

The Public Health Nurse in Mental Health Programme

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"Mental Health denotes the emotional stability and intellectual efficiency of the members of a Society." The World Federation for Mental Health (1947) defined mental Health "as a condition which permits the optimal development of physical, intellectual and emotional aspects of the individual, which are comparable to that of another." The Society in which one lives is an organised structure and the culture it depicts, is one of enlightenment and refinement of taste acquired by intellectual and aesthetic training. A good society is thus, one that allows, development of its members with ability to tolerate other societies. Society, or the social structure, is constantly changing; and in this change which brings in its wake a constant conflict between competing roles and relationships of members, some may turn out to be misfits in the society. Genes possess the potential for growth and development in an individual and at the same time set limits to the extent that he (she) can develop. The physical and psychological development in a person, determined by his (her) genetic inheritance, interacts with the external environment to manifest in the full development of his (her) personality. Therefore, people who are deprived either genetically, or by the forces in external environment, and are thus unable to adjust themselves to the everchanging demands, form the core of the mentally ill population.

Mental health disorders form a broad spectrum: they range from mild emotional problems on one end to gross maladjustment requiring prolonged counselling, psychotherapy, chemotherapy and even occasional institutionalisation on the other. Mental Health programmes have thus two sides. The first is the therapeutic or the remedial side which cures or temporarily controls the disorder while the other is preventive aspect which attempts to deal with likely factors causing mental conflicts and breakdown.

Though the etiology of any one particular mental disorder is not known for certain, modern psychology affords ample scope for psycho-analysis and psychotherapy. The causative organism for mental illness having not been identified, many workers in the field of mental hygiene feel that the society or the social structure is responsible to a certain degree for the maladjustments seen in and around. The Psychologists and Psychiatrists of the Freudian School and those who seek more unified organismic account seem to be divided in their opinions. Lund³ referring to Terhune, states that "The conclusion is inescapable that all

mental disorders are the result of disturbances in normal physiology, the whole doubtless influenced by disturbing environmental and genetic factors."

In a developing country like ours where the rapid social and industrial changes are taking place, creating various complexities of our day to day life, the stress, strain and tension one is subjected to are on the increase. Along with the joint family system, the former sense of security in the individual seems to be on the decline, resulting in development of unfavourable attitudes and failures in social adjustments. The all-pervading indiscipline amongst the youth, the strikes etc., and the increasing crime and suicidal rates are perhaps the obvious reflections of mental ill health present in our community.

Every nurse owes it to the community to conserve the mental health of patients under her care, and it is all the more so in the case of a nurse providing Community Nursing Services. The public health nurse during her daily routine either in clinics or during home visits, comes into contact with individuals of all age groups. Equipped with adequate skills in different aspects of nursing and nursing care and knowledge in behavioural sciences, the P.H.N. can help an individual in striking a balance between his personality and his environment thus enabling him to live harmoniously with his fellow beings. It can be expected that the nurse who has the necessary technical knowledge and know-how can contribute a great deal towards positive mental health in a critical situation.

From cradle to grave each one is called upon to adjust to several situations, some real and other imaginary. A public health nurse holds an unique position in the community because of the long and lasting relationship she maintains with families under her care on the one hand, and the technical support she receives from the different specialists in the health team on the other. The rapport she has established with any family will stand here in good stead in the community in contributing to the overall well-being of the community as a diagnostic observer and assisting the specific age groups through the basic health services.

Work in mental health field should be a cooperative venture, be it prevention, therapeutic care or research. Though the roles of the members of the health team are clearly defined, the Nurse owing to her availability round-the-clock has often to take the place of a friend, guide and philosopher and also that of a therapist for quick recovery of the mentally ill patients under her care. Every action, behaviour, or an attitude of the patient or the individual is a meaningful response which needs to be taken care of in promoting positive mental health.

Public Health Nurse in the community, unlike her counterpart in the institution providing therapeutic care, is expected to contribute in the prevention and non-recurrence of mental illness in the community she serves. In the community mental health team, the

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nurse plays an important role through the liaison she maintains between the patient, (family) and other health welfare agencies. She guides the patient, and other members in the family in providing a congenial environment to meet the physical, social, psychological and religious needs of the individual and thus facilitate his quick recovery and easy and early rehabilitation.

In Maternal and Child Health Services, the public health nurse during the field visits is expected to contact mothers during all the stages of natal care and encourage them to talk about their fears, anxieties, and emotional problems. She guides and helps to resolve these problems and encourages them to find solutions and follow the advice with the help of the family members. The children of various ages are also, screened and assessed and thus helped to maintain steady growth and development in terms of nutrition, habit formations, play and emotional adjustments. Deviations from the accepted norms are immediately noticed and brought to the attention of the family, and the assistance of other members of the health team is sought to help the child adjust within the family and in the society.

School Health Nursing Service is another field where the Public Health Nurse in the community can contribute much. The close liaison she maintains with the teachers and the family members facilitates the physical examinations of children at school and at home. Deviant behaviour from the established norms are treated sympathetically and early identification of the problems will go a long way to facilitate counseling, making arrangements for chemotherapy, continued care and supervision by specialists. Fear, guilt complex, delinquency, truancy, tendencies for lying and stealing etc. are often overcome by the students by close association with and constant advices of the nurse in the community providing School Nursing Services.

A nurse in Industrial Health Service too, is at an advantageous position to contribute much in the mental health aspects of the employees. Here she is aware of the probable environmental hazards affecting the health of an individual, and this observation helps her to help the individual, his family and his dependants to overcome the stress and strain and feel free from anxiety.

The public health nurse in the community, besides her therapeutic role, educates the public with greater emphasis on the causes of mental illness, ways of early recognition of emotional disorders, social maladjustments contributing to mental ill health. She helps the community in understanding the psycho-social factors which cause maladjustments and emphasizes how each individual can foster mental health and emotional stability right from childhood, and help those unfortunate few by referring them to the correct source from where help can be obtained.

Finally the public health nurse makes the people recognize the contribution an individual can make to the nation if he is emotionally stable and possesses positive attitudes towards self, society and work.

The contribution that Public Health Nurse can make in community nursing programmes is thus indisputable and she carries the beacon of light leading from ignorance to knowledge in the field of health. She helps them to strengthen their minds in addition to their physical strength, leading to healthy relationships with a balanced personality.

Reference :

1. Ernest W.B. : *Mental Health in Modern Society*-N.W. Norton and Company.
2. John A.L. : *The Nurse in Mental Health Practice*-World Health Organisation 1963-Public Health Paper 22.
3. Lund Fredric : K.H. and Glosser, Harry, J.—*Nature of Mental illness*-Education November 1957-L 154-165.
4. May A.R. Kahn, J. H. Cronkahn—*Mental Health of Adolescents and Young persons*—World Health Organisation 1971. Public Health Paper 41.
5. Patel H.W. : "Role of the Nurse in Mental Health" Paper read during Mental Health Week-Sponsored by Indian Council of Social Welfare and Faculty of Social Work, Baroda University, January, 1973.

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3. Dusty rooms are always harmful; remove useless articles of furniture, curtains, ornaments, etc. A damp cloth should be used for cleaning instead of an ordinary broom and duster.

4. Keep your teeth clean and in good order, so that you can chew and digest your food properly.

5. Plenty of nourishing and easily digested food is necessary. Milk is especially valuable, and three pints of milk should be taken daily, together with plenty of butter, margarine, dripping, etc. Eat as much fat meat, bacon, kippers, and other fatty foods as you can comfortably digest.

6. Rest for at least three quarters of an hour before and after meals.

7. Learn to take your own temperature night and morning, and notice whether you get at all feverish. Whenever your temperature is 99°, stay quietly in bed until it is normal again.

(b) To avoid giving the disease to others.

1. The sputum or spit is especially dangerous, as it contains the living germ of the disease. Be careful not to spit just anywhere, spit only into pieces of newspapers of paper handkerchiefs and burn these as soon as convenient. When out of doors put the soiled papers into a paper bag until you return home or else use a pocket spitting bottle.

2. Kissing should be avoided. Use your own plate, cup, etc., these articles should be boiled before being washed with the household crockery, or else washed separately.

3. Sleep in a separate bed in a room by yourself. The disease may be conveyed to a healthy person through sleeping with a consumptive—for example a wife sleeping with a consumptive husband.