

# The Future of Public Health Nursing

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## Introduction

IF one looks critically into Public Health Nursing as Service, I must say that it has not only something common with all other branches of Nursing, i.e., 'caring for the sick' but also has a plus point to work for promotion of health and prevention of disease and injury. It is the span and width of responsibilities of the public Health Nursing that makes it challenging for the public health nurse covers the individuals, families and communities.

The work connotes that being a key member of the community health team, and in cooperation with allied professions and members of the community, one has the opportunity to translate new scientific knowledge into every day health practices of people. With the rapport it further strengthens the ways and means of helping the neighbours and indicates ways to work together to obtain the best possible health services for themselves and their progeny.

## Variety in the Job

There is no 'typical' day in the Public Health Nursing service record. The day may start from calling upon a new born with checking of mother and baby for starting breast feed followed by an emergency call of acute abdominal pain with a need for referral to hospital, followed by a visit to a drug defaulter to ensure that drugs are taken and other members are protected with immunisations.

The afternoon might take one into a heavy clinic demanding injections, instructions, inspection and passing on information to the satisfaction of the consumers and providers of health services. Yet another call from the district can send one out to stand by the Traditional Birth Attendant to attend an emergency and return to the Shelter tired as the sun rises with a satisfaction of spending the day usefully and being of help in need.

## Future Demands and Envisaged Changes

Community life has changed and is changing rapidly with many women taking up jobs bringing a change in the life style. Demands for more services to meet the health needs are on the increase. It is expected that a public health nurse at her level would be able to help developments in health care, stimulate and exert her influence on the community and their adaptations to changes.

With increased life span and changes in treatment modalities, the public health nurse has to meet the everlasting increasing demands of both families and

institutions for people are returning earlier to homes for it is said convalescence in homes is speedier than in hospital.

Thus the goal of Public Health in the context of our Public Health Nursing service responsibilities does not change but reiterates as stated by Fineberg in his address at Harvard on October 11, 1984: "To identify and act on reducible causes of ill health with the knowledge available". It also means development of methods and media to help improve nation's health within the National Health system when the problem crosses boundaries, it becomes a global concern and draws attention of International Health professionals.

Analytically, the statement leads one to the understanding of the mechanics of ill health and its determinants—be it biological, epidemiological, clinical, behavioural or social—requiring interruptions. The interruptions in its course may vary at various levels from the genetic through the host defences in human behaviour and the environment encompassing physical, biological and social milieu.

The main objective of health work is to prevent ill health and ameliorate disease. This requires an open mind and an urge to develop or create strategies which lead to success from one stage to the other.

The objective can be achieved in different settings through perseverance and pursuing the matter as it is of concern to one and all, i.e., to handle the cause directly and the other way is through research and its application.

It is this diversity in the work and approach to reach the aim that makes public health interesting, challenging or exciting as it appeals to public health workers. It is hence necessary that nurses voice their opinions and vocalise their views to have a fair share of resources allocated to build the foundations at various levels to operate towards prevention and promotion of health.

In the interest of human welfare, public health continues to encompass the fundamental needs to be met as basic necessities of life, adequate diet, wholesome working and living environment leading to appreciation of health care. The Alma Ata Conference of 1978 has pinpointed the need for moving towards a commitment, 'Health for All by 2000 A.D.'. This in turn becomes a social demand and function of a civilized society.

Given below are the traditional and research methods which have proved successful to some extent and need further exploration. To name a few:

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Traditionally, has encompassed service.

- (a) Care for the sick and ill patients within institution or home environment.
- (b) Educate the sick and well through different media appropriate to the learners' ability.
- (c) Intervening through employment policies—in the work place/expand services to homes.
- (d) Pursue with new knowledge in the laboratory or field in the special branches.
- (e) Work with private and public agencies to promote in generalised and specialised branches of Health and Health Services.

Has explored the causative factors which influence :

- (a) Those areas of basic understanding of the cause and effect of disease-specific and general.
- (b) Appreciation of social and larger consequences of illness.
- (c) Identifications of inventions along with evaluation to prevent, detect and treat disease.
- (d) Assessing the strategic options for society to take decisions at individual and collective levels of health problems.

We are cognizant of the proposed plans to achieve this through our Health Policy and machinery. If this is the ultimate aim of public health conferences of the kind that is planned for professional members of Nursing, it calls for deliberations and discussions from Nurse practitioners, Nurse Academicians and Nurse Administrators.

A moral and legal responsibility lies on the shoulders of the professional members to shape the future of Public Health Nursing Education in the context of changing demands. This would definitely ask for a self-analysis of the individuals holding positions of practitioners, educators and administrators.

A practitioner may question herself:

- (i) Am I prepared sufficiently to deliver the responsibilities expected of me?
- (ii) Do I have or seek opportunities to apply the knowledge with an attitude to see the results.
- (iii) Do I seek and get the encouragement to explore newer areas and give them feedback to superiors in the hierarchy to bring about the change.

An academician or educator in turn may question herself:

- (1) Are we preparing the student to take over the future responsibilities realistically than a theoretical approach.
- (2) Do I ask for feedback from our alumni and know that their problems are as they join the new group of task force.
- (3) Do I encourage the ex-students and novitiates to write for help and follow it up at personal or school levels.

An administrator in turn may seek answers for questions as:

- (1) Am I able to draw and distribute the work in terms of meeting the needs of clients and the workers, e.g., work allocation in interest areas?
- (2) Have I been utilising the staff in terms of their abilities and according to professional preparation.
- (3) Have I encouraged areas of interests of working members to improve in general the work and working areas along with provision of satisfaction to the workers with provision for self-development.

To conclude, one may express that the future of Public Health Nursing definitely lies in the hands of the "Nurse Practitioners, Nurse Educators and Nurse Administrators" as in the Epidemiological triad, wherein the profession can work towards the goals set to react the aims of Public Health Nursing Education and Service within a setting of cyclic order commonly known as Evaluation.

Lastly, I would like to emphasize and reiterate that Public Health Nursing is not static but dynamic and can survive only when its challenges and variety are met in its context, for it demands adaptations to suit the local conditions, and it is needless to state young nurses should come forward to meet the challenges posed by the Twentieth century.

#### References :

- (1) N. L. N., 'Look to Your Future in Public Health Nursing', 1959.
- (2) Fireberg. H.V., 'Public Health: Meeting Challenge'. Inaugural Address, Harvard School, October 11, 1984.