenile courts; Psychiatric out-patient departments, clinics and hospitals; Day centres and Homes for mentally retarded, etc.

Finally a public health nurse has a research role to observe and record the milieu in which emotional adjustment tend to occur in normal life situations. Addition of this knowledge in the field of young psychiatry will go a long way in prevention of mental illness in the community.

LIVE LONGER

New Delhi—Life expectancy has increased from 32 years to 52.6 years and the death rate has decreased to 14 from 27.4 per 1,000 of population since independence, according to an official press release.

The infant mortality rate now is estimated at 113 per 1,000 live births as against 133 about two decades ago.

The number of doctors has increased from 47,500 in 1947 to 1,05,000, of nurses from 7,000 to 66,000 and of midwives from 5,000 to 52,000.

As against 6669 hospitals and dispensaries in 1947 their number has increased to 14,580 and the number of beds has increased from 80,163 to 263,380.

The country also has 6,000 health visitors. The number of medical colleges has increased from 25 in 1947 to 95, increasing the admission capacity from 2,000 students to 11,800.

Hospital Image (Contd. f. p. 44)

ment in good conditions; (4) those that provide for the patients mental comfort and peace of mind; and (5) those that have to do with the patients rehabilitation.³

I am convinced that the professional nurses want to do nursing for which they should be given enough of freedom to practice nursing in the hospital and in the community. If there is coordination among the doctors and other members of the health team the public would understand the important role of the nurse. Some of the problems such as poor utilization of nursing personnel, non-nursing duties, treatments requiring preparation away from the bed-side etc. will have to be removed. The nursing profession should see that it keeps pace with the advances, faces its own problems, solve them in the light of today's situation and prepare for the future.

Miss Marion Murphy has said: "Only with a truly professional education can a nurse meet the society's needs and maintain its strength at a time when the general educational level of the population is rising constantly. The basic education for the professional nurse should be secured in a programme that provides for the intellectual, technical and cultural components of both the professional and liberal education⁴.

At present the nursing profession, above all things, requires organization. The nurses, above all other things, require to be united.

Reference

1. Margaret Lindsey, *The Teaching Profession, 1961 New Horizons for the Teaching profession, National Education Association of the United States Washington, D.C. 1961, p. 8.*
2. *The Grand Council of International Council of Nurses, International Code of Nursing, Sao Paulo, Brazil, July 10th 1953.*
3. *American Hospital Association and National League of Nursing Education, Hospital Nursing Service Manual National League for Nursing, 10 Columbus Circle, New York, 1950 P. 18.*
4. *Murphy, Marion Director of the School of Public Health, University of Minnesota, in an address entitled "Preparation of students for nursing tomorrow"—1961).*