



Student Status in Nursing

Sheila Monteiro

STUDENT status in nursing has been the subject of conversation among the intellectuals of our profession so far. It is my intention, through this article, to convey to the student nurse (to whom this topic should be of utmost concern) the importance and necessity of becoming aware of this trend in nursing.

Student status in nursing is a complex idea which cannot be explained by a mere definition. Student status will have to be a process, an event involving time, since it will comprise many ideas and many facets. I shall endeavour to explain this idea concisely through the following points.

(1) A candidate for nursing who enters training would have the minimum qualification of P.U.C. or its equivalent.

(2) The student will pay for the tuition and also for board and lodging (if hostel facilities—which should not be obligatory are required). There would, therefore, be no obligation to serve the bond with the institution, where they are trained, after the academic career.

(3) The syllabus of the student nurses would require a sound theoretical background with sufficient clinical experience to furnish the student nurses with the necessary skills. They would practise in the wards, under the supervision of a clinical instructor.

(4) The students' duty will not be at unearthly hours. For experience in night duty, the student nurse will get such postings to aid the staff nurse on duty and for observation in dealing with emergencies, etc., which night duty usually entails.

(5) Vacation will include both summer and winter holidays besides

public holidays, sick and examination leave.

(6) Every year the University will hold an examination.

(7) After the academic career, a nurse will be required to do an internship for one year, according to the discretion of the examining authority. After this only, they will be eligible for registration as a Nurse with the Nursing Council.

During the period of internship, the nurse, now fully equipped with theoretical knowledge required for (legally) nursing a patient, will work (but under supervision) as an employee of the Hospital. Granted the intern nurse will not be as efficient and skilled as not to require the guidance of an experienced nurse. I am sure you will agree that whatever the intern nurse does for the patient, will be done with the full knowledge of its implications. In the course of the internship, they naturally become familiar with ward routine and thus acquire more proficiency. At the end of the internship, a nurse, will be more efficient, intelligent and mature; a nurse able to skillfully, efficiently nurse a patient as a "person with an illness".

Of course, there are two sides to every coin. I will now give the drawbacks of the system:

(1) If sufficient and good clinical instructors are not available for the guidance of the students, and intern nurses, more harm, than good may be done.

(2) If the idea of student status is misunderstood by the student, there is a danger that student nurses will not feel the importance of dealing with human life. This, in turn, will be the cause for creating apprehension among the patients.

(3) There is also the danger that once student status has been achieved, many young people are likely to be attracted to the profession for the sole reason of acquiring

a status. Nursing as a career based on compassion for the sick and suffering may be overlooked and this may lead to a sorry state of affairs.

How plausible the evolution of this idea will be, depends on the role today's student nurses play as also the interest of tutors and Principals. It is in our hands to change the poor state of affairs, existing in our profession and liberate ourselves from the chains of convention and past structures.

To begin with this idea is already crystallising into a reality. There are many colleges of Nursing in various parts of the country. Post-basic and post-graduate courses are also available. Two years courses for students, who have completed bachelor's degrees have also commenced.

The student nurse should realise that it is vital that society be made aware of these changes. The nursing profession has always been termed as mediocre by our society. It has never had a status in the society in India. This is not because 80% of our people are illiterate. In fact, the illiterate have a high regard and healthy respect for us who tend them. It is the educated or the elite of the Indian society who regard nurses as glorified servants.

By selecting students from P.U.C. level, one would get a more mature person, belonging to an educated society where they can have more voice. The fact that they pay for the training imparted will afford them a sense of dignity, with more vocations, restricted hours of duty etc. the student nurse will have plenty of time to indulge in extra curricular activities which will broaden the outlook.

I hope I have been able to give you an idea of the much talked subject of studentship. It is evident that by building up the student status, we will lay the foundation for the status of the nursing profession, as a whole. With the tremendous progress science is making today, nursing thus elevated should be able to cope up with the changes and needs of the society in which we live. "The future of the Earth is in our hands. What shall we decide?"

Miss Sheila Monteiro is a third year student, at St. Martha's Hospital, Bangalore.