What Causes Frustration among Nurses
Need for Socio-psychological study

by

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What ails the nurses who are supposed to take care of the sick? The major problems seem to be lack of recognition by patients, physicians and the public; social stigma attached to the profession of nursing; overwork in the ward and in the classroom; poor working conditions and poorer rewards; bleak future; prolonged celibacy and selfish parents with a vested interest in her income.

The stresses and strains are not limited to one profession. There are reports of frustration and even attempted suicides among students when they fail in the final examination. They run away from home not knowing what to do and where to go.

What the youth need today is aid and advice, the services of a guidance bureau to answer many of their questions in life.

The stresses and strains disturbing the personal life of the youth call for a thorough socio-psychological study. In the nursing profession and student community the probe should analyse the direct and indirect causes of stresses and suggest remedial measures.

It is common knowledge that an average nurse is unhappy. She receives little recognition for the arduous work she has to perform. She is an important member of the health team but she complains that even the physician does not give her the place she deserves.

The popular image of a nurse today is not palatable. The accusing finger can be pointed at a handful of nurses who succumb to the glamour of money. But to condemn the entire nursing profession for the misdeeds of a few would be a folly.

Florence Nightingales are gone and today's nurses lack the urge to serve the sick and the wounded. The spirit of service and the feeling for the suffering that marked the pioneer's work in the profession is missing. But the basic cause of this indifference is to be found in the deplorable working conditions of the nurse and the apathy of the public towards her.

The Nurse's role has changed from direct service to technical work and she is left with little time to understand the patient and give him proper care. The tendency today is for the basic nursing care to be a matter of supervision and administration while many of the functions previously carried out by the doctors are delegated to the nurse. More and more responsibilities are handed to the nurse by the physician.

The nurse is overworked and

TO THINK OVER

A friend who has had considerable difficulty in keeping a very worthy organization alive claims that most of the trouble comes from within, not from without. It is well summarized, in the following ten points:

1. Don't come to the meetings.
2. If you do come, come late.
3. If the weather doesn't suit you, don't come.
4. If you attend a meeting, find fault with the work of the officers and members.
5. Never accept an office, as it is easier to criticize than to do things.
6. Feel hurt if you are not appointed to a committee, but if you are, do not attend committee meetings.
7. If asked by the chairman to give your opinion on some matter, tell him you have nothing to say. After the meeting, tell everyone how things ought to have been done.
8. Do nothing more than is absolutely necessary, but when members roll up their sleeves and willingly, unselfishly use their ability to help matters along, say that the board is run by a clique.
9. Hold back your dues as long as possible, or don't pay them at all.
10. Don't bother about getting new members. Let someone else do it.

—JAMES KEELER

How do these apply in our lives as members, office-bearers and Council members of our Association?

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gets little satisfaction from a job indifferently done. She has to put in 8 to 12 hours of work in a hospital ward. Sometimes she has to manage a ward with 70 to 80 patients single-handed. The ratio of nurse to population in India is 1 : 11,000 (in some states it is 1 : 30,000). In some western countries the ratio is 1 : 300 population or 1 : 3 hospital beds.

Then the nurse has to work in overcrowded and understaffed hospitals with inadequate equipment. Her living conditions are unsatisfactory. Food served in the nurses' hostels falls below standard. Some nurses are forced to cook their own food in the rooms in violation of rules.

The hostels in many hospitals have no cultural or social activities or a cozy atmosphere for recreation or relaxation. There is no library, no indoor or outdoor games.

The student nurse is the most frustrated person in the profession. Apart from completing a regular course of study for 3 to 4 years she has to perform the duties of a fully-fledged nurse in the ward. While a student, she is not treated as such. Her syllabus itself is too much for a matriculate and the time available for class-room work and theoretical study is limited. The knowledge needed by the nurse practitioner today differs greatly from that needed 10 years ago. She is now required to master a complex growing body of knowledge and make independent judgement about patients and their care. Her knowledge, skill as well as devotion, has to meet the challenge of this automated age of super technology.

She has neither time to study nor to relax. She is always dragged by the physician who demands her assistance in all petty things. The ward sister who behaves as a task-master regardless of her problems and the sister tutor who pulls her up for neglecting her studies. She is blamed for all the trifles in her ward and her superiors seem satisfied if some one is made stoop, go down and punished. Her complaints are often construed as insubordination.

Crown it all today's incumbents are not dedicated to the profession with a spiritual quality to serve the sick. They choose the career because of pressing economic problems at home. Their parents give them little choice. Even while a trainee many a nurse has to save all her stipend to meet the demands from her home and the problems at home keeps her worried.

She is unable to bear heavy odds at the young age. Her emotional stress often has its manifestation in a physical problem and mental fatigue.

The nurse needs the society but the society seems to neglect her. She is away from parental control for the first time and she needs someone to help and advise in her frustration to determine her future aims and present identities. She runs against time and her tasks remain incomplete. Her problems find no answer and yet she continues to do her best in silent protest.

With all her studies and struggle for existence, the nurse finds her future bleak. Nurses are not yet considered a professional group. Her specialised studies have no academic recognition and her chances for promotions are limited.

As she grows with age she has the urge to marry and raise a family. Her work and the stigma attached to her profession are often a hindrance.

While a silent sufferer with stresses and strains she comes across different individuals from all walks of life, with whom she has to keep constant contact so long as they are her patients. She finds someone for plain conversation and her smile, is often misunderstood. Her human weakness and her urge for social recognition are often exploited by the unscrupulous. Her search for sympathy and identity land her in utter frustration.

Two California State Colleges had the problem of students with emotional pressures.

Dr. Addie L. Klotz, Director Student Health Centre, conducted a study. "If we can prevent one attempted suicide the entire project will be worth the effort", she said.

According to Dr. Klotz the problems she dealt with included the tremendous despair of the girl whose father was killed in an automobile accident the first day of final examinations, the concern of a girl who discovered she was pregnant during that week not knowing where to turn and the young lady who had become involved with drug abuse and was having a frightening drug reaction.

Her study revealed that the majority of complaints seemed to centre on symptoms related to increased stress. These symptoms may have been emotional or psychological. Some of them were physical and many were a combination of both emotional and physical.

Dr. Klotz mooted the idea of establishing "Panic Clinics" in the colleges to show the students that "we do care enough to be available to them at any time of need".

The clinic serves as a central area to meet together to relax, to discuss current situations, to have food or coffee together; it serves as a place for individual counselling as needed; provides a place to study under good study conditions without distractions; provides a place to get medical treatment of acute medical problems or exacerbations of chronic medical problems; it serves as a place to sleep if sleep were impossible or difficult elsewhere.

According to Dr. Klotz her experiment has been successful and an increasing number of students are now visiting these clinics. The principal method will be discussion of the worries and conflicts as well as symptomatic treatment.

"Some students come here because they felt so lonely. Others say they need a place where they could relax and back off from studying for a while. Some others just need someone with whom to communicate," says Dr. Klotz.

Our nursing schools and attached hospitals need the services of such clinics. Such an institution will help her find answers to her problem, gain self-confidence to face the facts of life and give a sense of security to know that there are people to care for her.

The society can ill-afford to neglect the nurse, an important member of the medical team, a liaison officer between the physician, the patient and the family, and a valuable natural resource in maintaining the health of the nation.