

# The Role of the Nurse in School Health Programme

By Reena Bose

With the advancement of medical services and the changing concept of nursing the role of the nurse is fast changing. In some advanced countries the nurse is delegated with certain functions which hitherto were the domain of medical men. Further, a nurse today is expected to possess more knowledge and understanding and function more independently. The image of a Public Health Nurse and her function and responsibilities have undergone considerable change.

School Health Nursing is a chapter in community Health Programme which provides a wider scope for the Public Health Nurse for nursing practices. The success of the programme depends greatly on the nurse who with her depth of knowledge, understanding and initiative should be able to interpret the programme. Unfortunately today the school health programme is not given its due importance and it forms part as one of the many responsibilities of the Public Health Nurse.

The Public Health Nurse attached to a health centre is expected to carry out school health service for the area along with the medical officer who is often occupied with the clinic service. Thus running of a clinic or visiting a newborn is of more importance to the nurse than the school health service. She visits the school when she can find time more for completing the record and furnishing a report than for any useful service. Her duties are confined to checking of heights and weights of children and rarely she finds time for health talks.

The School Health Nurse posted at the district school health unit helps the medical officer of the unit in supervisory work. Therefore, no nurse at any level provides an adequate school health service to the

schools. The school health programme is the most neglected chapter of the community health service.

Let us now analyse the role of the Public Health Nurse in the school health programme.

(1) The school health team usually includes teachers, parents, doctors and nurses. Where there is no social worker or health educator, the nurse also assumes their role. In the team the nurse by virtue of her role in the community possesses the most intimate knowledge and understanding of the home condition, health practices and attitude of the child's family. Therefore, she is in an advantageous position to interpret a child's needs to the teacher and the whole programme to the parents and then to the community. Success of the programme therefore largely depends on her. One of the major role of the nurse is to serve as a liaison among the school, the home and the community at large. She helps bridge the gap between what the child learns at school and practices at home. For example a child learns to discard wastes in a basket, but at home there is none provided and as a result the child throws waste out through the window. A nurse on her home visit explains this to the parents and suggests remedial measures. Her suggestions will be readily acceptable if the parents are familiar with the school health programme and have good confidence in the nurse. Thus the inter-personnel relationship among the nurse, the parent and the teacher, the nurse is able to build has a profound effect on the programme.

(2) The nurse is the co-ordinator of the whole school health programme. She helps to organise the programme according to the convenience of the school. She explains to the teachers their role and

the extent of co-operation expected of them. She ensures that the school authorities inform the parents in time so that they can actively participate. During her home visits the nurse speaks to the family about the school health programme as well.

(3) The nurse acts as a counsellor and educator of health. She provides guidance to the teachers and parents in the matter of health. While working in school, she becomes one of the co-operative members of the staff and discusses health problems with the teachers. She clarifies their doubts and helps build up a sound knowledge about health in them. She helps them plan health talks and encourages them to introduce more learning activities such as—cleaning of classrooms, inspection of nails and hair, making of health charts etc. She guides them in the maintenance of health records, weighing and measuring of heights and detection of simple defects. She guides the teachers in providing healthy school living conditions. The school health nurse sees to the total improvement of all conditions that may affect health of the children. She explains to the parents the defects detected in their wards and explains the community resources for its correction. She counsels them on home adjustment of the child. She ensures that the parents know all about the immunization schedule of a child and also regarding child nutrition. She instructs them on cheap but substantial school tiffin. She also discusses particular health problems of the school at the periodic meetings of parent-teacher association and encourages them to find out the solution.

(4) Along with all these vital functions, the nurse provides certain services for the school.

(i) Before the medical officer arrives, she ensures that all the health cards are properly filled up. She screens the defective children for medical check-up except where it is an initial health appraisal which is to be done by the medical officer.

(Contd. on page 286)