

RED CROSS NURSING

By Daisy M. H. Das

NURSING is a natural instinct, which is evident in all living creatures, both gentle and predatory. It is an art which has existed with its measureless antiquity since the dawn of history and has gradually developed into a well recognized profession. Women in all lands have nursed their sick children, men and wounded folks. But as certain women dedicated and devoted their lives more to the care of the sick and adopted care of the sick and the needy as their "calling", which did not require any scientific preparation and special training but willingness to serve the sick with devotion irrespective of the caste and creed, race and nationality of the patient. The profession came to be known as a noble profession. It remained so without any solid background until the appearance of Miss Florence Nightingale on the scene who founded the "Modern Nursing Profession" which now requires an extensive preparation.

Red Cross and Nursing

Jean Henri Dunant, a Swiss Banker, succeeded in turning his dream into a reality. He was the founder of the Red Cross and brought about the Geneva Convention and so founded the International Committee of the Red Cross. It was after the Franco-Prussian War in 1872, when he visited London to read his paper on the work of this newly formed society of which he was the founder, he paid a great tribute to one woman by saying: "Though I am known as the great founder of the Red Cross and the originator of the Convention of Geneva, it is to an English woman that all the honour of the convention is due. What inspired me to go to Italy during the War in 1859, was the work of Miss Florence Nightingale in the Crimea." So from the compassionate hearts and brilliant minds of Henri Dunant and Miss Nightingale sprang the most famous philanthropic movements—International Red Cross and Modern Nursing, the activities of which are indispensable and inseparable. Red Cross cannot function without a devoted band of workers. No organization or institution dealing with sick and wounded can survive progressively without having an efficient nursing service. Both services are essential for the suffering humanity, but nursing service to which are entrusted the principles of Red Cross is most essential branch of the Red Cross Society.

Foundation of Red Cross Nursing

As a result of the recommendations by the International Congress of 1863, the First Geneva Convention was held from 8th August to 26th August, the same year, when the Red Cross was born. Miss Florence Nightingale prepared a full set of recommendations which was brought by the English Delegation to this convention. Many of the recommendations were incorporated in the basic principles of the new organization. Henri Dunant despite getting his inspiration

from a nurse's work, had not realized the importance of nursing. In his plans for the sick and the wounded in times of war and disaster, services of stretcher bearers and dressers, presumably men, who were known as volunteers, but were actually recruited from local hospitals, had been mentioned. However, no mention of nurses trained or untrained had been made. Nevertheless nursing was passed in the resolution: "On the demand, or with the concurrence of the military authority the Committee shall send volunteer nurses to the field of battle, where they will be under the direction of a military chief." Miss Nightingale became a life member and supported wholeheartedly. She disfavoured the practice of giving brief courses to volunteer nurses who were to serve during War and other disasters. After 1900, similar to other Red Cross Societies, the British Red Cross too developed courses in elementary nursing and first aid. Volunteer Aid Detachments whose members were required to work under qualified nurses, were also organised. But for most countries that signed the Geneva Convention after 1864, the word 'Voluntary' led to some confusion between the two movements in Britain and Europe. The word meant unpaid and as a rule 'Amateur Nurse.' In Britain and her dominions trained nurses were part of the army and navy, whereas most national societies were expected to provide voluntary workers.

Red Cross Insignia

The famous Article, known as the Geneva Convention or Treaty were adopted at its second meeting. The Articles are actually nine in all, but a section of the last article which refers to the details of procedures is sometimes referred to as the 10th Article. The Article provides for the neutrality of all hospitals, ambulances, supplies equipment and personnel. The armies were to regard all military hospitals as safe zones; while their staff i.e. doctors, nurses and other personnel were to give services to all wounded, irrespective of their race or nationality. An adoption of a uniform flag for hospitals and ambulances, accompanied by the national flags; also a badge and uniform were considered for the protection of all personnel. This insignia was a modification of the colours of the Swiss national flag. So, the insignia came to be a red cross on a white ground for the Red Cross Society. And hence the emblem for the flag and arm-band was also to be of Red Cross on a white ground. The decision was to put the insignia of the society conspicuously on all ambulances, equipments and accountments of all hospital services. The motto was "*Inter Arma Caritas*".

League of Red Cross Societies

During World War I, strained relationship between professional nurses and untrained volunteers were obviously reflected in the nursing care of the wounded soldiers and civilian population who needed care and treatment. So, at the end of the war an important meeting was held in Cannes in France and the League of Red Cross Societies was organized as a voluntary federation of national societies. The purpose was to

improve the services of the national societies and to interchange information, thereby provide a channel for mutual help in times of war and disaster. The group also decided to pay more constant attention to various community services. The work of the Red Cross Societies was expanded both at national and international levels. The preparation of personnel, both professional and non-professional, was strengthened. The standard for basic professional preparation as recommended by the International Council of Nurses were also endorsed. The distinction between trained professional nurses, Red Cross aids and other auxiliary workers in general was clarified. The first trained professional nurse, Miss Alice Fitzgerald (USA) was made in-charge of the Nursing Bureau of the LORCS at its headquarters in Geneva. The first step taken by LORCS was to establish an International Course in nursing at Bedford College in London in collaboration with the Royal College of Nursing. Later, a series of annual International Post-basic Courses in Public Health Nursing were organized there. Shortly afterwards another series of courses were added in nursing administration and nursing education.

In 1920, the General Council in their Resolution No. 27 laid down that the three main duties of National Societies were : (i) to stimulate and maintain interest in public health ; (ii) to support and if need be, supplement the work of the government agencies ; (iii) and to disseminate useful knowledge and information about health education. However by 1930, the pilot purpose of the LORCS for which these courses were organized and created had been achieved. As the League was facing financial difficulties to support these projects, the International Council of Nurses in their Congress in 1933 decided to augment the finances of the League by forming the Florence Nightingale International Foundation. The aims of this institution as officially defined were : "to establish and maintain a permanent International Memorial to Miss Florence Nightingale in the form of an endowment for post graduate nursing education either in continuation of post-graduate courses for nurses, hitherto organized by the LORCS or otherwise, and also to maintain and develop facilities for post-graduate education for selected nurses for all countries". With the foundation of this institution the ties between Red Cross and Nursing Profession were further strengthened. By 1934, 240 nurses were granted scholarships for post basic studies in London. Study visits for short duration to Belgium, France, Poland and Great Britain were also organized by the LORCS. Later, realizing the value of these courses many national societies and organizations provided scholarships for their own candidates whereas many candidates paid for their studies. Simultaneously, facilities for post basic education in nursing at university level were also developed in many countries. The same year the League was relieved from all the responsibilities of running and financing these international courses in London. However, the League continued its representation along with ICN on the

governing body of the Florence Nightingale International Foundation.

Nursing Education

Breaking through indifference and routine, Miss Nightingale had made it very clear that hospitals are built by human beings for human beings. She wanted nurses to be equipped professionally and morally to carry out the two-fold missions of nursing and health education. She was equally concerned with patient's health and his social care. She refused to regard nursing as being limited to caring for the sick. She found the schools of nursing most inadequate to meet this need. She wanted to pioneer the way towards public health and district nursing. In support of her views, she once said : "Follow the people to their homes."

At academic level too, the League has done every thing possible to help promote advance instructions for nurses, both in advisory capacity and as a direct intermediary between member societies. It has recommended students for study grants ; kept national societies informed of study grants made available by Red Cross and other organizations, arranged study visits with the societies concerned and assisted them in the organization of refresher courses to keep them up-to-date with the latest trends in nursing education.

Home Nursing

Owing to scientific progress and development in various therapeutic and prophylactic work, demand for qualified nurses is rapidly growing. Their necessity to perform those tasks that no one else can perform adds to the general shortage of nurses all over the world and this is a most critical problem. The national societies, in order to overcome this problem impart essential knowledge on elementary rules of preventative hygiene, and teach simple home nursing care. This course is known "Home Nursing" and is taught by specially trained instructors to small batches of voluntary workers who wish to help patients while they await medical assistance.

Expert assistance is given to all national societies to spread information and knowledge of this course which is based on modern teaching methods. The assistance primarily consists of giving instructions to those who in turn may train and instruct others and thus spread health education to the general public. The course is open to all people and even to the blind and the deaf. Home nursing manuals have been published in Braille also.

Duties of Nursing Bureau

The Nursing Bureau is guided by the Nursing Advisory Committee, which consists of a 15-20 member societies who meet every second year. The Bureau is responsible for organizing Committee meetings and for carrying out all decisions which are recommended by

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