

Why Every Nurse Must Learn Psychiatric Nursing

By Prem Misra

IN a developing country like India the social and industrial changes are becoming rapid, complexities of modern life are on the increase, tensions and stresses are also increasing proportionately. Our old social and spiritual norms are disappearing and are being replaced by materialistic values. The security of joint family system is fast disappearing resulting in anti-social attitudes, insecurity and failure. All these stresses and strains in the society are obvious from the reports of strikes, 'dharnas', suicides and crimes every day which give a clear indication of the mental ill-health.

The need for mental health and hygiene to be an integral part of general health services was felt by the authorities and as a result in 1973 Mental Health Advisory Committee of the Ministry of Health had recommended the strengthening of preventive health services, the expansion and improvement of curative services for the training facilities and research surveys.

The same year I took up a research project for Master's study on the subject. "The integration of psychiatric nursing and mental health concepts in the curriculum of B.Sc. (Hons) Nursing Course of Delhi University" (1964). My major objective was to provide a professional nurse with skills in human relations which is useful in all the fields of nursing.

Every nurse has a dynamic role to play in conserving mental health of a developing nation like India. As such every nurse must be prepared to teach and foster mental health. She must recognise the mental health problems and must know

where to contact for help. She can play such a role only if she is emotionally stable, mentally healthy and possesses desirable personal, social, and professional attitudes.

Psychiatric Nursing does not restrict itself to the caring of mentally ill in the mental hospital but in addition, it embraces all larger concepts of behavioural skills which are used in every day life at home, in hospitals and in the community.

Psychiatric nursing is a study of what goes on between people. This implies that the nurse first begins to understand herself and then works towards expanding her ability to understand others. She develops competence in interaction between individuals, positive attitudes and the skills in communication and observation. She learns that every behaviour is a meaningful response of a patient to a situation as he perceives at that time, and that is the best response to which he is capable. The nurse starts recognising the family as a basic unit of the society in which the personality is developing as a dynamic process. She also recognises the person as an individual with self-respect and dignity, and who has psychological, spiritual and social needs besides physical needs.

Psychiatric nursing also helps to understand the total concepts of Mental health, which is the optimum growth and happiness of an individual, his full maturity, his adjustment to himself and to the others in the world around him to the maximum effectiveness. Mental health is the process which starts in infancy and continues to develop through maturity. "Mental health

means an ability to love and share, the love is not possessive indulgence but freedom and emancipation; sharing is not demanding and receiving but of ideas, thoughts of encouragement which will motivate, comfort and help others move more closely towards a satisfactory mental health." Thus a mentally healthy person possesses a balanced personality.

The valuable assets of a nurse in a psychiatric situation are her unique personality and healthy self-esteem. As the awareness of self is achieved, the deeper understanding of others is evolved and increasing skills in handling the emotional aspects of illness develops. Psychiatric nursing leads to an understanding of one's own behaviour and that of others.

Psychiatric nursing training in the basic curriculum prepares a nurse to function in a mental hospital at the first level position. It also helps her with patients in general hospitals and in the community, who may have emotional problems which need to be considered as a part of his comprehensive care.

Psychiatric nursing, on the whole, is a pursuit and accomplishment of more satisfactory interpersonal relations that are vital human needs of a demanding and dynamic society of India. Psychiatric nursing has made a great leap forward to lead the way elsewhere e.g. administration, teaching and service in hospitals or in community.

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M. PHILIP
Secretary
