Nursing Teachers Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow

QUEST FOR QUALITY

By

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"The teacher who teaches merely what others have found out or thought through will never be a significant teacher". —Douglas M. Knight.

Every New Year’s Eve countless resolutions are made by individuals. How many attempt to adhere to these resolutions is a matter of the individual’s concern. However, the resolutions a person makes affect greatly the lives of other people. I wonder how many of us, nursing teachers, resolve to be better teachers as we cross the threshold of each New Year. As time rolls on, we move along with it and the numerous changes that are brought into our lives by the technological developments and the complexities of our ever-evolving society. We are living in a great big wonderful world filled with challenge and promise.

Nursing at the present time is very different from nursing twenty years ago. In the past, nursing programmes were designed to care for the sick, mechanical fulfilment of doctor’s orders and hospital routines in circumscribed areas in a given institution. Much of the great difficulty in nursing has been lack of an educational design. In many schools the education of a nurse still remains apprenticeship training. Because of this apprenticeship system of nursing education, the public has assumed little responsibility for or even given much thought to the proper financing of the preparation of nurses. The hospital paid the student nurse a small monthly allowance and provided her a living. During recent years better hospital schools have been attempting to convert the student nurse into a person who more nearly resembles a nursing student by charging at least a small tuition fee.

Nursing is in the process of an important transition from a skilled occupation to a profession. This transition is producing a new set of problems and a new set of concern. Current literature and changes in nursing education since World War II indicate that nurses are making conscious efforts to elevate nursing to recognition as a profession. An increasing number of nurses are getting their education in their university settings. As a member of the University community, the School of Nursing is expected to accept the goals of that institution, while at the same time retaining its unique professional commitments.

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In our society the School of Nursing is the agency which shoulders the primary responsibility for the professionalization of the nursing student. Norms are taught and inculcated during the period of study and clinical

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We also Thank Our Members, Well-wishers and Friends for their Greetings and Good wishes for Christmas and New Year.
experience. In this process the student learns to become one or another type of nurse independent of thought and study. The well-established traditions of hospital schools have become a public image and nursing leaders are finding it difficult to convince the public that nursing education, like education for the teachers, doctors, engineers or social workers is a public responsibility and the responsibility of publicly supported institutions. The improvement of education rests first of all on commitment to the belief that the life of every individual can be lifted to a higher plane of significance through cultivation of the intellect.

In many educational situations there is a great gap between what a teacher has tried to teach and what the prospective learner has learned. The teaching process is dependent upon the application of principles of teaching, based upon an understanding of how people learn. It is also dependent upon the attitudes of the teachers, their interests, and the individual capacities and motivation of the learner. People learn more readily when the learning goes forward under conditions in which satisfactory personality, spiritual, professional and social growth are provided. The teacher's attitude toward the student should be based on individualised motivation toward progression, equal learning opportunities and treatment as responsible people. Every teacher should ask herself "Am I stimulating the student by appealing to her intellect?"

The teaching of nursing is not greatly different than teaching in other fields, except that in the clinical situation, the relationship of student to teacher is a significant one. The learning milieu is not usually controlled specifically for the teaching of the nursing student. Nevertheless, the faculty believe that students learn about nursing care by actively experiencing such processes as inquiring, analysing, synthesising, generalising and applying. In the process of learning, teachers are primarily facilitators of learning and not directors, controllers or mere transmitters and the students are active participants. Teachers aim to transmit a zest for nursing and the excitement to be gained from exploring into the unknown.

Education seeks to influence human behaviour and should therefore have the triple aim of encouraging logical and constructive thinking, well directed and warm feeling, and accurate, speedy and purposive action. Nursing education differs in no way from other branches of education except that all three aspects are of great importance—knowledge, attitudes and skills (thinking, feeling and doing).

The future of any profession lies in the supply and calibre of its teachers and nursing is no exception. If the nursing profession wishes to keep nurse education in its own hands and at a standard worthy of a profession, it would do well not to ignore its responsibility for the future. Certainly it is the business of a faculty to think along these lines as it embarks upon a curriculum designed to prepare the student for her future role as a professional nurse. Nurses cannot cling to outmoded techniques. We must utilise the knowledge of the past and add to this bank frequent deposits as new scientific data are revealed. Teaching must fall in line with this approach. What was learned many years ago has been superseded by new knowledge and methods. One cannot say that in "the good old days" we did it this way and expect the younger generation to follow suit. What was good then does not necessarily hold true today for the best is yet to come.

The creative and the good teacher

The creative teacher is one who has the ability to motivate learners to become thinking, growing, self-directing people, able to work constructively either independently or with others. Creative teaching should be dynamic, living, growing, changing process with no one best way of approach.

The good teacher has the knowledge, skill and attitude that are conducive to good learning. The teacher must have and understand her own educational point of view or philosophy of education so that it will influence her practice in teaching and also in the evaluation of her teaching and the learning which takes place. The teacher must respect the uniqueness of every individual with whom she works. A good teacher is one who likes people, likes to teach, likes her subject and helps her students work. She begins by helping them discover for themselves. She makes an effective effort to provide help appropriate to the student's needs. The teacher's guidance is crucial; so the growth in the teacher's knowledge and understanding must be planned, guided and nourished. Formal preparation provides the basic structure for teaching and research, but self-education—both on and off the job—is required to keep a teacher's knowledge fresh and her skills polished and sparkling. Continuing study and effort are necessary to keep up with the expanding information in the field.

We as educators know that a student's critical thinking must not only begin with factual knowledge but must, for the most part, be kept within the limits of factual knowledge. Today there is an effort on the part of educators, to go beyond facts to cultivate the student's spirit of wonder and intellectual curiosity, to help her discipline her intellect, to invite in her that adventurous quest for truth that is the crowning achievement of every school.

Let us ask ourselves the following questions and see what we can do to upgrade nursing education, and see if our answers can help towards this:

Are we helping the students develop their potentials through a problem-solving approach to learning?

Are we providing individual attention and an atmosphere that is conducive to good learning?

Are the students thinking critically?

Is the faculty setting an example that is facilitating to learning?

Is there consistency between faculty in relation to their attitude toward the whole programme?
Are we seeking the cooperation of other educators, the public, hospital administrators, and other health groups in achieving excellence in nursing education and meeting the needs of society?

Are students as enthusiastic after as before their nursing education?

If our answers are in the affirmative, we are on the right track. Otherwise, we should get busy, think constructively, and act before it is too late. Through profound, vigorous, and imaginative self-examination, the direction in which nursing education must move will be determined.

The sharing of knowledge

The teacher should feel obliged to explain and share what she learns with her peers in all fields of learning so that she and they may continue to learn from each other. All good teachers work from a broad and deep base of knowledge.

The good teacher has an insatiable appetite to learn. She seizes all learning opportunities; she learns from her students and she also shares with them. Students of today have more to talk and write about than those of yesterday, and they are better prepared to do so. They are more mature, better informed, more aware of the issues of our time, more interested in questions of rights and freedoms. They will not be put off by trite, inappropriate answers. They want to see honesty and integrity in their teachers. They respect a teacher who gives them their right to differ with her, without censure or penalty, as she reserves the right to differ with them.

An effective teacher is proud of the role she plays. She considers her assignment an opportunity and challenge to help students learn and does not consider it just work. She recognises her limitations and inadequacies and tries to overcome these. An effective teacher is a role model for continuing learning and for expert professional nursing care. She is constantly reminded that students are learning to think!

Teaching talent is hard to identify. Methods of teaching nursing have changed in the past ten years and are continuing to change. We now have more give and take between faculty and students that we still do not have enough. In teaching there is no substitute for excellence. The strength of the curriculum offered reflects the intellectual strength and creative ability of the faculty. It is easy to go along in our established framework adding or subtracting courses from time to time. It is difficult to examine our nursing courses one by one, study the framework upon which they are built, and take steps to redesign our curricula. Yet that is what we ought to be doing. In our rapidly changing world no student of nursing can learn specifically how to do her future job. The best we can do for her is to help her attain some of her fundamental knowledge she will need, some habits of inquiry, some methods of analysis and some modes of attack she can use in solving the problems of her profession. We can help her develop perspective and enthusiasm for her profession.

Cultural and technological change is upon us and with it the realisation that traditional patterns of education will no longer serve society. There is a long, arduous journey ahead that must be travelled by those responsible for the education of the nursing students and by those responsible for nursing services to people. Nurses themselves must examine their feelings in light of understanding why they are so fearful of letting go of the old and trying the new. Why are we so reluctant to change?

Nursing has created, developed, and continually searched for ideas which are ultimately manifested in improved standards of patient care. The search continues and we have to share this responsibility as teachers of today and tomorrow. The attainment of our goals will depend largely on our ability to recruit large numbers of talented students. This in turn will depend on our ability to demonstrate that nursing offers a challenge, that the study of nursing will not necessitate the students being isolated from other educational programs, but will provide her with an educational environment, offer intellectual stimulation, opportunities for advancement, a reasonable standard of living and opportunity for self-actualisation.

Armed with all the knowledge, techniques and the tremendous resources that are at our command, nurses and teachers, let us march on toward the goal that is set before us, "better education for our students, quality and safe nursing care for our patients." The future of nursing education and the students that are committed to our care and guidance now lies in the hands of our students. We are all united in a common purpose and in this unanimity we are fortunate. This provides a broad basis for our mutual effort, interest and understanding.

It is time to drink deeply of the inspiration of the past, to face facts and challenges of today and to plan for the future. The future has unlimited scope as well as problems but if we have faith, endurance and the will to pursue the right path, nothing is impossible.

"If a society has optimistic ideas, dynamic aspirations and cohesive ambitions, the civilisation will grow and prosper. If it exhibits negative trends, uncertain ideas and hesitant faith, the society is in danger of disintegrating. The idea, then, is that thinking about the future, man creates the same future according to his image."

Fred Polok

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