HANDICAPPED CHILDREN

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TODAY'S children are tomorrow's citizens. A healthy child will be healthy citizen. To enjoy good health is the birth right of every child. According to W.H.O., "Health is the complete state of well-being of an individual physically, mentally and socially and not merely the absence of diseases or infirmity". Does a handicapped child fall in this group? Does he enjoy good health in his life? A handicap can be devastating to the individual, his family and the community and it takes its toll in nation's productivity. Can anyone help him to be useful in this world? The answer is yes. He should be well cared for and trained to be a useful citizen. At present there are 45 million handicapped persons in the world. The greatest need of a handicapped child is for comprehensive health services and continuing care.

Meanings, terms and definitions

The word handicapped means a thing placed at a disadvantageous position. Handicapped children are those children who are at a disadvantageous position as compared the normal ones.

In the specific term, handicapped children means crippled with orthopadic disabilities neurological disabilities like cerebral palsy and paralegia etc. Comprehensively defined, it denotes those groups which are blind, deaf, orthopoedically handicapped including cerebral palsy cases and mentally difficient or retarded. According to W.H.O. physically handicapped children are based on the causes of their handicaps namely congenital deformation, war-injuries, injury due to accidents malnourishment and illness.

From above meanings and definitions we are aware of different factors relating to handicapped children and where the child will have to live within the limitations placed upon him by his condition.

Classification of handicapped children

Congenital—The child is born with deformities which may lead him to be handicapped, e.g. Absence of a hand or foot due to malformation.

Acquired —The child acquires a handicap during his life due to diseases, accidents, poisoning and infections diseases like small-pox and poliomyelitis.

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Again they are classified as physically, mentally and socially handicapped children. Physically handicapped children are those that are blind, deaf, mute, lame or having loss of any limb and heart diseases. Mentally handicapped children are those mentally retarded. They may be idiots, imbecile, morones or dull. This may be due to cerebral palsy and epilepsy. Socially handicapped children are juvenile delinquents, truants, runaway children, they are often children from broken homes, they indulge into smoking, drinking alchohol.

Aims of care of handicapped children

1. To restore him to self reliance in daily life.
2. To rehabilitate the child so that he will be able to settle down in the society.
3. To help him to be able to do his routine work such as eating, dressing and going to school as other normal children of his age and sex are doing.
4. To prepare him to be independent for a living securing a proper job for him.
5. To help him to seek medical, physical educational, emotional, mental and vocational training in vocational school or sheltered workshops.
6. To make the community to realise that a handicapped can be a useful citizen and there is a place for him in the society.
7. To use the potentialities of the child and use it properly.

As the population increases the number of handicapped children also increases. Now let us see how to fulfil the aims and how to take care of such children. Care should be taken at different levels and by different people, care of the handicapped children is not one man's job, but it is a team work. The team consists of a doctor, a nurse, a physiotherapist, an occupational therapist, a social worker, a speech therapist, a neurologist, an orthopedic surgeon, a plastic surgeon and a specially trained teacher. Every person in this team is important. Action can be taken at international level. W.H.O. along with other organisations should focus their attention on prevention of disability from childhood. It should develop the socio-economic condition of the developing countries to enable them to educate and rehabilitate the handicapped children. It should assist to improve conditions for disabled ones in developing countries. It should maintain

good cooperation and world peace among all nations avoiding violence and war. It is also very important to adopt policy and provide the facilities to the handicapped.

At National level:

(1) Find aut the causes of handicap and take necessary steps to prevent them. It was found previously that most of the blindness was due to smallpox and now it is irradicated. Malnutrition is another problem. Effort should be made to supplement nutrition through school health programme. Vitamin A should be supplied freely. Immunization against communicable diseases should be carried out.

(2) Recognition of the handicapped children.

(3) Child health centres and child guidance clinics to teach the mothers about diet, feeding and personal hygiene of the child.

(4) Separate provision in the budgets for the care of the handicapped children.

(5) More schools for the blind, deaf & mute.

(6) Workshops to train them.

At State level:

(1) Adoption of above responsibilities and providing them with proper jobs.

(2) Job reservation, enforcement of such laws to utilise the handicapped personnel in different areas like industries if they have the required training.

(3) Maintenance of proper training schools specially for the blind, deaf and mute with sufficient training staff.

(4) Day care centres: Rehabilitation at non residential basis.

(5) Physiotherapy and occupational therapy centres.

(6) Diagnostic activities—child guidance clinics and hospitals with vocational guidance.

(7) Health programmes for mentally retarded children through public health and medical services.

Now the community has an important role for the handicapped children. (1) Realisation of the need for the care of the handicapped children. (2) should be philanthropic minded and donate whole heartedly (3) It should take initiative in starting the sheltered workshops and reserve certain percentage of jobs for them, so as to give them a sense of security and self respect which comes from being independent. Voluntary and social services like Rotary club, Lions club and Jaycee to see into the need of these disabled children and to provide necessary help. Much can be done by the family to the handicapped children. They should be loved and accepted. Wrong ideas and prejudices about handicap should be removed and they should realise that he is not a stigma or cause of shame for his parents. Co-operation, understanding the importance of education and rehabilitation of the parents. Love and care of the siblings. If the parents show much interest in the handicapped child, naturally others too will do the same. The care of the handicapped children depends upon the availability of medical and surgical facilities, proper facilities for training and rehabilitation, in sheltered workshops. Physiotherapy and occupational therapy centres are very necessary for physically handicapped ones.

Early correction of the deformities in infancy. Fitting of special shoes and prosthetics and teaching the child how to walk. This will be done by the orthopoedic surgeon and occupational therapist. Children with heart diseases are made to understand their limited activities. Blind children should be taught Braille board, carpentry, weaving and handicrafts.

Occupational therapy

It is also called diversional therapy or hand work. It included knitting, sewing, embroidery, making of bags or mats and weaving. Exercises and control of weak muscles are done while working. It also encourages the mental activity and a desire to complete the task begun. Older children may learn trades and crafts which can be used to make a living later on. The occupational therapist plans and works for the childs recovery within the doctor's orders.

Physiotherapy

Treatments such as exercises, electrical stimulation, diathermy. Infra red rays and massages are given to the defective parts of the body to stimulate the blood circulation and tissue repair and quick return of muscle strength.

Education

The goal of the special education is to integrate the child into the life of the community that means to give him as much contact as possible with normal people. The blind could be taught braille weaving, typing, carpentry and handicrafts as mentioned above.

Recreation

As normal children require recreation handicapped children also need it to achieve success

and function independently. It increases knowledge and awarness of his environment. It makes him to express himself and to recognise and develop social skills. It also provides opportunities to success and to derive pleasure. It keeps him away from frustration because of his disability. It encourages to function as independently as his limitations may permit, if the activities are adopted to the childs needs, interests and capabilities.

Rehabilitation

Rehabilitation is an adjustment to living—a simple definition. The term rehabilitation is the process by which handicapped are restored to the fullest physical, mental, social, vocational and economical usefulness of which they are capable. In another sense, rehabilitation means bringing crippled, deformed, paralysed or chronically ill-child to a place of independence usefulness and happiness which will make him a contributing member of his community. Rehabilitation includes both education and training as I mentioned above. This is a slow process.

Prevention of handicap

1. Proper care of antenatal mothers, good nutrition, proper immunisation against tetanus. Prevention of infectious diseases like German Measles and infective hepatities or any kind of viral diseases.
2. Detection and treatment of diseases like syphilis. Blood test should be done for K.T. & V.D. R.L.
3. Antianaemic treatment with iron preparations.
4. Avoidance of exposure to radiation and taking of harmful drugs like L.S.D. and quinine during pregnancy.
5. Health teaching of the antenatal mothers regarding nutrition. The diet should contain protiens, vitamins iron and calcium adequately.
6. Post war and atom bomb survivors children are the victims of various handicaps. It can be prevented by world-peace maintenance without war and dreadful atoms.
7. Prevention of accidents in children.
8. Regular immunisation specially against small-pox and poliomyelitis.
9. Medical and surgical treatments as early as possible.
10. Building up good health habits. Rehabilitation in early stage will help to overcome the physical handicap for psychological adjustment to his condition and education.

Parents role in taking care of a handicapped child

Parents role to remove supersitition that a handicap is due to curse or good or ill effects of devil or exposure to eclipse. They should not feel guilty or ashamed of these children. They should get proper guidance and health education. They should be made to be aware of the specialised places for education and training to make them useful citizens by sending them to such schools. The financial difficulties through funds are to be aided. They should understand the child's need and problems. True love, feelings, understanding patience, attention and helping attitude towards the child should be developed. The parents should accept the child and show good reaction normally to the child as to avoid emotional disturbances. They should not neglect the child but need to know the psychological and emotional needs and how to adjust to his special condition.

Role of a nurse

The nurse should know the child psychology to get the child prepared mentally and emotionally. She should know the background of the child such as physical, psychological, emotional, social, economical conditions and recognise the handicapped child. She should know the available resources and direct the parents according to the need of the child. Liaison between rehabilitation personnel, the community, the patient and the physician in charge of the child. Health education in the areas of diet, fluids, skincare, hygiene, bladder and bowel control, rest, sleep, pain control, socialisation and prevention of infectious diseases. Education of the family assessing the condition of the home environment for the discharged child from the hospital. She must teach the parents beside nursing care especially general cleanliness, elimination and pressure points. To attend the childs welfare such as schooling, mental activities and recreation. She should know the actual position of the child at home such as rejection, overprotection and negligence. Accordingly advice should be given to the family members. Instruction on rehabilitation teachings and demonstrations in nursing. Refer the child to local agencies of vocational guidance. Help him to learn activities of daily living and to have social interaction and prevent emotional distress. Encourage and help the child for using prosthetics or special shoes. Proper planning and comprehensive revaluation of the care of the handicapped child having set the goals at priority levels.

Conclusion

Handicapped children are those children who are placed at disadvantageous position as compared to the normal ones. These are various

types of handicaps according to the part of the body or mind effected. The care of such children can be taken at different levels such as international, national, state level and by the community. Parents role is very important in caring for the children. Care of the handicapped child is not one man's job but it is a team work. It is to be noted that care of the handicapped child depends upon the extent of the handicap. How much can be cared and what side are available for the individual condition.

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