

Health and Safety in a Hospital Setting

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Health : When we talk of health, we talk about total well being of an individual. In other words WHO defines Health as "a state of complete mental, physical and social well-being, and not merely an absence of disease or infirmity".

Safety implies prevention of any such sickness or injury which can occur due to environmental factors.

A hospital is generally thought of as a place where the sick and injured come for care. A hospital is a busy place and is usually fraught with tension and stress. Therefore, Health and Safety both are of paramount importance in a hospital setting.

When we speak of health in a hospital setting, we are concerned about all those who come in direct contact with the patients during their hospital stay. They are Doctors, Nurses and other paramedical staff. To be more specific, I shall talk about nurses mainly, as they are with the patients constantly and they spend their maximum time with patients.

If a nurse herself is healthy (physically, mentally and socially) she can better look after the patient and will be able to cope with any problem situation. She can be a good counsellor and guide to the patients as well as to their relatives in any stressful situation. She can look after the patient without getting any infection herself.

Therefore, we can say that only a nurse with good/positive health and well-being can provide the best patient care.

To be healthy or to keep themselves fit for patient care the nurses must take care of their health by :

1. Proper & nutritious diet.
2. Prevention of communicable diseases by timely immunization.
3. Prevention of infection by use of proper methods while working for a patient with infections.
4. Maintenance of proper and Hygienic habits and teaching the same to other members of the Health Team, the patients and their relatives.

These are same major aspects of keeping oneself physically healthy. Every individual has the right and duty to participate individually and collectively in the planning and implementation of their health care and the Government and private sectors has an important role to play in the workers' health care and safety, such as :

1. Timely and thorough health check-ups.

2. Provision of safe and healthy physical environment to work and live.

3. Arrange lectures and demonstrations for the workers about the maintenance of health and use of safety measures.

To be psychologically healthy, some measures should be taken both by nurses and the hospital administration, such as :

1. A proper nurse-patient ratio must be maintained, to prevent over exertion which leads to tension and stress situations.
2. Hard work and efficiency must be appreciated and rewarded timely.
3. The nurses also must accept the criticism, and should try to improve themselves rather than becoming tense and frustrated.

To be socially healthy, arrange social programmes, where everyone can meet and sit together. There should be provision for guidance and counselling, so that their problems are solved and they can even share their feelings. If the nurses will be healthy and happy at their work situation then only the best patient care is expected of them.

As I said earlier, a hospital is a place where, generally, the sick and injured come for care. Yet the number of accidental happenings in hospitals is extraordinarily high compared with those in most industries. Therefore, the need for safety is very great in a hospital setting.

There are mainly three groups of people whose safety is to be considered: the patients, who require additional protection because they are ill, the staff, who are vulnerable to many types of accidental injury (such as back strain and infections); and the visitors, who are usually anxious and worried about the patient, who may get cross-infection.

The common safety problems in hospitals are those due to :

1. Falls/slipping and other injuries caused by mechanical objects in the environment or mechanical injuries.
2. Fire and other types of thermal injuries.
3. Chemical injuries.
4. Improper ventilation.

Now, let us see, what nurses can do regarding the safety in a hospital setting.

1. Knowledge of safe nursing practices is essential. To recognize circumstances that could result in an accident and to intract effectively are very essential.
2. She should be a good observant of the total

environment, and look for any hazards or situations that could result in an accident.

3. The patients unit and the nursing unit should be kept free of clutter or kept tidy and in an orderly manner.

4. All accidents must be notified so that remedial measures may be instituted and further accidents can be prevented.

How can we prevent Mechanical Injury?

1. Prevent slippery floors. Wash the floor at times when there is little traffic upon them.

2. Keep the walkways tidy to prevent a fall. Arrange the items on the side tables in such a way that they are within easy reach of the patient.

3. Avoid changing the position of furniture in patient's room, especially in case of an old patient or a patient with eye bandage.

4. Keep the movable wheel chairs locked, till the patient sits properly.

5. Discard the broken glass pieces and sharp instruments, separately and carefully.

6. Use safety devices, such as side rails, safety jackets, arm and leg restraints to prevent falls and injury.

7. Prevent bedsores and foot drops, etc., in the case of long bed-ridden patients.

8. Prevent infection due to improperly sterilized syringes and needles, any lapse or carelessness can cause a number of diseases like hepatitis and AIDS.

Prevention of Chemical Injury

Chemical accidents generally result from the incorrect use of pharmaceutical preparations. Nurses should be well aware of the dangers due to errors in administration of medications.

— Keep all the drug in locked cupboards.

— Medicines for topical or local use must be separated from medicines administered orally or parenterally.

— Poisonous drugs must be well marked and kept under lock and key.

— Keep Narcotics in a separate locked cupboard and count at the end of each nursing shift and this tally must be recorded in a separate book.

— In case an error is made, report it immediately to the nursing supervisor.

Prevention of Injuries from Fire and other Thermal accidents can be achieved by

— Education of nurses about fire prevention and control programme and it must be a routine of the hospital and every nurse must attend to these programmes.

— Smoking should be prohibited in the wards.

— Through housekeeping and adequate maintenance

of equipments lessen the likelihood of fires.

— Adequate storage and distribution of volatile liquids and gases must be done.

If a fire does occur the nurses should carry out the following steps.

— Removal of patient from the immediate danger area.

— Report the fire.

— Shut off the fire area and decrease the ventilation to the area.

— Utilise available extinguishing equipment.

— Be careful while providing hot water bottle to patients, special attention should be given in case of a child, an old or an unconscious patient.

— During oxygen administration care must be taken about the flow percentage and duration of administration.

Therefore, it is felt that nurses are in a key position to provide optimum care and safety to patients by prevention of accidents and injury to a patient, admitted in the hospital due to some other sickness.

As I said earlier also, though nurses are constantly with the patient, they are much more responsible, but other members of the health team are also equally responsible for the Health and Safety in the hospital setting. Specially, the paramedical staff must be trained about the safe and proper techniques and procedures of handling any equipments or articles. They should also be taught about the dangers of getting infections.

All hospitals must have their own safety programmes to provide safety to patients. Nurses must be the members of safety committee. Continuous analysis/research must be conducted to know the type of accidents and their causes, so that measures can be taken to prevent further accidents.

There can be many more health hazards which can affect the hospital employees.

To conclude, I must stress that if we expect the optimum level of patient care, we must have personnel with a good health, not only physically, but psychologically and socially as well. It is through these conferences, forums and through associations like TNAI that we can tap the doors of authorities for becoming aware of this particular need for nurses, professionals, patients and their relatives, I feel that a system is to be evolved for making it a legal and obligatory point by taking care of health and safety in work place in the initial and planning phase of any organisation/institute, etc. Well, it will be a great contribution from the audience with their expertise to enlightening this scientific session by throwing light on some other points which have not been covered in this presentation.

In the end, let me once again thank TNAI for providing me this opportunity to present my viewpoint on the theme: 'Health and Safety in a Hospital Setting'.