

Emerging Nurse : Her Limitations to Serve

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ACCORDING to the World Health Organization's definition of health, the nurse plays an important role in the health team, along with the other health workers, towards the prevention of diseases, preservation of health, and prolonging of life, keeping the health of the individual and the community in mind. She is the one category of worker available in a hospital, round the clock, catering to the multifarious needs of the patients. Nurse—the term is familiar to one and all—young, old, literate, illiterate, rich or poor.

If we look back into the history of Nursing, we find that the role of the nurse was quite different from what it is today. Her traditional role expected her to be a housekeeper, an assistant to the physician, a record keeper and a sanitarian. The standard of her practice as a nurse was naturally measured by the administrators in terms of how she organized the ward, how thrifty she was as a store keeper, how clean or tidy she kept the ward, and, above all, how well she subordinated herself to the physicians. With advances in medical sciences and technology, she had to take up newer functions, however she could not give up many of her traditional functions. This leads to overwork, making her less efficient, less organised, less energetic though not less effective. Secondly, the traditional apprenticeship training in hospital schools were no longer sufficient to prepare her for the newer role, hence university level preparations started, though at a slower pace. Moreover, in-service education which is now being recognised as the only remedy for the correction is quite inadequate. Even today, majority of our hospitals do not extend this facility to its nurses.

Ideology vs. Experience

A critical look at the present situation will reveal that there is a wide disparity between Nursing ideology and the actual job experience. A nurse is expected to play divergent roles which are identified by contradictory role expectations leaving no scope for her to find a compromise. Her creative ideas and original thinking do not have a place in the traditional setup of hospitals.

A nurse is a public servant. She is expected to play a humanitarian role. The ministering 'angel' image is to be kept up by soft speech, smiling face and love and affection for the suffering humanity. The nurse is an employee—thus an official of the hospital. She acts as the manager of the ward unit. Management will take away most of her time for doing non-Nursing duties. Her supervisors expect her to carry out these functions to their entire satisfaction even at the cost of patient care. Conscientious nurses feel that there is something

wrong somewhere and a remedy is inevitable.

In the course of her work, a nurse is often blamed or misunderstood by the patients and their relatives. For example, if the bed linen is dirty, and no clean linen is available, the nurse is held responsible. Unless she has sufficient supplies, wherefrom can she produce clean linen? If the drug is not available, how can she give it in time? Yet no one realises that she has no role in decision-making for these things. When the wards are crowded with relatives she is expected to send them out. Is she too inhuman in doing her duty? These activities make the patient and the public furious, but is the nurse solely responsible for these inconveniences?

A ward of patients may have one or two nurses on duty. With many serious patients in the ward, one is apt to be late to attend to many of the needs of the ambulatory patients. If the nurse is not there, it is not that she is away elsewhere. It is due to shortage of nurses on duty. It is not her fault, but the system has caused it. Yet she is the one who gets her image tarnished with the common saying 'nurses are no longer coming with a compassion to serve the humanity'. She is prone to the criticism for no fault of hers. These limitations in her work sphere lower the image of a nurse and the Nursing profession at large.

Lack of Preparation

Another common problem is that a nurse may not have proper skill or knowledge for a particular type of care. That is due to her lack of preparation. Facilities must be made available for better Nursing education and later on for learning while she is serving. The public must demand well prepared nurses in the right numbers under right conditions of work to get the right kind of service. Every responsible citizen must do his best to ensure safe Nursing care. While purchasing cloth or equipments or a television set, we look for standard quality. Shouldn't we look for standard Nursing education when we entrust ourselves to the hands of nurses to care for us in our sickness? Aren't our lives more precious than the money's worth we look for while purchasing inanimate things? There are hundreds of examples like this: we can go on and on where people forget the value of life and act carelessly.

Let us consider the transition of a student nurse to a staff nurse. A student is trained according to the Nursing norms. But when she takes up a job, she finds that she is expected to play quite a different role. The practical situation is quite different from the ideal one. This forces her to change her image of hospital and Nursing profession. The young graduates will sure face

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- (5) Hostel Matron—An elderly lady or matric pass or a retired General Nurse without any encumbrance. To look after the Nurses' Hostels, training "A" grade nurses, both male and female students having a total of 50 students. Salary negotiable.

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Emerging Nurse

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these problems when they enter the job. It is essential for each one to think and act in a positive manner to adjust to the situation without sacrificing the quality of service. Adequate educational background is sure to help in making professional adjustments. Each one will have to find a happy, satisfactory medium between the expectations of the public, the employers, co-workers and self. This will help to find satisfaction in one's job.

For effective contribution towards the uplift of Nursing profession, it is imperative that one should not get disappointed and lose heart thereby leaving efforts for improvement. No one else is going to come forward to improve our profession, we nurses have to go forward hand-in-hand to work for the cause of our profession. Let us make a unified effort from this year's Nurses' Week when the theme is apt; 'Nurses Speak Up for Better Health.'