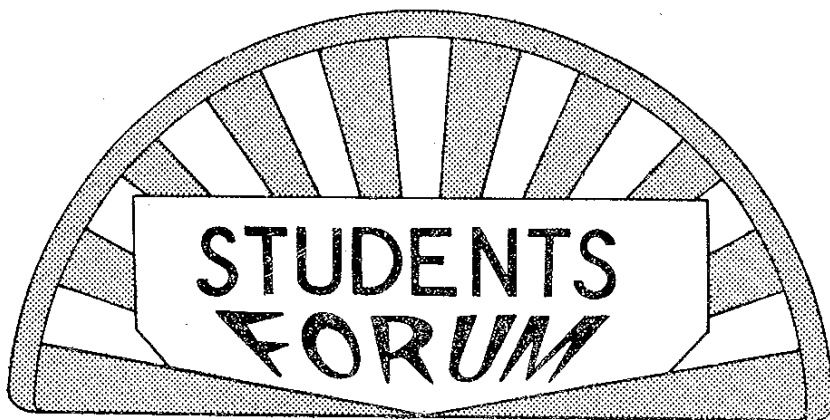




Role of a nurse in psychiatric field

By Denise Rita Pinto*

The nurse in the field of psychiatric nursing is required to be an ideal machine where she has to maintain a high standard of physical and mental health. She is required to recognise the need to approach patients as persons whose problems are more than those of mere physical illness. The psychiatric nurse is professionally educated so that she can work with patients and understand why mentally sick persons act the way they do.

The attitude of the psychiatric nurse is also a significant factor in the recovery of the patient which requires her to have strength, a strong will and adequate knowledge. In the early days of nursing the main job of the nurse was to fetch and carry. Her feet were her most important equipment. As nursing techniques developed, her hands became more important. Then came emphasis on knowledge of anatomy, physiology, pharmacology. Now she is also required to study social sciences. In the specialised field like psychiatric nursing it is her brain, her psychological and spiritual make-up that are the most important factors.

'Man is born social by nature.' Each individual develops a pattern of life as he grows up. No two persons have exactly the same mental make-up. He has to make adjustments in the life from birth to

death maintaining a balance between his needs and the external constraints of life. One of the dominant psychological need of the individual is to gain security and acceptance by others in the society. Our attitude can do much to make a patient feel secure and protected. A patient may enter the hospital filled with tears for his own safety, or for the safety of his family, and we can help him by explaining the ward situation in which he will live, answering his questions, referring him to other sources for help and being there when he needs us. Just as a child feels secure when he knows he is in the same room with his mother, the patient feels secure knowing that a nurse is within sight of him at all hours.

It is unfortunate that the general attitude of the public to the mentally sick persons is different than to medical, surgical or gynaecological patients. Psychiatric cases are perceived with a strong current of emotions, uneasiness and fear. Psychiatric cases are considered as incurable and a social stigma is attached to it. There are diseases like leukaemia, hypertension, diabetes mellitus, cirrhosis of liver, bronchial asthma where the patient has to live with the illness for years struggling with the disease with the help of medicines. One fails to understand why do they label the psychiatric illness as incurable and curse the psychiatric patient. Illness whether it is physical, mental or social threa-

tens the individual in making satisfactory adjustment to his day-to-day life and it is only natural that he loses his confidence when the illness is persistent and he is faced with a constant stress.

The fundamental duty of a nurse is to plan the nursing care of the patient. Without the plan of nursing care she is like a tailor without his scissors. In psychiatric nursing the need of an organised nursing care plan is all the more important because we have to deal with patients who are to be treated with drugs as well as other psychotherapeutic procedures. The psychiatric nursing care involves the use of attitudes in giving patients opportunities to regain their health and to learn good health habits. Just as we apply dressings and give specific medications, we have to use the attitudes of love, security and approval so that the recovery of the patient is facilitated. She is supposed to know the various modes of management of the mental patients. The hypoactive, exuberant maniac patient requires periods of rest. The hyperactive depressed patient needs words of encouragement to come out of himself and his blue moods. As the thief is afraid of the word 'jail', the patient is frightened of the word 'hospital'. The nurse is required to act in a manner that the patient feels protected. It is her presence plus her understanding and easy availability that gives the patient a feeling of security and protection.

Mental peace does not come in capsules. The psychiatric patient needs something more than a capsule. Apart from the drugs he requires attitudes of helpfulness, understanding and encouragement. The psychiatric patients act often like small children. When people become ill they often discard adult standards of behavior. The nurse in this field is not only one who gives the pill to the patient, not only one who makes the bed of the patient, not only one who picks and collects the blood. She does all these jobs and is sometimes more than these.

She is a mother who showers affections,

She is a candle which burns in the dark,

(Contd. on page 42)

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