Psychological Aspects of Illness

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NURSING both as a profession and a as a vocation is dedicated to the individual. The advanced medical education has helped to reduce the incidence of both physical and mental ill health. In order to understand an individual we must study him in relation to his 'niche' in the community and not attempt to separate him from his environment. It is being increasingly realized that the physical and psychological components of the total personality cannot be divided and that harmony must exist between these spheres for the ideal development of the individual into an integrated healthy maturity.

The word 'psyche' means soul and is referred to the psychological aspects the individual embraces, both mental and emotional, the emotional being the primitive driving force of existence.

Psychology is the systemic study of thinking, feeling and behaviour. Psychological medicine is that branch of medicine whose special province is study, prevention and, treatment of all types of mental illness, however produced. Health is defined as a "state of complete physical, mental and social well-being."

It is recognized that primarily physical or mental disturbances would affect the patient's adoption to his environment. The interaction of mental and physical process is often illustrated to the full during illness.

Although mental and physical illness are so often closely associated, patients with mental disorders are treated in psychiatric hospitals and those with physical disorders are treated in General Hospitals. The mental health Act 1960 abolishes the special designation of mental hospitals. The comprehensive hospitals of the future will meet all the needs of community in that area.

The gap between mental nursing and general nursing is slowly but surely being bridged. Special skills are needed in different types of illness since nursing care in any situation is based on meeting the total needs of the patient. It is the special province of the psychiatric nurse to cater for emotionally disturbed people, and her main skill lies in understanding and handling patients whose illness is reflected in abnormal or difficult behaviour. Thus the establisement of a successful nurse-patient relationship is the main. 'therapeutic tool'. She also needs to be skilled in carrying out an ever increasing number of practical nursing procedures. The nurse in general hospital is mainly concerned in the care of physical sick but she too should bear in mind the wholeness of the individual and therefore she needs to be an expert in human relationship with an ability to recognize and meet the differing emotional needs of each of her patients. To gain this skill she should have some knowledge of the social factors which produce emotional, physical and mental problems.

As per psychiatrist view usually even during healthy life man is normally abnormal. Then how about a sickly man's behaviour ?

Take the case of a patient who would have been admitted in the hospital for very mild illness, but as the environmental condition of the hospital is different from his home he feels lonely. He desires that he should be looked after well. He expects love and sympathy and wishes to gain confidence that he would never be left neglected.

If this is what an ordinary patient expects, can you imagine the feeling of a cardiac patient ? Heart disease suggests to the lay person a condition in which the sufferer can only hope to survive if he leads the life of a complete invalid. He feels insecure and deprived of all desires. Even after knowing the advancement in medical knowledge everything seems a threat to him. This sort of emotional factors aggravate his physical conditions even though he undergoes proper treatment. Mental stress make him worse.

A Cancer patient with pain and with lost confidence of his existence is much irritative than others. He even would attempt to commit suicide and dies because of his disgusted mind rather than his illness.

Apart from physical condition there are other factors involved in causing mental illness. Generally there is no single element responsible for a person's break-down. The causes are many and varied. In certain disorders, notably the neurotic reactions, it would appear that factors involved are mainly psychogenic. For example where emotional maturity has been hampered through early trumatic experiences the scene may be set, particularly if heredity is poor, for a future break down if life proves sufficiently stressful. On the other hand there are mental disorders in which the main cause is basic organic disease, e.g., general paralysis of insane or dementia. But in schizophrenia and manic depressive illness the full cause is not known. Very often there is evidence of a bad home background. Hysterical symptoms might be considered as a defence against anxiety for painful mental experiences.

Treatment

Preventive measures should be taken vigorously *e.g.* : The child guidence service, and more consultative clinics for out-patients throughout the country. Some teaching of psychology and the psychiatric disorders in the general curriculum of both doctors and nurses would promote a better understanding of mental disorders and earlier detection of their onset. Increased population to be checked by Family Planning measures since a planned happy family with much facility will ensure calm life.

Enrolment of Nurses

In all physical illness, psychological factors should be borne in

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