Nursing Programme in Vietnam

by

Lt. Col. (Dr.) Harry Williams

SOUTH Vietnam, with a population of fifteen million, has only two schools of Higher Grade Nursing, one in Saigon and the other in Hue. These schools also have a one-year course for assistant nurses and there are six more schools in various provinces giving this one-year course.

The Saigon School of Nursing is the largest, accommodated in a large building complex comprising adequate lecture rooms, offices and hostel facilities. The total enrollment is 450, of which about one third are men. There seems to exist a healthy relationship between the sexes. Recreational, dining as well as class-room facilities are common. There is keen competition for places in the school and as a result there is eagerness to study.

A ninth grade High School Pass certificate proficiency in Vietnamese and French are the minimum qualifications. Many are learning English and language classes are held in the school. Nursing students have the option to live out and about 50 per cent do so. This is allowed mainly to ease overcrowding in hostels.

The three-year course includes public health but not midwifery. In the latter there are two schools in the country which give a three-year midwifery course and on qualification these midwives assume considerable responsibilities. The Danang Provincial Hospital with large obstetric practice has only two doctors in this department but 12 midwives with the three-year qualification. The same hospital illustrates the general position in the country. With about 1,200 patients there are 12 nurses with the three-year general nursing diploma (they are officially termed nurse-technicians) and nearly a hundred assistant nurses.

On being qualified female nurses give ten years to Government service and men are drafted into the Army Medical Corps. Salaries are low, 7,000 piastres for nurse technicians and 4,000 for assistant nurses. The cost of living is high in Vietnam and I can only quote 2,000 piastres per month as the average income per capita over the whole country.

I found a general feeling that the status of nurses is reflected in this salary scale. There is no professional nursing association in the country although there is a kind of trade union of long standing which was recently in conflict with the doctors over its advocacy of a nurse's right to give injections.

Nursing education in Vietnam differs from the common patterns in India. The Director of the Saigon School is a Government Surgeon and all subjects except nursing are taught by doctors of whom there are 21 on the faculty. There are 14 nursing tutors. They have no higher qualification but have been chosen from the three-year course by a separate examination and then admitted to a three months in-service programme. Six of this number have now had a year's experience in USA or Canada. When I visited the school both Senior American and Japanese nurses were giving assistance.

It would seem to the visitor that Vietnam needs more nurses and to this end more schools or Colleges of Nursing, and a diploma or degree course for nursing tutors. With the large demands made by the war, there are too few doctors for hospitals and well-trained nursing tutors could gradually replace the medical lecturers.

One way in which India could help would be providing scholarships for a number of the present tutors to a college of nursing for the B.Sc. degree or a shortened course for 2 years, according to Dr. Thunn, Director of the Government School of Nursing at Cho Ray Hospital.

(Dr. Williams who is the Director of Catherine Booth Hospital, Nagore, has served as senior surgeon to the Banyan Medico Surgical Unit of the Children's Medical Relief International in Saigon from April to July 1969).

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