

Role of Nurse in a Leprosy Hospital

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FEAR of Leprosy is due to the notion that it is a highly contagious disease and it results in physical crippling. It also results in mental, emotional, and socio-economic changes. Leprosy is not a divine punishment for sinner it is highly contagious as people think. Most of the deformities are secondary complications of the disease and are preventable. People have wrong ideas and prejudices about Leprosy that working in a Leprosy Hospital is very degrading and many nurses are afraid to work in Leprosy Hospitals. Even some nurses think that Leprosy patients do not need any Nursing care except giving DDS and few dressings for their ulcers.

Until few years ago, Leprosy patients were kept isolated in homes and sanatoriums and some of the patients who were not so sick used to give medicines and did all the Nursing care or attended ulcer patients. Now the pattern of treatment has changed and there are hospitals for Leprosy patients with specialised medical, surgical and other services. The goal of treatment is "total or comprehensive care" of the patient.

Advantages of Multidrug Therapy

Previously, patients were given dapsone monotherapy but the recently introduced multidrug therapy has many advantages. The patients who were on multidrug therapy as per the new regimen of treatment must be under close supervision. These drugs have many toxic side effects and need constant observation and accurate recording by the attending nurse.

Patients are admitted in the hospital for various problems. Leprosy reactions are extremely serious conditions and need most attentive Nursing care if the patient is expected to be comfortable and recovers without permanent damage to the nerves and other vital organs. Reaction may involve other areas of the body, besides skin, causing neuritis, bone pain, lymphadenitis, arthritis, iritis and iridocyclitis and these increase morbidity. The main danger of reaction is rapid, permanent and crippling damage to the nerves. Active reactions of Leprosy are prone to lead to non-paralytic deformities and development of stiffness with deformity in extremities. During this period exercises should be carried out to place the joints through their normal range of motion. The nurse has a great responsibility in assisting the patient through various stages of his disease and reactions in attending to physical and

emotional care. Patient is reassured and given every assistance in the acute stages of his disease.

Patients admitted with intensive hands and feet are prone to frequent injuries and complications by infections. The majority of infections are preventable by appropriate health education. The nurse has an important role to educate the patients about care of hands and feet. Patients with lagophthalmos (inability to close the eye lids) are potential candidates for blindness if not properly cared. Liquid Paraffin eye drops or clean castor oil should be instilled in the eyes especially during the night to ensure the protection of the cornea from exposure to keratitis or corneal ulcers.

Care in Reconstructive Surgery

Patients are also admitted for reconstructive surgery for the correction of cosmetic and functional deformities affecting the face and extremities. Patients undergoing reconstructive surgery need special pre- and post-operative Nursing care. Disabled and old Leprosy patients in the hospital present various problems of hygiene which require more intensive Nursing care. These patients need love and companionship.

Nurse is the first person that a patient contacts when he is hospitalised. Leprosy patient needs empathy not pity or sympathy. As a member of the medical team nurse should be considerate and helpful to build up the confidence and morale of the patient.

The patient and his family should be educated on the following facts :

1. Leprosy is one of the least of the infectious diseases and it can be rendered non-infectious by treatment

2. Early treatment can prevent deformities. The presence of deformities and ulcers are secondary problems of insensitive extremities and essentially preventable.

Caring for Leprosy patient is a challenge for the nurse and it gives joy and satisfaction to be involved in this work of mercy.

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References

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