

The Nurse and Her Role as a Family Planning Practitioner

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'CHILDREN by Choice and not by Chance' is the theme of the planned parenthood movement. In a scientifically advancing world, it is not desirable to leave important matters to chance. On the basis of choice, plans will have to be made so that what we acquire, procure, possess or get will be needed, loved and precious to be cherished in future.

In modern cities like ours, if a house is to be constructed, we have to approach an architect and get the building plan made and approved, by the Estate Officer (who is a Government Agent). And if this is the case with all things in life, how much more it should be in the matter of choosing or planning the number of one's own family size...a family consisting of one's own dear ones, whose welfare is the sole aim in one's life. Therefore, it is unbelievable that people are generally not in favour of adopting family planning as a way of life.

Those who do not accept it, are not aware of its good or bad effects on themselves or others. If you watch a child playing in the gardens, you may find him eagerly plucking a flower. If there is an open fire nearby, he will carefully try to keep himself away from it. Why? Because he knows what is good for him or what is harmful to him. If he can be taught this, in the early stages of his childhood, is it impossible to bring the facts of family planning with its advantages to our growing population? No, but one thing, I agree with each one of you that it is not possible by one or a few people...it has to become a matter of concern to the majority of people so that they all work for it. Just like each parent, teacher and the elder taking the responsibility to advise the child during his early life, every grown up person must engage in spreading this message repeatedly. Each drop makes an ocean, but for this we will have to stay together and united like the water drops together making an ocean.

Right to Information

It is important for us to know that the public have a right to receive correct information on planning of their families which can come from various agencies like hospital, home, friends, clubs, workplace or market. Family Planning should be the centre for all planned development. Studies have shown that people even in remote villages want family planning and we have to evolve strategies for individual and mass

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approach. The fact that we add to our Indian population One Australia every year or One United States every 15 years or One USSR every 20 years will be a shocking news to every right thinking citizen. Yet, as this is an area where we are not dealing with mere numbers, but with people, and in a very sensitive aspect, we have to proceed with tact. We can help parents recognize that the child has a right to love and in order to fulfil it well, one must have a small family. Today's child is expected to carry on the traditions of his family tomorrow. Let us give him a chance to grow well by giving him tender loving care.

Human beings are rational animals. They act on reasons. I still remember an incident that occurred during the early part of my Nursing career. I was working in a Mission hospital in West Bengal. One day during my rounds, I found a man bringing his one year old child to the bedside of his wife who was admitted with typhoid fever. As a young graduate I tried to explain to him that it is harmful to the child and so he should take the child out of the ward. Worried, as he was, about his wife, he did not pay any heed to my advice, instead grumbled loudly. On stopping him to go to his patient, he went to report to the higher authorities. As usual, as a junior Nurse, I was called to the office to explain my action. Then I had the chance to clearly explain the reason in front of the administrators and after almost half an hour's interaction, the man realised the importance and regretted his action.

Always this may not be the case, but this shows if the reasons are understood well, people are liable to change their course of action. But we have to be very patient and consistent. I have deliberately narrated this experience of mine, to make it clear that it is the responsibility of health workers to help the public learn the reasons for advices. Nurses constitute a large portion of the health workers in our country. And we as nurses have a great responsibility in this direction.

Role of the Nurses

In order to carry out the functions, a nurse must keep in mind the goals of Family Planning programmes, such as :

1. Creating an awareness of concept of small family norm.
2. Dissemination of information on family planning methods.
3. Organization of supply of contraceptives regularly.

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4. Assisting in Family Planning services, clinical and surgical.

These aims can be achieved by the concentrated efforts of nurses working in all kinds of settings as every nurse is a family planning worker. Convincing people is an act and for this, nurses must have adequate training on communication skills. A nurse must engage in education and counselling for the needy. She must explain the various methods with its advantages and disadvantages and help them choose the best method for themselves. We are all familiar with Cafeterias in bigger institutions to serve people with refreshments or meals. There the organisers make available various eatables or drinks and people can choose what they need according to their likes or pockets. If only one item is there, it doesn't serve the purpose. We must organise the contraceptive methods and supplies like the cafeteria approach where each couple can choose according to their needs and inclination. The nurse who is working in an area may even act as a role model. The nurse's own family can act as an ideal for people to work towards achieving the standards.

The nurse can promote family planning through improved MCH services, such as :

Care of pregnant women; Care during and after delivery; Promotion of breast feeding; Nutrition supplement for mother and children; Prevention of anaemia and blindness; Immunization; Post-partum schemes; Population education to youth in schools and colleges; and Training of personnel.

A careful look at this will show that all we need to do is to integrate all these services as an integral part of Primary Health Care and not as a separate issue. In order to achieve this goal, members of WHO expert committee have recommended urgent action to make post-basic education programmes for Nursing teachers and managers more relevant to the social and health needs of people. The committee on 'Training Nursing Teachers and Managers with Special Regard to PHC' met recently in Geneva. It recommended a reorganization of all training programmes of Post-Basic training to ensure principles of PHC which has a major component of MCH services.

Many Post-Basic schools are in crisis today due to less teachers both in quality and quantity. A recent survey of Post-Basic training schools showed lack of relevance of educational programmes to pressing national needs. The teachers appeared positive though they lacked motivation for change due to lack of just compensation for their work and frustration due to the attitude of administration. The WHO's Director of Division of Manpower Development stressed the need for reorientation of Nursing personnel. I must add my own opinion here that success of F.P. services can never be achieved without the active participation of Nursing personnel right from the planning stage till the grass-root level implementation and evaluation.

Services in MCH

A nurse in an MCH Centre can also carry out

counselling on family planning, education on family planning, insertion of intrauterine devices, supervision of ladies using contraceptives, supervision of health workers, distribution of supplies and conducting of informal discussions.

A nurse administrator may influence policy decisions and budget allocations for the work. She can also suggest proper training of personnel with adequate content and in-service education for all nurses. Every nurse irrespective of the area of work can be motivated to promote family planning.

A school health nurse is in a unique position to educate the children. Children are receptive and capable to understand the implications. Either they will directly or indirectly influence their parents or at least will act as messengers of family planning in future, as they grow up. Childhood education is never a waste. Once I saw two little children watching curiously a herd of piglets running after their mother. One said to the other, "Look, Look, it has so many children. Why is it not eating Nirodh". The other one retorted, "Fool, who will give it to Pigs"? The first one said, "Yes, I didn't realise". He continued, "Yar, if people are to have only one or two children now, by the time we grow up and get married, we can not have even one child". And they laughed. I was glad to note that even children of that age, now know that there are devices to reduce the number of childbirth. Of course they need proper education. They also know that they have a responsibility to contain the ever increasing population. It is heartening to note that they are not only thinking of the present, but of the future. The concern for the future and action at present is what we need. If properly trained children can be our effective messengers.

The Expanded Role

Now, let us consider the expanded role of a nurse in this area. A pilot study was conducted in Thailand in 1979 by the Ministry of Public Health in which five nurse midwives with operating theatre experience were trained to perform post-partum tubal ligation by a minilaprotomy incision under local anaesthesia. Their performance was compared with that of doctors in a controlled clinical trial. The results suggested that trained nurse midwives can safely perform the procedure. A subsequent expanded field trial of nurse training programme showed similar results.

The acceptability of the service as perceived by the patients was clearly impressive. The attitude of doctors towards the use of trained nurse midwives in their hospitals to perform tubal ligations was very positive. As a result of this study, it has been suggested to the Ministry of Public Health in Thailand that an expanded programme be planned and implemented. Secondly, it is suggested that as Medical procedures become accepted and routine, doctors should delegate these tasks to Nursing and other personnel. Here, I quote from a WHO report: "Delegation does not undermine the professional role, it enhances it". So one should be only too happy to delegate functions.