

Dr. M.D. Saigal Says

Nurses Important in Community Health Care

DR. M.D. SAIGAL assumed the office of Director-General of Health Services, Government of India, on April 11, 1986.

Dr. Saigal has held many important positions prior to this appointment in the State of Uttar Pradesh, in the Directorate of Health as well as in other capacities at the Centre. He did his M.B.B.S. and Master of Surgery from Agra University. He served as Regional Director (F.P. & M.C.H.), Government of India, Uttar Pradesh, during 1965-71. His assignments with the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India, so far, have been as Assistant Commissioner, Health (1971-75), Deputy Commissioner, Health (1975-1978); Deputy Director-General, Health Services (1979-1985), and Additional Director-General of Health Services from November 11, 1985 to April 10, 1986.

I had the privilege of meeting Dr. M.D. Saigal on June 27, 1986 in his office at Nirman Bhavan. On my first meeting with Dr. Saigal I found him to be soft spoken, and a very alert person who showed great clarity of approach and, predictably, richness of experience: precise and firm in his statements. We spent nearly half an hour to discuss and share our views with regard to some of the important issues concerning Health Care strategies and the place of nurses in the total health care system of the country. He seems to be quite enthusiastic about his new job.

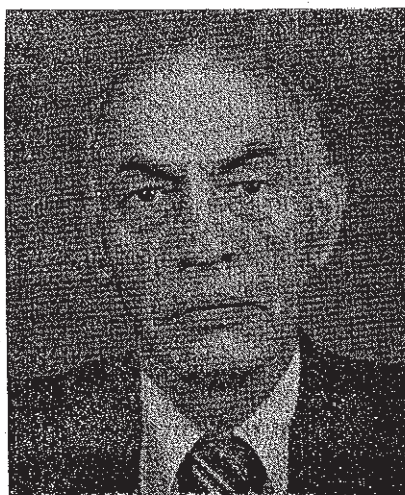
The Important Tasks

What are the important tasks in his view in the field of health care, particularly in the context of Health for All by 2000 A.D., I inquired.

Dr. Saigal is very positive that the goal of Health for All by 2000 A.D. is realistic. There are clear cut targets and primary health care programmes to achieve this goal step-by-step. They are in force for

quite some time now. He finds no reason why the goal should not be achieved by the stipulated date. He has been, from the very beginning, actively involved in planning and implementing primary health care programmes of the country.

"What particular role Nurses and other auxiliaries have to play, specifically in the field of Primary Health Care?", was my next question.



Dr. M.D. Saigal

He recognises the important role Nurses and other auxiliaries play in the field of community health care. He pointed out their limitations in terms of their satisfactory contribution. He specially showed his concern for shortage of Nurses and also the deteriorating standard of Nursing education in most training institutions. He strongly feels that controlling bodies of Nursing education like Nursing Registration Councils and other registration bodies should have a proper independent structure and must provide the minimum requirements to run proper Nursing training programmes. Similarly, a professional body like TNAI must have a free voice to represent the members concerned

and influence government decisions.

Dr. Saigal also feels that the existing Nursing Legislation itself restricts meaningful contribution of nurses in the sphere of Primary Health Care. A Multipurpose Health Worker with short duration of training and academic qualification is prepared to treat minor ailments on his or her own whereas a nurse has to wait for doctors for giving even simple medication.

He also dwelt on opening the issue of nurses doing private practice. The Association and the Indian Nursing Council can do much to influence such changes for the larger benefit of the people and the Nursing profession as a whole, he felt.

More Meaningful Involvement

I wanted to know from Dr. Saigal how nurses can be involved more meaningfully in the present system of the country's health care.

Dr. Saigal feels that nurses' association and Nursing Councils have to be vigilant and active in the sphere of meaningful involvement of Nurses. Definite norms for Nursing practice should be fixed; minimum wages and service conditions need to be framed and fixed. So far, there are hardly any authentic Nursing norms existing in the country. Nurses work at the mercy of employers and they are often exploited in terms of salary and working facilities. Under the present system of acute shortage of nurses, one can hardly expect their effective contribution as expected of a professional group.

I put it to Dr. Saigal: "Would it not be better that Nurses are made to take decisions concerning themselves? TNAI has been negotiating with the Government for having separate Directorates of Nursing or else creating more Nursing positions at the Directorate-level both at the Centre and

in the States. At present, there are only one or two nurses in a Directorate with hardly any power to look after the Nursing care aspects. Also related is the issue of inclusion of Nurse delegate from the Health Directorate in the country's delegation to participate in World Health Assembly."

Dr. Saigal explained that he was in favour of having more nurses in the Directorate and currently he has proposed to create two more posts in the Health Directorate specially to look after the Nursing Education and the Community Nursing aspects. He also feels that Nurses themselves have to build up their stand as an effective member of the health care team and create the need for their services in the organisation and also among the people. However, he does not consider it necessary for a nurse to participate in the World Health Assembly from the Government sector. May be if the Association represents itself in such meetings it would be more useful, he said.

Continuing Education Programmes

On the issue of continuing education programmes, I asked Dr. Saigal: "There is need for continued updating of Nursing knowledge and skills like for any other professional. What are the clear cut policies of the Government for advanced studies in Nursing and for updating their knowledge on the job?"

According to him, in the Central Government, on the same basis as doctors are deputed for higher studies nurses can also be deputed. Each institution has to prepare the list of candidates to be deputed every year. With regard to continuing education the Government is conducting regular short-term courses for Nurse-teachers and other community health nurses. It has been taking steps towards establishing Regional Nursing Training Centres to conduct regular courses. However, he denied such a provision was existing for nurses working in the hospitals and the issue needed to be looked into.

"What is your view regarding Nurses being trained in particular fields and posted in the areas of

their specialisations?", I asked.

Dr. Saigal said he is in favour of exposing nurses to different skills and the responsibility for it greatly rests with the Nursing leaders to look into sustaining the interest of nurses working with them. Where there is any vacancy, a person with the needed knowledge and skill can be given preference.

He strongly feels that higher positions in Nursing, atleast 25 percent, should be filled from outside an institution. Merit element is equally important while considering the experience for higher promotion.

On the important question of security to Nursing personnel, he said he was aware of the situation but it was not easy to tackle.

However, in the rural area the training and appointment policies

of the Government specify that candidates trained from a particular area should be posted in their areas to minimise incidence of threats to Nurses' safety.

The High Power Committee

"How soon the high power committee to study Nursing situation (promised by the Government for quite some time now) is going to be announced? Would there be adequate representation of nurses in that Committee?", was the last vital question.

Dr. Saigal indicated his unawareness of the plan for such a committee but he said there is going to be a small health survey committee which will also cover the Nursing aspect. A nurse representative has been included in that committee, he pointed out.

Miss Jaiwanti P. Dhaulta

Community Health Nurses' Meet

Miss B.A. Devanesan, Chairperson, Public Health Section of TNAI, and President, Tamil Nadu Branch as well as XII SNA Biennial Conference Chairperson, very warmly welcomes the participants of All-India Community Health Nurses' Meet to be held at Coimbatore on October 11, 1986 and invites agenda items from all Public Health Nurses to be discussed at the Business Session latest by September 25, 1986 on the following address: 'Patmos,' Church Hill, Coonoor-643101.

The Steering Committee consisting of Miss B.A. Devanesan, Miss K.K. Vilasini, Chairperson, Public Health Committee, Tamil Nadu Branch, TNAI, and Mrs P. Padmavathy, District Public Health Nurse, alongwith other coopted members from the other categories would finalise the programme.

TENTATIVE PROGRAMME Community Health Nurses' Meet

October 11, 1986.

Theme: 'Healthy Living and Small Family Norms : Manpower Utilisation'

Venue: Nanikalaikarngam

Forenoon

9 to 10 : Inauguration of Meet
10 to 10.30 : Refreshments

10.30 to 11 ; Roll Call

11 to 1 ; Plenary Session:

'Tomorrow's

Health: Whose Responsibility?'

Afternoon

1 to 2 Lunch

2 to 4 Business Session

4 to 5 Valedictory Session

Members might be reading about the coming Meet in the recent issues of the *Journal*. We have published the Registration Form in our August 1986 issue.

This Meet is specifically for Public Health Nurses, Lady Health Visitors and ANMs including Multipurpose Health Workers (Female). Members of any other category of Nursing personnel wanting to attend this Meet can do so. They have to register separately for this Meet.

The members are requested to hurry up and register themselves for better organisation of the Meet. Registration fee: Rs. 20/-; Boarding and Lodging and Transport Charges: Rs. 50/- per day.. Charges for sight seeing will be announced at the time of the Meet. Members would pay Rs. 5 as late fee in addition to the above mentioned registration fee, if late.